

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*."¹

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."²

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,"

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

² 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.

to the general stock of wisdom; an essayist may be charming as he rambles in pleasant fields of thought and gossips with his readers; but a narrator fails as a narrator in so far as he does not go straight on from the beginning to the end. A story-teller who runs this way and that in pursuit of something which is entirely aside from his narrative, and who returns to his subject as if by accident, is perhaps the most vexatious of all who try to communicate by language with their fellow-beings.

To secure method in movement, a writer should keep one point of view until he has good reason to change it.

When he adopts another point of view, he should in some way apprise the reader that he has done so. In the following account of a boat-race, there is no change in point of view:—

“Few things in this vale of tears are more worthy a pen of fire than an English boat-race is, as seen by the runners; of whom I have often been one. But this race I am bound to indicate, not describe; I mean, to show how it appeared to two ladies seated on the Henley side of the Thames, nearly opposite the winning-post. These fair novices then looked all down the river, and could just discern two whitish streaks on the water, one on each side the little fairy isle; and a great black patch on the Berkshire bank. The threatening streaks were the two racing boats: the black patch was about a hundred Cambridge and Oxford men, ready to run and hallo with the boats all the way.

“There was a long uneasy suspense.

“At last a puff of smoke issued from a pistol down at the island; two oars seemed to splash into the water from each white streak; and the black patch was moving; so were the threatening streaks. Presently was heard a faint, continuous, distant murmur, and the streaks began to get larger, and larger, and larger; and the eight splashing oars looked four instead of two.

“Every head was now turned down the river. Groups hung craning over it like nodding bulrushes.

“Next the runners were swelled by the stragglers they picked

up; so were their voices; and on came the splashing oars and roaring lungs.

“Now the colours of the racing Jerseys peeped distinct. The oarsmen’s heads and bodies came swinging back like one, and the oars seemed to lash the water savagely, like a connected row of swords, and the spray squirted at each vicious stroke. The boats leaped and darted side by side, and, looking at them in front, Julia could not say which was ahead. On they came nearer and nearer, with hundreds of voices vociferating, ‘Go it, Cambridge!’ ‘Well pulled, Oxford!’ ‘You are gaining, hurrah!’ ‘Well pulled, Trinity!’ ‘Hurrah!’ ‘Oxford!’ ‘Cambridge!’ ‘Now is your time, Hardie; pick her up!’ ‘Oh, well pulled, Six!’ ‘Well pulled, Stroke!’ ‘Up, up! lift her a bit!’ ‘Cambridge!’ ‘Oxford!’ ‘Hurrah!’

“At this Julia turned red and pale by turns. ‘Oh, mamma!’ said she, clasping her hands and colouring high, ‘would it be very wrong if I was to *pray* for Oxford to win?’

“Mrs. Dodd had a monitory finger; it was on her left hand: she raised it; and, that moment, as if she had given a signal, the boats, foreshortened no longer, shot out to treble the length they had looked hitherto, and came broadside past our palpitating fair, the elastic rowers stretched like greyhounds in a chase, darting forward at each stroke so boldly they seemed flying out of the boats, and surging back as superbly, an eightfold human wave: their nostrils all open, the lips of some pale and glutinous; their white teeth all clenched grimly, their young eyes all glowing, their supple bodies swelling, the muscles writhing beneath their Jerseys, and the sinews starting on each bare brown arm; their little shrill coxswains shouting imperiously at the young giants, and working to and fro with them, like jockeys at a finish; nine souls and bodies flung whole into each magnificent effort; water foaming and flying, rowlocks ringing, crowd running, tumbling, and howling like mad; and Cambridge a boat’s nose ahead.

“They had scarcely passed our two spectators, when Oxford put on a furious spurt, and got fully even with the leading boat. There was a louder roar than ever from the bank. Cambridge spurted desperately in turn, and stole those few feet back; and so they went fighting every inch of water. Bang! A cannon on the bank sent its smoke over both competitors; it dispersed in a

moment, and the boats were seen pulling slowly towards the bridge, Cambridge with four oars, Oxford with six, as if that gun had winged them both.

"The race was over.

