

this wild and wasted plain. The earth yields and crumbles beneath his foot, tread he never so lightly, for its substance is white, hollow, and carious, like the dusty wreck of the bones of men. The long knotted grass waves and tosses feebly in the evening wind, and the shadows of its motion shake feverishly along the banks of ruin that lift themselves to the sunlight. Hillocks of mouldering earth heave around him, as if the dead beneath were struggling in their sleep; scattered blocks of black stone, four-square, remnants of mighty edifices, not one left upon another, lie upon them to keep them down. A dull purple poisonous haze stretches level along the desert, veiling its spectral wrecks of massy ruins, on whose rents the red light rests, like dying fire on defiled altars. The blue ridge of the Alban Mount lifts itself against a solemn space of green, clear, quiet sky. Watch-towers of dark clouds stand steadfastly along the promontories of the Apennines. From the plain to the mountains, the shattered aqueducts, pier beyond pier, melt into the darkness, like shadowy and countless troops of funeral mourners, passing from a nation's grave."¹

This scene is a picture of death and silence, but the still aspects are not mentioned. Everything moves. The earth "yields" and "crumbles" beneath the foot; the grass "waves" and "tosses" in the wind, and the shadows of the waving grass "shake;" hillocks of earth "heave;" a haze "stretches" along the desert; the mountain "lifts" itself against the sky; the shattered aqueducts "melt into the darkness."

Another example comes from a writer who has done much to familiarize his readers with the scenery as well as with the art of Italy:—

"The road between Vietri and Amalfi is justly celebrated as one of the most lovely pieces of coast scenery in Italy. . . . On first quitting Vietri, Salerno is left low down upon the sea-shore, nestling² into a little corner of the bay which bears its name, and backed up by gigantic mountains. With each onward step these mountain-ranges expand in long aerial line, revealing reaches of fantastic peaks, that stretch away beyond the plain of Paestum,

¹ Ruskin: *Modern Painters*, Preface.

² An overworked word. Mark Twain says, "Villages nestle and roost."

till they end at last in mist and sunbeams shimmering on the sea. On the left hand hangs the cliff above the deep salt water, with here and there a fig-tree spreading fanlike leaves against the blue beneath. On the right rises the hill-side, clothed with myrtle, lentisk, cistus, and pale yellow coronilla—a tangle as sweet with scent as it is gay with blossom. Over the parapet that skirts the precipice lean heavy-foliaged locust-trees, and the terraces in sunny nooks are set with lemon-orchards. There are but few olives, and no pines. Meanwhile each turn in the road brings some change of scene: now a village with its little beach of gray sand, lapped by clearest sea-waves, where bare-legged fishermen mend their nets, and naked boys bask like lizards in the sun; now towering bastions of weird rock, broken into spires and pinnacles like those of Skye, and colored with bright hues of red and orange; then a ravine, where the thin thread of a mountain streamlet seems to hang suspended upon ferny ledges in the limestone—or a precipice defined in profile against sea and sky, with a lad, half dressed in goat-skin, dangling his legs into vacuity and singing—or a tract of cultivation, where the orange, apricot, and lemon-trees nestle together upon terraces with intermingled pergolas of vines."¹

On this method of description considered from a psychologist's point of view Dr. Royce comments as follows:

"The mountains rise into the sky, or lift their heads; the lake stretches out before one's sight; the tower looms up, or hangs over the spectator,—such are some of the more familiar devices of description. An exception that illustrates the rule [that words are better fitted to represent movement than rest²] is found in the case of very bright colors, whose interest and comparative brilliancy in the mental pictures of even very unimaginative persons may make it possible for the descriptive poet to name them as coexistent, without suggesting motion, particularly if he render them otherwise especially interesting. So in the well-known description, in Keats's 'St. Agnes' Eve,' of the light from the stained-glass casement, as it falls on the praying Madeline. Even here, however, the light *falls*. And color-images, however brilliant, are

¹ J. A. Symonds: *Sketches in Italy*. An excellent example of this method is Cardinal Newman's description of Attica, in "Historical Sketches," vol. iii. chap. iii.

