

into description: a paragraph may be descriptive in form and narrative in purpose, or narrative in form and descriptive in purpose. Exposition has much in common with one kind of description; and it may be of service to any kind of description, to narration, or to argument.

## CHAPTER I.

### DESCRIPTION.

THE purpose of DESCRIPTION is, as has already been said, to bring before the mind of the reader persons or things as they appear to the writer. As a means to this end, language has certain limits, limits that are obvious to one who compares a verbal description of an object either with the object itself or with a model, a photograph, or a drawing of it. In the model or the drawing, as in the object itself, we see the parts in themselves, and we see them in their relations with one another,— we see them as a whole. Now, the only way in which words can give a complete idea of a whole is by a description of the parts. To make a whole these parts must be laboriously put together, and even then the part first spoken of may be forgotten before the last part is reached. The process, in the words of Coleridge, “seems to be like taking the pieces of a dissected map out of its box. We first look at one part and then at another, then join and dove-tail them; and when the successive acts of attention have been completed, there is a retrogressive effort of mind to behold it as a whole.”<sup>1</sup> In consequence of this serious drawback to the use of words for purposes of description, diagrams are added to the text of a scientific treatise, ground-plans and elevations to the specifications of an

Language  
compared  
with painting  
and sculpture.

<sup>1</sup> Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria*, chap. xxii.

architect, models to applications for patents, illustrations to verbal descriptions in dictionaries and periodicals.

Painting and sculpture, on the other hand, address the eye only, and are subject to the limitations to which the eye is subject. They can convey impressions of a single moment only, since the eye cannot receive impressions of two successive moments at once; but they can represent a wide extent of space or a scene comprising numerous details, since the eye can in a moment receive an impression of a whole that is composed of many different parts. Being limited to a single moment, they naturally choose the moment that tells most about the past and the future of the object represented. Their *Lady Macbeth* appears in the sleep-walking scene, in which she lives over again, not only the murder, but the motive that led to it and the remorse that followed; their *Medea* appears in the struggle between her maternal love and her impulse to murder; their *Ajax*, sitting among the slaughtered herds whose destruction he now regrets; their *Laocoön*, while his pain is still endurable; their *Dying Gladiator*, at the moment when with the pangs of death mingle the memories of his "young barbarians at play."

Whatever painting and sculpture can thus suggest to the imagination, language can fully recount. It can tell the whole story of *Lady Macbeth*, *Medea*, *Ajax*, *Laocoön*, the *Dying Gladiator*. No gallery of pictures, however large, can tell a story as words can; for each picture is distinct from every other, but each word is part of a continuously flowing current. Words succeed each other in time, as forms and colors lie side by side in space; words are, therefore, especially fitted to represent movement, forms and colors to represent rest. A writer suggests to

the imagination persons or scenes that a painter presents to the eye, as a painter suggests a story that a writer tells. Each is strongest at the other's weakest point.<sup>1</sup>

No one can describe a person or a thing that he has not seen either in fact or in imagination, and no one can describe well what he sees unless, Two kinds of description. in obedience to Wordsworth's rule, he has his "eye on the object" to be described. All description, then, implies observation. There are, however, two ways of observing: we may observe as men of science,—that is, give attention to the details of an object; or we may observe as artists,—that is, give attention to an object as a whole. In the first case, our purpose is to study the object ourselves or to enable others to study it; in the second case, our purpose is to enjoy the object ourselves or to enable others to enjoy it. Answering to these two kinds of observation are two kinds of description,—one in the service of science, the other in the service of art. The first may be called **SCIENTIFIC**, the second **ARTISTIC**.

## SECTION I.

## SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION.

The purpose of **SCIENTIFIC DESCRIPTION** is to convey information about the object described. It analyzes an object in order to distinguish its parts and thus enable us to identify the object by Aim and method of scientific description. comparing it part by part with the description. This kind of description,—which is employed not

<sup>1</sup> For a complete exposition of these principles, see Lessing's "*Laocoön*," sects. xv. xvi. *et seq.*