"But who had won our party could not see, and must wait to learn."¹

Contrast with this the well-known account of a boat-race in "Tom Brown at Oxford." It is too long to quote entire; but a short extract will suffice to show how much is lost by frequent changes in point of view:—

"Both boats make a beautiful start, and again as before in the first dash the St. Ambrose pace tells, and they gain their boat's length before first winds fail; then they settle down for a long, steady effort. Both crews are rowing comparatively steady, reserving themselves for the tug of war up above. Thus they pass the Gut, and so those two treacherous corners, the scene of countless bumps, into the wider water beyond, up under the willows.

"Miller's face is decidedly hopeful; he shows no sign, indeed, but you can see that he is not the same man as he was at this place in the last race. He feels that to-day the boat is full of life, and that he can call on his crew with hopes of an answer. His well-trained eye also detects that, while both crews are at full stretch, his own, instead of losing, as it did on the last night, is now gaining inch by inch on Oriel. The gain is scarcely perceptible to him even; from the bank it is quite imperceptible; but there it is; he is surer and surer of it, as one after another the willows are left behind.

"And now comes the pinch. The Oriel captain is beginning to be conscious of the fact which has been dawning on Miller, but will not acknowledge it to himself, and as his coxswain turns the boat's head gently across the stream, and makes for the Berkshire side and the goal, now full in view, he smiles grimly as he quickens his stroke; he will shake off these light-heeled gentry yet, as he did before.

"Miller sees the move in a moment, and signals his captain, and the next stroke St. Ambrose has quickened also; and now

¹ Charles Reade: *Hard Cash*, chap. i.

there is no mistake about it, St. Ambrose is creeping up slowly but surely. The boat's length lessens to forty feet, thirty feet; surely and steadily lessens. But the race is not lost yet; thirty feet is a short space enough to look at on the water, but a good bit to pick up foot by foot in the last two hundred yards of a desperate struggle. They are over under the Berkshire side now, and there stands up the winning-post, close ahead, all but won. The distance lessens and lessens still, but the Oriel crew stick steadily and gallantly to their work, and will fight every inch of distance to the last. The Orielites on the bank, who are rushing along, sometimes in the water, sometimes out, hoarse, furious, madly alternating between hope and despair, have no reason to be ashamed of a man in the crew. Off the mouth of the Cherwell there is still twenty feet between them. Another minute, and it will be over one way or another. Every man in both crews is now doing his best, and no mistake: tell me which boat holds the most men who can do better than their best at a pinch, who will risk a broken blood-vessel, and I will tell you how it will end."¹

That a skilful writer may change his point of view in such a manner as to make it easy for the reader to follow him is shown by the following passage from Macaulay:

"Mackay, accompanied by one trusty servant, spurred bravely through the thickest of the claymores and targets, and reached a point from which he had a view of the field. His whole army had disappeared, with the exception of some Borderers whom Leven had kept together, and of Hastings's regiment, which had poured a murderous fire into the Celtic ranks, and which still kept unbroken order. All the men that could be collected were only a few hundreds. The general made haste to lead them across the Garry, and, having put that river between them and the enemy, paused for a moment to meditate on his situation.

"He could hardly understand how the conquerors could be so unwise as to allow him even that moment for deliberation. They might with ease have killed or taken all who were with him before the night closed in. But the energy of the Celtic warriors had spent itself in one furious rush and one short struggle. The pass

¹ Thomas Hughes: *Tom Brown at Oxford*, part i. chap. xiv.

was choked by the twelve hundred beasts of burden which carried the provisions and baggage of the vanquished army. Such a booty was irresistibly tempting to men who were impelled to war quite as much by the desire of rapine as by the desire of glory. It is probable that few even of the chiefs were disposed to leave so rich a prize for the sake of King James. Dundee himself might at that moment have been unable to persuade his followers to quit the heaps of spoil, and to complete the great work of the day; and Dundee was no more.

