

"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.

by narration, it would be necessary to give examples of narration that is nothing but narration, and examples of this sort are exceedingly rare. Parts of "Robinson Crusoe" come very near being such; as, for instance, Crusoe's account of his discovery of the footprint in the sand:—

"It happened, one day, about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen in the sand. I stood like one thunder-struck, or as if I had seen an apparition. I listened, I looked round me, I could hear nothing, nor see any thing. I went up to a rising ground to look farther. I went up the shore, and down the shore, but it was all one, I could see no other impression but that one. I went to it again to see if there were any more, and to observe if it might not be my fancy; but there was no room for that, for there was exactly the very print of a foot, toes, heel, and every part of a foot. How it came thither I knew not, nor could in the least imagine. But, after innumerable fluttering thoughts, like a man perfectly confused and out of myself, I came home to my fortification, not feeling, as we say, the ground I went on, but terrified to the last degree, looking behind me at every two or three steps, mistaking every bush and tree, and fancying every stump at a distance to be a man."¹

Another example comes from a recent work by a living author:—

"The moon was sinking behind the hills, and the lines of trembling monkeys huddled together on the walls and battlements looked like ragged, shaky fringes of things. Baloo went down to the tank for a drink, and Bagheera began to put his fur in order, as Kaa glided out into the centre of the terrace and brought his jaws together with a ringing snap that drew all the monkeys' eyes upon him.

"The moon sets,' he said. 'Is there yet light to see?'

"From the walls came a moan like the wind in the tree-tops: 'We see, O Kaa!'

"Good! Begins now the Dance—the Dance of the Hunger of Kaa. Sit still and watch.'

¹ Daniel Defoe: Robinson Crusoe.

"He turned twice or thrice in a big circle, weaving his head from right to left. Then he began making loops and figures of eight with his body, and soft, oozy triangles that melted into squares and five-sided figures, and coiled mounds, never resting, never hurrying, and never stopping his low, humming song. It grew darker and darker, till at last the dragging, shifting coils disappeared, but they could hear the rustle of the scales.

"Baloo and Bagheera stood still as stone, growling in their throats, their neck-hair bristling, and Mowgli watched and wondered.

"Bandar-log,' said the voice of Kaa at last, 'can ye stir foot or hand without my order? Speak!'

"Without thy order we cannot stir foot or hand, O Kaa!'

"Good! Come all one pace nearer to me.'

The lines of the monkeys swayed forward helplessly, and Baloo and Bagheera took one stiff step forward with them.

"Nearer!' hissed Kaa, and they all moved again.

Mowgli laid his hands on Baloo and Bagheera to get them away, and the two great beasts started as though they had been waked from a dream.

"Keep thy hand on my shoulder,' Bagheera whispered. 'Keep it there, or I must go back—must go back to Kaa. Ah!'

"It is only old Kaa making circles on the dust,' said Mowgli; 'let us go;' and the three slipped off through a gap in the walls to the jungle.

"Whoof!' said Baloo, when he stood under the still trees again. 'Never more will I make an ally of Kaa,' and he shook himself all over.

"He knows more than we,' said Bagheera, trembling. 'In a little time, had I stayed, I should have walked down his throat.'

"Many will walk that road before the moon rises again,' said Baloo. 'He will have good hunting—after his own fashion.'¹

Even books like those from which the foregoing passages are taken contain many pages that are not purely narrative. To render a story intelligible, there must be some description (as, for instance, in the first sentence of

¹ Rudyard Kipling: The Jungle Book; Kaa's Hunting.

the passage just quoted from "The Jungle Book"); but this should be so introduced as to form part and parcel of the story. Descriptions "should seem, as in Homer and Chaucer, for instance, they always seem, inevitable and half unconscious."¹

Before considering what constitutes movement and method in narration, a student will do well to look at some well-known stories so short that one or more can easily be read at a sitting, and to ask himself as he reads what it is that makes these stories successful.

Among authors whose short stories have influenced the work of succeeding writers are Irving, Hawthorne, and Poe. Of Irving's style a favorable example is "Rip Van Winkle;" of Hawthorne's, "The Snow Image;" of Poe's, "The Fall of the House of Usher."

Within the last twenty-five years the short story has become an important part of literature, especially in France. "No small part of Maupassant's success," says Mr. Henry James, "comes from his countrymen's pride in seeing him add to a collection which is already a national glory."² In the volume of Maupassant's stories which Mr. James introduces to the American reader, "The Piece of String," "La Mère Sauvage," and "Little Soldier" deserve special commendation. In the telling of short stories no writer has surpassed Maupassant; but much creditable work of this kind has been done in English. Among noteworthy short stories by living authors may be mentioned "The Iliad of Sandy Bar" and "The Luck of Roaring Camp," by Mr. F. Bret Harte; "The Man Without a Country,"

¹ The [London] Athenæum, Nov. 3, 1883, p. 561.

² Introduction to "The Odd Number: Thirteen Tales by Guy de Maupassant," translated by Jonathan Sturges.

by Rev. Edward Everett Hale; "Rikki-Tikki-Tavi" and other stories in "The Jungle Book," and "The Sending of Dana Da," by Mr. Rudyard Kipling; "A Village Singer" and "An Honest Soul," by Miss Mary E. Wilkins; "The Griffin and the Minor Canon," by Mr. Frank R. Stockton; "Van Bibber and the Swan-Boats" and "An Unfinished Story," by Mr. Richard Harding Davis.

SECTION I.

MOVEMENT.

A narrative may move rapidly, as in the best work of Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, Stevenson, or Mr. Kipling; or slowly, as with Richardson, Jane Austen, or Anthony Trollope, — but Movement may be rapid or slow. MOVEMENT it must have. The story that moves swiftly omits every detail that can possibly be spared, selects what is most characteristic, and lays stress on that: the story that moves slowly may give many details, but, if it is well told, these details are so arranged that each contributes to the general effect. In the swift story, the characters show what they are by what they do rather than by what they say, and the conversations are so introduced that they seem to be parts of the action: in the slower story, since the characters are more complex and need more explanation than action alone can give, dialogues play a more important part.

Every story, whether it moves swiftly or slowly, is successful or unsuccessful as a narrative according as it is or is not interrupted. To show the difference Movement should be constant. between a narrative that keeps in motion and one that stops by the way, two bear-stories may be useful.