

The character of Cortés seems to have undergone some change with change of circumstances; or, to speak more correctly, the new scenes in which he was placed called forth qualities which before were dormant in his bosom. There are some hardy natures that require the heats of excited action to unfold their energies; like the plants, which, closed to the mild influence of a temperate latitude, come to their full growth, and give forth their fruits only in the burning atmosphere of the tropics. Such is the portrait left to us by his contemporaries of this remarkable man.

The examples which have now been introduced are deemed sufficient, both in variety and extent, to introduce the student to descriptive writing. The attentive perusal of the examples given, with careful attention to the preliminary hints and observations, it is thought will furnish considerable aid in this department of composition.

LXIII.

NARRATION AND DESCRIPTION UNITED.

That the student may perceive how much is added to the beauty and the interest of a narration by the union of description with the narrative, the following model is presented, which is founded on the simple circumstance, that a young man in a feeble state of health is called home, after a long absence, to be present at the death-bed of his mother. The student will observe how beautifully many of the particulars presented in the list in the preceding exercises are interwoven with the narrative, and how much the union of description with the narration has added to the beauty of the story.

Example.

In looking over some papers of a deceased acquaintance, I found the following fragment. He had frequently spoken to me of the person whom it concerned, and who had been his school-fellow. I remember well his one day telling me that, thinking the character of his friend, and some circumstances in his life, were of such a kind that an interesting moral little story might be made from them, he had undertaken it; but, considering as he

was going on, that bringing the private character and feelings of a deceased friend before the world, was something like sacrilege, though done under a fictitious name, he had stopped soon after beginning the tale,—that he had laid it away amongst his papers, and had never looked at it again.

As the person it concerns has been a long time dead, and no relation survives, I do not feel that there can be any impropriety in my now making it public. I give it as it was written, though evidently not revised by my friend. Though hastily put together, and beginning as abruptly as it ends, and with little of story and no novelty in the circumstances, yet there is a mournful tenderness in it, which, I trust, will interest others in some portion as it did me.

“The sun not set yet, Thomas?” “Not quite, Sir. It blazes through the trees on the hill yonder, as if their branches were all on fire.”

Arthur raised himself heavily forward, and with his hat still over his brow, turned his glazed and dim eyes towards the setting sun. It was only the night before that he had heard his mother was ill, and could survive but a day or two. He had lived nearly apart from society, and, being a lad of a thoughtful, dreamy mind, had made a world to himself. His thoughts and feelings were so much in it, that, except in relation to his own home, there were the same vague and strange notions in his brain concerning the state of things surrounding him, as we have of a foreign land.

The main feeling which this self-made world excited in him was love, and, like most of his age, he had formed to himself a being suited to his own fancies. This was the romance of life, and though men, with minds like his, make imagination to stand oftentimes in the place of real existence, and to take to itself as deep feeling and concern, yet in domestic relations, which are so near, and usual, and private, they feel longer and more deeply than those who look upon their homes as only a better part of the world to which they belong. Indeed, in affectionate and good men of a visionary cast, it is in some sort only realizing their hopes and desires, to turn them homeward. Arthur felt that it was so, and he loved his house hold the more that they gave him an earnest of one day realizing all his hopes and attachments.

Arthur's mother was peculiarly dear to him, in having a character so much like his own. For though the cares and attachments of life had long ago taken place of a fanciful existence in her, yet her natural turn of mind was strong enough to give to these something of the romance of her disposition. This had led to a more than usual openness and intimacy between Arthur and his mother, and now brought to his remembrance the hours they had sat together by the firelight, when he listened to her mild and melancholy voice, as she spoke of what she had undergone at the loss of her parents and husband. Her gentle rebuke of his faults, her affectionate look of approval when he had done well, her care that he should be a just man, and her motherly anxiety lest the world should go hard with him, all crowded into his mind, and he thought that every worldly attachment was hereafter to be a vain thing.