“At the beginning of the action he had taken his place in front of his little band of cavalry. He bade them follow him, and rode forward. But it seemed to be decreed that, on that day, the Lowland Scotch should in both armies appear to disadvantage. The horse hesitated. Dundee turned round, stood up in his stirrups, and, waving his hat, invited them to come on. As he lifted his arm, his cuirass rose, and exposed the lower part of his left side. A musket ball struck him; his horse sprang forward and plunged into a cloud of smoke and dust, which hid from both armies the fall of the victorious general. A person named Johnstone was near him and caught him as he sank down from the saddle. ‘How goes the day?’ said Dundee. ‘Well for King James,’ answered Johnstone: ‘but I am sorry for Your Lordship.’ ‘If it is well for him,’ answered the dying man, ‘it matters the less for me.’ He never spoke again; but when, half an hour later, Lord Dunfermline and some other friends came to the spot, they thought that they could still discern some faint remains of life. The body, wrapped in two plaids, was carried to the Castle of Blair.”¹

To secure method in movement, a writer should keep constantly in mind the central idea of his narrative; about that central idea he should group all other ideas according to their relative value and pertinence. The difficulty of applying this principle increases, of course, with the amount and the variety of a writer’s material. It is greater in a novel that represents numerous characters in varying circumstances than in a short and simple story; it is greater in a history

A central
idea.

¹ Macaulay: History of England, vol. iii. chap. xiii.

that deals with the multiform circumstances of modern life than in one that recounts the Sicilian Expedition or a crusade.

In biography, it is comparatively easy to fulfil the requirements of method in movement with regard both to point of view and to central idea; for a biography concerns itself with the life of one man. Method in
biography. In order to show this man’s inherited traits and the circumstances surrounding him at birth, an introduction may be necessary, but it should be as short as possible. Once on the scene, the man himself should be kept to the front; the narrative should move forward with his life, and should end with his death. Contemporary persons, incidents, and opinions should be mentioned so far, and so far only, as they influenced his life and character, and they should be introduced in such a way as to show that that influence was the cause of their introduction. These conditions are fulfilled in Mr. Trevelyan’s “Life of Macaulay.” In sharp contrast with this is Masson’s “Life of Milton,” of which Lowell says, “It is plain . . . that Mr. Masson himself has an uneasy consciousness . . . that Milton ought somehow to be more than a mere incident of his own biography.”¹

In history, and especially in history that deals with modern times, so many subjects have to be treated, so many details have to be given, that method in movement is not easily attained. Method in
history. An unskilful historian runs from one point of view to another, and he has no central idea. Having no sense of proportion, he gives as much space to unimportant as to important matters. Having no eye for perspective, he fails to show the true relations between events. Even when his narrative

¹ Lowell: Literary Essays; Milton.

is historically correct, the total impression is false. Even when his narrative moves, it moves like a corkscrew or in a circle. A skilful historian, on the other hand, never changes his point of view without necessity or without in some way apprising his reader of the change. He never loses sight of the main idea, and he groups details in their true relations to the main idea and to each other. If an introduction is necessary, he makes it just long enough to give a clear understanding of what is to follow. He begins at the true beginning, and moves steadily towards the end.

"The affairs of England during the reigns of James and William," writes Professor Minto, "were considerably involved, and without skilful arrangement a history of that period could hardly fail to be confused. Macaulay's exhibition of the movements of different parties, the different aspects of things in the three parts of the kingdom, the complicated relations between James and William, and the intrigues of different individuals, is managed with great perspicuity.

"He is exemplary in keeping prominent the main action and the main actor. After the death of Charles, our interest centres in James. We are eager to know how the change of monarch was received in London and through the country, and how James stood in his relations with France and Rome, with Scotland, and with the English clergy and the Dissenters. Macaulay follows the lead of this natural interest, and does not leave James until he is fairly settled on the throne. James once established, our interest in him is for the time satisfied, and we desire to know the proceedings of his baffled opponents. Accordingly, the historian transports us to the asylum of the Whig refugees on the Continent, describes them, and keeps their machinations in Holland, and their successive invasions of Britain, prominent on the stage until the final collapse of their designs and the execution of their leaders. That chapter of the History ends with an account of the cruelties perpetrated on the aiders and abettors of the western insurrection under Monmouth. Then the scene changes to Ireland, the next interesting theatre of events. And so on: there were

various critical junctures in the history of the Government, and the events leading to each are traced separately.