² See pages 249-251.

increased in vividness by the addition of the suggestion of motion; as in Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind,' where

'The leaves dead
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence stricken multitudes.'

Much less effective would be the mention of the most brilliant autumn hues apart from motion.

"Lessing gave as basis for this theory the somewhat abstract statement that language, being spoken or read successively, is best fitted to portray the successive. But this is hardly the whole story. The modern generalization that men and animals alike observe moving more easily than quiet objects, in case the motion is not too fast or too slow, seems to come nearer to offering an explanation. But this account is still incomplete; for it will be found that we do not always picture mentally the motion of an object, even when we try to do so. To see a man walk in the mind's eye is not always so easy as to picture a man in some attitude. . . . In many dreams we must all have noticed that the rapid transitions that take place are rather known as motions or alterations that have happened, than as changes in process of taking place. The present writer's own image with Shelley's lines above quoted is not so much of dead leaves actually moving, as of the leaves rustling, with the sense of *feeling* that they are driven by the wind. The words descriptive of motion give, rather, the feeling of action connected with the leaves, than a picture of movement itself. So, to say that the mountains *rise* is to direct the mental eye upwards, rather than to introduce any picture of objective motion into the mental landscape."¹

Sometimes a writer gives life to a description by representing the objects described at the moment of their greatest activity. For example:—

"Hard by the farmhouse was a vast barn, that might have served for a church; every window and crevice of which seemed bursting forth with the treasures of the farm; the flail was busily

¹ Josiah Royce: Some Recent Studies on Ideas of Motion. Science. [New York] Nov. 30, 1883, p. 716.

resounding within it from morning to night; swallows and martins skimmed twittering about the eaves; and rows of pigeons, some with one eye turned up, as if watching the weather, some with their heads under their wings, or buried in their bosoms, and others swelling, and cooing, and bowing about their dames, were enjoying the sunshine on the roof. Sleek unwieldy porkers were grunting in the repose and abundance of their pens; whence sallied forth, now and then, troops of sucking pigs, as if to snuff the air. A stately squadron of snowy geese were riding in an adjoining pond, convoying whole fleets of ducks; regiments of turkeys were gobbling through the farm-yard, and guinea fowls fretting about it, like ill-tempered housewives, with their peevish discontented cry. Before the barn door strutted the gallant cock, that pattern of a husband, a warrior, and a fine gentleman, clapping his burnished wings, and crowing in the pride and gladness of his heart — sometimes tearing up the earth with his feet, and then generously calling his ever-hungry family of wives and children to enjoy the rich morsel which he had discovered."¹

The very ordinary scene described by Irving is full of life. The barn is "bursting" with grain; the flail is "resounding;" swallows are "skimming" about the eaves; pigeons, pigs, geese, ducks, turkeys, and guinea fowls are active in characteristic ways, and the gallant cock in the foreground is busiest of all.

Another method of giving life to a description is to throw it into the form of a narrative. A famous instance of this method is Homer's description of Achilles's shield. Instead of suspending ^{The narrative form.} the narrative while describing the details of the ornamentation, Homer represents the process of making the shield. He does not attempt to paint a picture with words, but he tells the story of the manufacture of the shield as a whole, and he tells a separate story about each scene represented on it:—

"And first he forged the huge and massive shield,
Divinely wrought in every part, — its edge

¹ Irving: The Sketch Book; The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

Clasped with a triple border, white and bright.
 A silver belt hung from it, and its folds
 Were five; a crowd of figures on its disk
 Were fashioned by the artist's passing skill,
 For here he placed the earth and heaven, and here
 The great deep and the never-resting sun
 And the full moon, and here he set the stars
 That shine in the round heaven, — the Pleiades,
 The Hyades, Orion in his strength,
 And the Bear near him, called by some the Wain,
 That, wheeling, keeps Orion still in sight,
 Yet bathes not in the waters of the sea.