He had passed the night between violent, tumultuous grief, and numb insensibility. Stepping into the carriage, with a slow, weak motion, like one who was quitting his sick chamber for the first time, he began his journey homeward. As he lifted his eyes upward, the few stars that were here and there over the sky seemed to look down in pity, and shed a religious and healing light upon him. But they soon went out, one after another, and as the last faded from his imploring sight, it was as if every thing good and holy had forsaken him. The faint tint in the east soon became a ruddy glow, and the sun, shooting upward, burst over every living thing in full glory. The sight went to Arthur's sick heart, as if it were in mockery of his misery.

Leaning back in his carriage, with his hand over his eyes, he was carried along, hardly sensible it was day. The old servant, Thomas, who was sitting by his side, went on talking in a low, monotonous tone; but Arthur only heard something sounding in his ears, scarcely heeding that it was a human voice. He had a sense of wearisomeness from the motion of the carriage, but in all things else the day passed as a melancholy dream.

Almost the first words Arthur spoke were those I have mentioned. As he looked out upon the setting sun, he shuddered through his whole frame, and then became sick and pale. He thought he knew the hill near him; and, as they wound round it, some peculiar old trees appeared, and he was in a few minutes in the midst of the scenery near his home. The river before him reflecting the rich evening sky, looked as if poured out from a molten mine. The birds, gathering in, were shooting across each other, bursting into short, gay notes, or singing their evening songs in the trees. It was a bitter thing to find all so bright and cheerful, and so near his own home too. His horses' hoofs struck upon the old wooden bridge. The sound went to his heart. It was here his mother took her last leave of him, and blessed him.

As he passed through the village, there was a feeling of strangeness, that every thing should be just as it was when he left it. There was an undefined thought floating in his mind, that his mother's state should produce a visible change in all that he had been familiar with. But the boys were at their noisy games in the street, the laborers returning, talking together, from their work, and the old men sitting quietly at their doors. He concealed himself as well as he could, and bade Thomas hasten on.

As they drew near the house, the night was shutting in about it, and there was a melancholy, gusty sound in the trees. Arthur felt as if approaching his mother's tomb. He entered the parlor. All was as gloomy and still as a deserted house. Presently he heard a slow, cautious step over head. It was in his mother's chamber. His sister had seen him from the window. She hurried down and threw her arms about her brother's neck, without uttering a word. As soon as he could speak, he asked, "Is she alive?" — and he could not say, my mother. "She is sleeping," answered his sister, "and must not know to-night that you are here; she is too weak to bear it now." "I will go look at her, then, while she sleeps," said he, drawing his handkerchief from his face. His sister's sympathy had made him shed the first tears which had fallen from him that day, and he was more composed.

He entered the chamber with a deep and still awe upon him; and as he drew near his mother's bed side, and looked on her pale, placid, and motionless face, he scarcely dared breathe, lest he should disturb the secret communion that the soul was holding with the world into which it was about to enter. The loss that he was about suffering, and his heavy grief, were all forgotten in the feeling of a holy inspiration, and he was, as it were, in the midst of invisible spirits, ascending and descending. His mother's lips moved slightly, as she uttered an indistinct sound. He drew back, and his sister went near to her, and she spoke. It was the same gentle voice which he had known and felt from his childhood. The exaltation of his soul left him, — he sunk down, — and his misery went over him like a flood.

The next day, as soon as his mother became composed enough to see him, Arthur went into her chamber. She stretched out her feeble hand, and turned towards him, with a look that blessed him. It was the short struggle of a meek spirit. She covered her eyes with her hand, and the tears trickled down between her pale, thin fingers. As soon as she became tranquil, she spoke of the gratitude she felt at being spared to see him before she died.