"The arrangement is so easy and natural, that one almost wonders to see it alleged as a merit. But when we compare it with Hume's arrangement of the events of the same period, we see that even a historian of eminence may pursue a less luminous method. Hume relates, first, all that in his time was known of James's relations with France; then the various particulars of his administration in England, down to the insurrection of Monmouth; then the state of affairs in Scotland, including Argyle's invasion and the conduct of the Parliament. He goes upon the plan of taking up events in local departments, violating both the order of time and the order of dependence. Macaulay makes the government of James the connecting rod or trunk, taking up, one after another, the difficulties that successively besiege it, and, when necessary, stepping back to trace the particular difficulty on hand to its original, without regard to locality. By grappling thus boldly with the complicity of events, he renders his narrative more continuous, and avoids the error of making a wide separation between events that were closely connected or interdependent. He does not, like Hume, give the descent of Monmouth in one section, and the descent of Argyle upon Scotland, an event prior in point of time, in another and subsequent section. James, after his accession, put off the meeting of the English Parliament till the more obsequious Parliament of Scotland should set a good example. Macaulay tells us at once James's motive for delaying the meeting of the English Parliament, and details what happened in Scotland during the fortnight of delay. In Hume's History, we do not hear of the proceedings instituted by the Scottish Parliament till after the execution of Argyle, by which time we are interested in another chain of events, and do not catch the influence of the proceedings in Scotland upon the proceedings in England."¹

In fiction, the requirements of method in movement should always be observed. A story should Method in fiction. begin to move as soon as possible; it should at the outset introduce the principal characters and

¹ William Minto: A Manual of English Prose Literature, part i. chap. ii.

make them say something or do something to excite interest. Once started, it should keep in motion, never stagnating, never eddying, but flowing on like a river which takes to itself all tributary streams and thus grows broader and deeper.

A good example of method in story-telling is Richardson's "Clarissa Harlowe," notwithstanding its length and the fact that it is composed entirely of letters. In the first letter, Miss Howe asks Clarissa to give a full account of her acquaintance with Lovelace from the beginning. From this point the story, though it moves slowly, moves as directly as the epistolary plan and the abundance of detail admit, and it ends with the death of Lovelace. There is, to be sure, a "conclusion," in which the subsequent history of the minor characters is related; but this is in form, as in fact, a postscript.

Miss Austen's method is generally good. Her "Emma," for example, introduces the heroine in the very first paragraph, concerns itself altogether with her fortunes and her match-makings, and ends with her marriage.

George Eliot's "Silas Marner" arouses interest at the beginning, first in the class to which Silas belongs, and secondly in Silas himself. Throughout the book Silas and his adopted daughter Eppie form the centre of interest, and Eppie's marriage ends the story.

The method of Hawthorne's romances is excellent throughout. "The Scarlet Letter," for example, begins by introducing the tragedy of Hester, and it keeps the tragedy before the reader from first to last.

Of living authors,¹ no one excels Mr. Stevenson in the art of narration. His "Kidnapped" and "David Balfour" are especially worthy of study.

¹ This was in type a month before Stevenson's death.

Scott's method is good in the main, after he is fairly started; but often he is provokingly long in getting under way,—as in "Ivanhoe," for example, which begins with four pages of history followed by two pages of description. For his slowness in beginning, Scott had, however, what he deemed a good reason: he was so much disgusted by the practice of novelists who began with the most interesting incident and made the whole story an anti-climax, that he intentionally went to the other extreme.

Thackeray's method is uneven. "The Virginians" begins better than it ends; "Henry Esmond" ends better than it begins. In "The Newcomes," the culminating point of interest is the death of Colonel Newcome. The paragraph which describes that death—the paragraph which brought tears to Thackeray's eyes when he wrote it—should have ended the book.

Dickens's method is weak in two particulars: most of his stories go backward and forward, and most end badly. The real end of "Pickwick" is the breakfast party; of "David Copperfield," Mr. Peggotty's visit to Ham's grave; of "Nicholas Nickleby," the breaking up of Dotheboys Hall; of "A Tale of Two Cities," the death of Sidney Carton: but each of these stories has a postscript after the real end.

Without method no narrative can be perfect; but perfect method alone does not make perfect, or even good, narrative. The mechanism of an optical instrument may be more accurate than that of the human eye, but the life behind the eye is the thing of value: an author's method may be perfect, and yet his story may fail for want of life-giving power. Method may be, if not learned, at least improved by practice; but the higher power, vision, is the gift of nature.