“There placed he two fair cities full of men.
 In one were marriages and feasts; they led
 The brides with flaming torches from their bowers
 Along the streets, with many a nuptial song.
 There the young dancers whirled, and flutes and lyres
 Gave forth their sounds, and women at the doors
 Stood and admired. Meanwhile a multitude
 Was in the forum, where a strife went on, —
 Two men contending for a fine, the price
 Of one who had been slain. Before the crowd
 One claimed that he had paid the fine, and one
 Denied that aught had been received, and both
 Called for the sentence which should end the strife.
 The people clamored for both sides, for both
 Had eager friends; the heralds held the crowd
 In check; the elders, upon polished stones,
 Sat in a sacred circle. Each one took,
 In turn, a herald's sceptre in his hand,
 And, rising, gave his sentence. In the midst
 Two talents lay in gold, to be the meed
 Of him whose juster judgment should prevail.

“Around the other city sat two hosts
 In shining armor, bent to lay it waste,
 Unless the dwellers would divide their wealth, —
 All that their pleasant homes contained, — and yield
 The assailants half. As yet the citizens
 Had not complied, but secretly had planned
 An ambush. Their beloved wives meanwhile,
 And their young children, stood and watched the walls,
 With aged men among them, while the youths
 Marched on, with Mars and Pallas at their head,

Both wrought in gold, with golden garments on,
 Stately and large in form, and over all
 Conspicuous, in bright armor, as became
 The gods; the rest were of an humbler size.
 And when they reached the spot where they should lie
 In ambush, by a river's side, a place
 For watering herds, they sat them down, all armed
 In shining brass. Apart from all the rest
 They placed two sentries, on the watch to spy
 The approach of sheep and hornèd kine. Soon came
 The herds in sight; two shepherds walked with them,
 Who, all unweeting of the evil nigh,
 Solaced their task with music from their reeds.
 The warriors saw and rushed on them, and took
 And drave away large prey of beeves, and flocks
 Of fair white sheep, whose keepers they had slain.
 When the besiegers in their council heard
 The sound of tumult at the watering-place,
 They sprang upon their nimble-footed steeds,
 And overtook the pillagers. Both bands
 Arrayed their ranks and fought beside the stream,
 And smote each other. There did Discord rage,
 And Tumult, and the great Destroyer, Fate.
 One wounded warrior she had seized alive,
 And one unwounded yet, and through the field
 Dragged by the foot another, dead. Her robe
 Was reddened o'er the shoulders with the blood
 From human veins. Like living men they ranged
 The battle-field, and dragged by turns the slain.

“Last on the border of that glorious shield
 He graved in all its strength the ocean-stream.”¹

A similar device is employed by Anacreon when he represents an artist in the act of painting a beautiful woman; by Schiller, in “The Song of the Bell;” by Longfellow, in “The Building of the Ship.” Akin to this method is that which Scott uses in the following description: he represents the boats and all that they carry,

¹ Homer: The Iliad, xviii. 601. Bryant's translation.

not as they would look in a picture, but as they would look to one who saw them gradually approaching:—

“Far up the lengthen’d lake were spied
Four darkening specks upon the tide,
That, slow enlarging on the view,
Four mann’d and masted barges grew,
And, bearing downwards from Glengyle,
Steer’d full upon the lonely isle;
The point of Briancoil they pass’d,
And, to the windward as they cast,
Against the sun they gave to shine
The bold Sir Roderick’s banner’d Pine.
Nearer and nearer as they bear,
Spear, pikes, and axes flash in air.
Now might you see the tartans brave,
And plaids and plumage dance and wave:
Now see the bonnets sink and rise,
As his tough oar the rower plies;
See, flashing at each sturdy stroke,
The wave ascending into smoke;
See the proud pipers on the bow,
And mark the gaudy streamers flow.”¹

Another example of description in the form of a narrative is Mr. Rudyard Kipling’s “City of Dreadful Night.”² Still another example is the following extract from one of Mr. Crawford’s romances:—

“And with all that, and with the certainty that those things were gone for ever, arose the great longing for one more breath of liberty, for one more ride over the boundless steppe, for one more draught of the sour kvass, of the camp brew of rye and malt.