"My dear mother," said Arthur, — but he could not go on. His voice was choked, his eyes filled with tears, and the agony of his soul was visible

in his face. "Do not be so afflicted, Arthur, at the loss of me. We are not to part for ever. Remember, too, how comfortable and happy you have made my days. Heaven, I know, will bless so good a son as you have been to me. You will have that consolation, my son, which visits but a few, — you will be able to look back upon your past conduct to me, not without pain only, but with a holy joy. And think, hereafter, of the peace of mind you give me, now that I am about to die, in the thought that I am leaving your sister to your love and care. So long as you live, she will find you a father and brother to her." She paused for a moment. "I have always felt that I could meet death with composure; but I did not know," she said, with a tremulous voice, her lips quivering, — "I did not know how hard a thing it would be to leave my children, till now that the hour has come."

After a little while, she spoke of his father, and said, she had lived with the belief that he was mindful of her, and with the conviction, which grew stronger as death approached, that she should meet him in another world. She said but little more, as she grew weaker and weaker every hour. Arthur sat by in silence, holding her hand. He saw that she was sensible he was watching her countenance, for every now and then she opened her dull eye, and looked towards him, and endeavored to smile.

The day wore slowly away. The sun went down, and the melancholy and still twilight came on. Nothing was heard but the ticking of the watch, telling him with a resistless power that the hour was drawing nigh. He gasped, as if under some invisible, gigantic grasp, which it was not for human strength to struggle against.

It was now quite dark, and by the pale light of the night-lamp in the chimney corner, the furniture in the room threw huge and uncouth figures over the walls. All was unsubstantial and visionary, and the shadowy ministers of death appeared gathering round, waiting the duty of the hour appointed them. Arthur shuddered for a moment with superstitious awe; but the solemn elevation which a good man feels at the sight of the dying took possession of him, and he became calm again.

The approach of death has so much which is exalting, that our grief is, for the time, forgotten. And could one who had seen Arthur a few hours before, now have looked upon the grave and grand repose of his countenance, he would hardly have known him.

The livid hue of death was fast spreading over his mother's face. He stooped forward to catch the sound of her breathing. It grew quick and faint. — "My mother." — She opened her eyes, for the last time, upon him, — a faint flush passed over her cheek, — there was the serenity of an angel in her look, — her hand just pressed his. It was all over.

His spirit had endured to its utmost. It sunk down from its unearthly height; and with his face upon his mother's pillow, he wept like a child. He arose with a violent effort, and stepping into the adjoining chamber, spoke to his aunt. "It is past," said he. "Is my sister asleep? — Well, then, let her have rest; she needs it." He then went to his own chamber, and shut himself in.

It is a merciful thing that the intense suffering of sensitive minds makes to itself a relief. Violent grief brings on a torpor, and an indistinctness, and dimness, as from long watching. It is not till the violence of affliction has subsided, and gentle and soothing thoughts can find room to mix with our sorrow, and holy consolations can minister to us, that we are able to know fully our loss, and see clearly what has been torn away from our affections. It was so with Arthur. Unconnected and strange thoughts, with melancholy but half-formed images, were floating in his mind, and now and then a gleam of light would pass through it, as if he had been in a troubled trance, and all was right again. His worn and tired feelings at last found rest in sleep

It is an impression, which we cannot rid ourselves of if we would, when sitting by the body of a friend, that he has still a consciousness of our presence, — that though the common concerns of the world have no more to do with him, he has still a love and care of us. The face which we had so long been familiar with, when it was all life and motion, seems only in a state of rest. We know not how to make it real to ourselves, that the body before us is not a living thing.

Arthur was in such a state of mind, as he sat alone in the room by his mother, the day after her death. It was as if her soul had been in paradise, and was now holding communion with pure spirits there, though it still abode in the body that lay before him. He felt as if sanctified by the presence of one to whom the other world had been laid open, — as if under the love and protection of one made holy. The religious reflections that his mother had early taught him, gave him strength; a spiritual composure stole over him, and he found himself prepared to perform the last offices to the dead.

