

It will be remembered that the Duke of Mantua bought a large 'set' of Flemish night scenes with burning cities—a motif which probably grew out of the hell landscapes by Hieronymus Bosch.⁴⁹ Now, we happen to know that in the years in which this purchase was made a young Italian, Cristoforo Sorte, worked in that city under Giulio Romano. Sorte's rare pamphlet *Osservazioni nella pittura*, published in Venice in 1580,⁵⁰ contains the first systematic treatment of landscape painting. The centrepiece of Sorte's attractive little book is a description of a fire he witnessed in Verona in 1541.

Sorte describes how one night he was roused by the pealing of bells and rushed towards the town where a terrible fire was raging. Having reached the Ponte Nuovo he stopped for a while to admire the 'marvellous effects of that fire because the places nearby and far away were at the same time illuminated by three different splendours'. He describes in truly painterly terms the red glow of the flames, the reflection of the scene in the tremulous waters of the Adige and the effect of the moonlight on the billows of smoke which merged with the clouds. 'And as I was a painter at that time I imitated it all in colours.' Describing his procedure in great detail, Sorte adds that his observations may come in useful for painters who want to represent such night scenes as the Burning of Troy or the Sack of Corinth. May we not assume that the sight of the catastrophe he witnessed would not have struck him as 'picturesque' if he had been unacquainted with this category of painting?

Similarly, so it seems, the discovery of Alpine scenery does not precede but follows the spread of prints and paintings with mountain panoramas. One of the first literary appreciations of an Alpine region, at any rate, bears such a striking resemblance to the typical landscape compositions of the period (Fig. 155) that the similarity can hardly be accidental. It was Montaigne who, in 1580, described the Inn valley as 'the most agreeable scenery he had ever seen'.⁵¹

Sometimes the mountains pressed close together, then again they opened up on our side of the river . . . and gave way to cultivable lands on the slopes of the mountains, where they were not too steep—and then vistas opened up on to plains on various levels, all full of beautiful noble dwellings and churches and all this enclosed and walled in from all sides by mountains of infinite height.

Thus, while it is usual to represent the 'discovery of the world' as the underlying motive for the development of landscape painting, we are almost tempted to reverse the formula and assert the priority of landscape painting over landscape 'feeling'. But there is no need to press this argument to its paradoxical extreme. All that matters in this context is that this movement in a 'deductive' direction from artistic theory to artistic practice, from artistic practice to artistic feeling does in fact deserve to be taken into account. Once this is granted the relevance of all theoretical subdivisions of landscape painting becomes apparent. For these we must turn from Pliny to Vitruvius.