

SCOTT'S POETICAL DESCRIPTIONS.

Scott's descriptive powers give a great part of the charm which attends his prose compositions. It is in his poetry, however, that the beauty and naturalness of his descriptions have reached their maximum. Not only do they cause the reader to admire the scene pictured before him, but furnish the means by which he can appreciate the characters occupying these habitations, which are true to nature, but still ideally picturesque and symmetrical. In truth the weaving of the beauties of external nature with the beautiful in the human form and character, was the province in which Scott shone brightly. Perhaps we can see most distinctly and judge most fairly of the poet's genius in description, by confining our attention to a few of the characters and scenes of his master productions.

Foremost of his poems in some respects stands the *Lady of the Lake*. In many of the complex correlations of this poem it is difficult to say, whether the beauty of human form and character sets forth the charms of nature most, or vice versa; perhaps nature is more often used as the means. Every character in the poem forms the central figure of a sylvan scene. First we have the background of nature, sparkling with all the freshness and glory of mountain scenery; then a most distinct and perfect semblance of this in the form and feature of the being who stands in the foreground; and lastly spreading a fitting halo over the whole scene, the character of this being is involved in perfect harmony with its source and surroundings. The blending of these elements is wrought out with greatest effect in the portraiture of the Highland maiden. Even in a few lines as—

"Not Katrine in her mirror blue
Gives back the shaggy banks more true,
Than every foreborn glance confessed,
The guileless movement of her breast."

We have nearly the whole picture.

The brave and generous Rhoderick Dhu, and the royal and courageous Fitz James are also, though not so firmly wrought out, characters which cannot but impress every admirer of heroic spirit and daring enterprise. In what perfection do their characters and bearing correspond with the strength and grandeur of a spot—

"Where stern and steep,
The hill sinks down upon the deep."

Mucauley has said of this poem, "That the glamour

of the great poet's genius has for ever hallowed even the barbarous tribes whose manners are here invested with all the charms of fiction." This sentiment will always find an echo in the heart of every lover of Scottish scenery and Highland bravery.

In *Marmion* the descriptions have been considered by many critics as the poet's finest. They are of a somewhat different type from those of the *Lady of the Lake*, the main action of the poem being of a more historical character and the culmination of the individual element coinciding with the great battle of Flodden. The description of natural scenery and human action are drawn with telling effect in the earlier part of the poem, but in the closing scene our admiration of quieter scenes and individual action is lost to some extent in our greater sympathy for one or other of the contending nations. With the exception of Homer, Scott has given us, in Flodden Field, the finest description of a battle in all literature. It is indeed "a fearful battle rendered you in music." It is worthy of note that this description does not derive its force from the fictitious creation of mortals or nations superhuman in prowess, but rather in the distinct and truthful portrayal of every feature of the battle, the deeds of the heroes being gallant and noble, but still within the range of human endeavor. Scott's own chivalrous and knightly disposition gave him, no doubt, that appreciation and sympathy for heroic action, without which he could never have painted Flodden Field. Of the heroes of the fight *Marmion*, the hero of the poem, stands foremost. Amid all the din of clashing arms and tramping steeds he is not forgotten, his falcon pennon is the first to issue from the cloud of dust, his wing of battle is most sorely pressed, and it is in his death we feel the deepest interest. That he is a valiant knight never appears so clearly as in this his last fight, and his prowess also lends a greater interest to the battle in which he is thus prominent. *Marmion* is a character with whom the careful reader will sympathize. Scott shows clearly what his own feelings concerning such a warrior were by his closing lines:

"If ever in temptation strong,
Thou left'st the right path for the wrong.
If ever, devious step thus trod,
Still lead the furthest from the road.
Dread thou to speak presumptuous doom,
On noble Marmion's lowly tomb;
But say 'He died a gallant knight,
With sword in hand, for England's right.'"