“The longing for such things, for one thing almost unattainable, is in man and beast at certain times. In the distant northern plains, a hundred miles from the sea, in the midst of the Laplander’s village, a young reindeer raises his broad muzzle to the north wind, and stares at the limitless distance while a man may count a

¹ Scott: *The Lady of the Lake*, canto ii. stanza xvi.

² Rudyard Kipling: *Life’s Handicap*.

hundred. He grows restless from that moment, but he is yet alone. The next day, a dozen of the herd look up, from the cropping of the moss, snuffing the breeze. Then the Laps nod to one another, and the camp grows daily more unquiet. At times, the whole herd of young deer stand at gaze, as it were, breathing hard through wide nostrils, then jostling each other and stamping the soft ground. They grow unruly, and it is hard to harness them in the light sledge. As the days pass, the Laps watch them more and more closely, well knowing what will happen sooner or later. And then at last, in the northern twilight, the great herd begins to move. The impulse is simultaneous, irresistible, their heads are all turned in one direction. They move slowly at first, biting still, here and there, at the bunches of rich moss. Presently the slow step becomes a trot, they crowd closely together, while the Laps hasten to gather up their last unpacked possessions, their cooking utensils and their wooden gods. That great herd break together from a trot to a gallop, from a gallop to a break-neck race; the distant thunder of their united tread reaches the camp during a few minutes, and they are gone to drink of the polar sea. The Laps follow after them, dragging painfully their laden sledges in the broad track left by the thousands of galloping beasts—a day’s journey, and they are yet far from the sea, and the trail is yet broad. On the second day it grows narrower, and there are stains of blood to be seen; far on the distant plain before them their sharp eyes distinguish in the direct line a dark, motionless object, another and then another. The race has grown more desperate and more wild as the stampede neared the sea. The weaker reindeer have been thrown down, and trampled to death by their stronger fellows. A thousand sharp hoofs have crushed and cut through hide and flesh and bone. Ever swifter and more terrible in their motion, the ruthless herd has raced onward, careless of the slain, careless of food, careless of any drink but the sharp salt water ahead of them. And when at last the Laplanders reach the shore their deer are once more quietly grazing, once more tame and docile, once more ready to drag the sledge whithersoever they are guided. Once in his life the reindeer must taste of the sea in one long, satisfying draught, and if he is hindered he perishes. Neither man nor beast dare stand between him and the ocean in the hundred miles of his arrow-like path.

"Something of this longing came upon the Cossack, as he suddenly remembered the sour taste of the kvass, to the recollection of which he had been somehow led by a train of thought which had begun with Vjera's love for the Count, to end abruptly in a camp kettle."¹

It is not always easy to draw the line between descriptions in narrative form and narratives proper; but usually the reader can reach a decision by asking himself what the writer's purpose is.² If his purpose is to present a person or a scene to the reader's imagination, the result may safely be called description; if his purpose is to tell of acts or events, the result may safely be called narration.

¹ F. Marion Crawford: *A Cigarette-Maker's Romance*, chap. vii.

² With this question in mind, the student may profitably examine the citations on pages 270, 271.

CHAPTER II.

NARRATION.

NARRATION, like description, concerns itself with persons or things; but, whereas description tries to show persons or things as they are or as they appear to be, narration tells what they do or what is done to them. In description, a writer is tempted to use language as if it could do what is better done by painting, sculpture, or music;¹ in narration, he is exposed to no such temptation, for words tell a story better than brush, chisel, or musical tones.

Narration distinguished from description.

As the main purpose of narration is to tell a story, a narrative should move from the beginning to the end, and it should move with method. If the action halts, the reader's attention halts with it; if the action is confused or self-repeating, the reader's mind is soon fatigued. MOVEMENT and METHOD, the life and the logic of discourse, are, then, the essentials of a good narrative.

Essentials of a good narrative.

These essentials seem so easy of attainment that people are in the habit of saying, "Anybody can write a story;" but in point of fact narration is very difficult, for few even of those who have a natural gift for story-telling are willing to cast aside everything that would obstruct the flow. To show exactly what is meant

Examples of narration.

¹ See pages 249-251, 256.