

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."<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup> 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,"

<sup>1</sup> The [London] Athenæum, Nov. 3, 1883, p. 561.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

One of these is from Charles Reade's masterpiece, "The Cloister and the Hearth":—

"Gerard ran back to his tree and climbed it swiftly. But, while his legs were dangling some eight feet from the ground, the bear came rearing and struck with her fore-paw, and out flew a piece of bloody cloth from Gerard's hose. He climbed and climbed; and presently he heard, as it were in the air, a voice say, 'Go out on the bough!' He looked, and there was a long, massive branch before him, shooting upwards at a slight angle; he threw his body across it, and by a series of convulsive efforts worked up it to the end.

"Then he looked round, panting.

"The bear was mounting the tree on the other side. He heard her claws scrape, and saw her bulge on both sides of the massive tree. Her eye not being very quick, she reached the fork and passed it, mounting the main stem. Gerard drew breath more freely. The bear either heard him, or found by scent she was wrong: she paused; presently she caught sight of him. She eyed him steadily, then quietly descended to the fork.

"Slowly and cautiously she stretched out a paw and tried the bough. It was a stiff oak branch, sound as iron. Instinct taught the creature this; it crawled carefully out on the bough, growling savagely as it came.

"Gerard looked wildly down. He was forty feet from the ground. Death below. Death moving slow but sure on him in a still more horrible form. His hair bristled. The sweat poured from him. He sat helpless, fascinated, tongue-tied.

"As the fearful monster crawled growling towards him, incongruous thoughts coursed through his mind. Margaret, — the Vulgate, where it speaks of the rage of a she-bear robbed of her whelps, — Rome, — Eternity.

"The bear crawled on. And now the stupor of death fell on the doomed man; he saw the opened jaws and bloodshot eyes coming, but in a mist.

"As in a mist he heard a twang; he glanced down; Denys, white and silent as death, was shooting up at the bear. The bear snarled at the twang, but crawled on. Again the cross-bow twanged; and the bear snarled and came nearer. Again the cross-bow twanged, and the next moment the bear was close upon

Gerard, where he sat, with hair standing stiff on end and eyes starting from their sockets, palsied. The bear opened her jaws like a grave; and hot blood spouted from them upon Gerard as from a pump. The bough rocked. The wounded monster was reeling; it clung, it stuck its sickles of claws deep into the wood; it toppled; its claws held firm, but its body rolled off, and the sudden shock to the branch shook Gerard forward on his stomach with his face on one of the bear's straining paws. At this, by a convulsive effort she raised her head up, up, till he felt her hot, fetid breath. Then huge teeth snapped together loudly close below him in the air, with a last effort of baffled hate. The ponderous carcase rent the claws out of the bough, then pounded the earth with a tremendous thump. There was a shout of triumph below, and the very next instant a cry of dismay; for Gerard had swooned, and, without an attempt to save himself, rolled headlong from the perilous height."<sup>1</sup>

In sharp contrast with this straightforward narrative is Captain Mayne Reid's account of a similar adventure:

"'See!' exclaimed Ivan, whose eyes had been lifted from the trail, and bent impatiently forward; — 'see! by the great Peter! yonder's a hole, under the root of that tree. Why might it not be his cave?'

"'It looks like enough. Hush! let us keep to the trail, and go up to it with caution — not a word!'

"All three, now scarce breathing — lest the sound should be heard — stole silently along the trail. The fresh-fallen snow, still soft as eider-down, enabled them to proceed without making the slightest noise; and without making any, they crept up, till within half a dozen paces of the tree.

"Ivan's conjecture was likely to prove correct. There was a line of tracks leading up the bank; and around the orifice of the cavity<sup>2</sup> the snow was considerably trampled down — as if the bear had turned himself two or three times before entering. That he had entered, the hunters did not entertain a doubt: there were no return tracks visible in the snow — only the single line that led up

<sup>1</sup> Charles Reade: *The Cloister and the Hearth*, chap. xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> See pages 102-104.

to the mouth of the cave, and this seemed to prove conclusively that Bruin was 'at home.'

Here the writer stops, and begins a new chapter as follows:—

"As already stated, it is the custom of the brown bear, as well as of several other species, to go to sleep for a period of several months every winter, — in other words, to *hibernate*."<sup>1</sup>

Then follow four pages on the hibernation of bears, at the end of which Captain Reid goes back to the story about the hunters' attempts to stir up the bear. Three pages later the patient reader learns that the bear is not in the cave at all, but in a tree directly over the mouth of the cave.

In a long narrative, whether of real or of fictitious events, pages of reflection, of analysis, of comment, may properly be introduced if they clear the way for the story, intensify interest in it, or assist in its development; but if they obstruct the story or divert it from its natural course, they cannot but injure it as a narrative.

"There should," says Trollope, "be no episodes in a novel. . . . Such episodes distract the attention of the reader, and always do so disagreeably. Who has not felt this to be the case even with *The Curious Impertinent* and with the *History of the Man of the Hill*. And if it be so with Cervantes and Fielding, who can hope to succeed? Though the novel which you have to write must be long, let it be all one. And this exclusion of episodes should be carried down into the smallest details. Every sentence and every word used should tend to the telling of the story."<sup>2</sup>

If the sole aim of a novel were to tell a story, Trollope would be right in saying that there should be no "episodes" in it; but the story is only a small part of some great novels. Compare "Henry Esmond" with "Les Trois Mousquetaires." In "Les Trois Mousquetaires," Dumas never drops the thread of his story. In "Henry Esmond,"

<sup>1</sup> Captain Mayne Reid: Bruin, *The Grand Bear Hunt*, chaps. viii. ix.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Trollope: *An Autobiography*, chap. xii.

Thackeray drops his thread very often; but he does so in order to make observations on life, — observations that sometimes have not a very close connection with either the main incidents or the principal characters, but that are to some readers more interesting than the narrative itself. Dumas, as Thackeray would have been the first to admit, is the better story-teller; but Thackeray, in the judgment of many, is the greater novelist. The question of comparative merit between Jane Austen and George Eliot is a more difficult one. Of Miss Austen's superiority as a narrator there can be no doubt: the action in her novels is quite as rapid as the provincial life they record, and it is never retarded by descriptions or reflections. George Eliot's novels — especially the later ones — move with unnecessary slowness, and often stop by the way for an analysis of character or the elucidation of a principle; but it is these parts of her work that many of her readers value most highly.

When, however, inferior writers try to follow the example of Thackeray or of George Eliot, the result is deplorable. Readers lose their interest in a story on which the writer himself sets so slight a value that he is easily diverted from it, and they find no compensating pleasure in trite remarks.

## SECTION II.

### METHOD IN MOVEMENT.

It is not enough that a narrative should move; it should move forward, it should have METHOD. In some kinds of composition method, important as it generally is, is not essential to success. A philosopher may contribute detached sayings (aphorisms)

Meaning and value of method in movement.