

far the most important, though ideas, if they be sane ideas of the great problems of human life, readily lend themselves to the art of poetry. Scenery, on the other hand, is the most barren topic of poetry. Aside from human associations, the pleasures of scenery are forced and affected. At most, it does not do more than excite feelings of sublimity and repose. Its other effects are, doubtless, merely physical. But, as the representation of action in poetry is limited only by æsthetic taste, the poet of action may range the whole field of human experience and find matter to appeal to every human emotion. If, therefore, poetry be weak in action or ideas, and strong in scenery, it will make but a limited appeal to human interest and play upon a narrow range of feeling. It may be safely said that no poetry of lasting merit is possible which does not base its claim to our attention on action or reflection concerning action.

The relative importance of the subject matter of poetry may be made still clearer: Why do we skip Scott's prolix descriptions when reading his prose or poetry? The answer is plain. We are more interested in action and ideas of human interest than in scenery. Our interest in action never flags. Consciously or unconsciously, the reader sees always in the action represented a reflection of his own, and there is thus provided a constant motive of interest on which the artist may rely. Detailed description is an effort to represent not the universal idea in the poet's mind, but some particular vision of his imagination. Hence the effect produced on the reader, if he should make an effort to reconstruct the poet's vision, will be void of human association and fail in artistic effect. Moreover, interest in action is more intense than interest in scenery, because of the element of suspense in action; and the pleasures of represented action are, therefore, more vivid. Action takes place in time: one action suggests another, arouses curi-

osity to know what it will be. The interest which holds breathless the spectators of a horse race, though not so laudable in its object, owes its intensity and its vulgar pleasures to the same conditions as those which keep an audience eager to know whether Juliet will rise in living beauty from the tomb. On the other hand, succession in time does not enter into the contemplation of scenes and objects. A single vision is a complete presentation to the mind, and its artistic effect lies in the whole effect of a moment. Such an effect even Scott was unable to produce.

But language is not adequate to the detail description of scenery; aside altogether from its limited interest, and its meagre power to appeal to human feeling, it cannot be represented in detail by the poet as vividly as action. The presentation of objects to the mind is the proper work of the painter or sculptor. The painter presents his subject in detail, and it produces its whole effect at one flash of vision. The poet, attempting detailed description and not merely suggestion, produces on the mind of the reader only a confused and distracted effect. The mind of the reader attempts to grasp the first detail by calling up from memory the image most like that suggested by the poet's words. This is an effort of some difficulty, and will produce some sense of pain, destructive of the pleasure which it is the purpose of art to awaken. Having got one detail of the picture, he seeks to recall another and another, until the whole has been attempted. But, at each succeeding attempt, he must drop the images which have preceded, and at the end he will have a confused impression of details and not the vivid representation of a whole.

While scenery is in itself relatively indifferent as subject matter, and the elaboration of it in detail impossible in poetry, it may yet be made to play a most important part. The pure-