It is not enough to see our friends die, and part with them for the remainder of our days, — to reflect that we shall hear their voices no more, and that they will never look on us again, — to see that turning to corruption which was but just now alive, and eloquent, and beautiful with all the sensations of the soul. Are our sorrows so sacred and peculiar as to make the world as vanity to us, and the men of it as strangers, and shall we not be left to our afflictions for a few hours? Must we be brought out at such a time to the concerned or careless gaze of those we know not, or be made to bear the formal proffers of consolation from acquaintances who will go away and forget it all? Shall we not be suffered a little while a holy and healing communion with the dead? Must the kindred stillness and gloom of our dwelling be changed for the solemn show of the pall, the talk of the passers-by, and the broad and piercing light of the common sun? Must the ceremonies of the world wait on us even to the open graves of our friends?

When the hour came, Arthur rose with a firm step and fixed eye, though his whole face was tremulous with the struggle within him. He went to his sister, and took her arm within his. The bell struck. Its heavy, undulating sound rolled forward like a sea. He felt a violent beating through his whole frame, which shook him that he reeled. It was but a momentary weakness. He moved on, passing those who surrounded him, as if they had been shadows. While he followed the slow hearse, there was a vacancy in his eye as it rested on the coffin, which showed him hardly conscious of what was before him. His spirit was with his mother's. As he reached the grave, he shrunk back and turned deadly pale; but sinking his head upon his breast, and drawing his hat over his face, he stood motionless as a statue till the service was over.

He had gone through all that the forms of society required of him. For, as painful as the effort was, and as little suited as such forms were to his own thoughts upon the subject, yet he could not do any thing that might appear to the world like a want of reverence and respect for his mother. The scene was ended, and the inward struggle over; and now that he was left to himself, the greatness of his loss came up full and distinctly before him.

It was a dreary and chilly evening when he returned home. When he entered the house from which his mother had gone for ever, a sense of dreary emptiness oppressed him, as if his very abode had been deserted by every living thing. He walked into his mother's chamber. The naked bedstead, and the chair in which she used to sit, were all that was left in the room. As he threw himself back into the chair, he groaned in the bitterness of his spirit. A feeling of forlornness came over him, which was not to be relieved by tears. She, whom he had watched over in her dying hour

and whom he had talked to as she lay before him in death, as if she could hear and answer him, had gone from him. Nothing was left for the senses to fasten fondly on, and time had not yet taught him to think of her only as a spirit. But time and holy endeavors brought this consolation; and the little of life that a wasting disease left him, was passed by him, when alone, in thoughtful tranquillity; and amongst his friends he appeared with that gentle cheerfulness, which, before his mother's death, had been a part of his nature.*

Exercises.

Narration and Description may now be united in the history of

Moses	Elizabeth of England
Saul	Arabella Stewart
Elijah	Arabella Johnson
Elisha	Washington
Daniel	Jay
Judith	Marshall
Joshua	Franklin
Jephthah	Montezuma.

To the historical data which can be gleaned from any authentic source, the student may be permitted to add fictitious circumstances of his own invention.

In the same manner, he may present notices of any other character which may occur in the course of his reading or observation. He may also reverse the process of amplifying, and present an abridgement of the example.

LXIV.

EPISTOLARY CORRESPONDENCE, OR LETTER WRITING.†

A Letter is, perhaps, one of the most common, as well as one of the most useful forms of composition, and there are few, who can read or write at all, who are not frequently called

* It is recommended that the student be required to analyze this beautiful specimen of narration united with description, by presenting a list of the particulars which enter into the narrative and descriptive parts respectively.

† It is generally allowed, that epistolary writing, if not one of the highest, is one of the most difficult branches of composition. An *elegant* letter is much more rare than an elegant specimen of any other kind of writing. It is for this reason, that the author has deviated from the usual order practised by respectable teachers who give epistolary writing the first place in