

WILLIAM FRANKLIN WEBSTER

ENGLISH: COMPOSITION
AND LITERATURE

William Franklin Webster

English: Composition and Literature

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W. F. Webster

English: Composition and Literature

PREFACE

In July, 1898, I presented at the National Educational Association, convened in Washington, a Course of Study in English. At Los Angeles, in 1899, the Association indorsed the principles¹ of this course, and made it the basis of the Course in English for High Schools. At the request of friends, I have prepared this short text-book, outlining the method of carrying forward the course, and emphasizing the principles necessary for the intelligent communication of ideas.

It has not been the purpose to write a rhetoric. The many fine distinctions and divisions, the rarefied examples of very beautiful forms of language which a young pupil cannot possibly reproduce, or even appreciate, have been omitted. To teach the methods of simple, direct, and accurate expression has been the purpose; and this is all that can be expected of a high school course in English.

The teaching of composition differs from the teaching of Latin or mathematics in this point: whereas pupils can be compelled to solve a definite number of problems or to read a given number of lines, it is not possible to compel expression of the full thought. The full thought is made of an intellectual and an emotional element. Whatever is intellectual may be compelled by dint of sheer purpose; whatever is emotional must spring undriven by outside authority, and uncompelled by inside determination. A boy saws a cord of wood because he has been commanded by his father; but he cannot laugh or cry because directed to do so by the same authority. There must be the conditions which call forth smiles or tears. So there must be the conditions which call forth the full expression of thought, both what is intellectual and what is emotional. This means that the subject shall be one of which the writer knows something, and in which he is interested; that the demands in the composition shall not be made a discouragement; and that the teacher shall be competent and enthusiastic, inspiring in each pupil a desire to say truly and adequately the best he thinks and feels.

These conditions cannot be realized while working with dead fragments of language; but they are realized while constructing living wholes of composition. It is not two decades ago when the pupil in drawing was compelled to make straight lines until he made them all crooked. The pupil in manual training began by drawing intersecting lines on two sides of a board; then he drove nails into the intersections on one side, hoping that they would hit the corresponding points on the other. Now no single line or exercise is an end in itself; it contributes to some whole. Under the old method the pupil did not care or try to draw a straight line, or to drive a nail straight; but now, in order that he may realize the idea that lies in his mind, he does care and he does try: so lines are drawn better and nails are driven straighter than before. In all training that combines intellect and hand, the principle has been recognized that the best work is done when the pupil's interest has been enlisted by making each exercise contribute directly to the construction of some whole. Only in the range of the spiritual are we twenty years behind time, trying to get the best construction by compulsion. It is quite time that we recognized that the best work in composition can be done, not while the pupil is correcting errors in the use of language which he never dreamed of, nor while he is writing ten similes or ten periodic sentences, but when both intellect and feeling combine and work together to produce some whole. Then into the construction of this whole the pupil will throw all his strength, using the most apt comparisons, choosing the best words, framing adequate sentences, in order that the outward form may worthily present to others what to himself has appeared worthy of expression.

¹ See pp. 13, 14, of the Report of Committee on College Entrance Requirements.

There are some persons who say that other languages are taught by the word and sentence method; then why not English? These persons overlook the fact that we are leaving that method as rapidly as possible, and adopting a more rational method which at once uses a language to communicate thought. And they overlook another fact of even greater importance: the pupil entering the high school is by no means a beginner in English. He has been using the language ten or twelve years, and has a fluency of expression in English which he cannot attain in German throughout a high school and college course. The conditions under which a pupil begins the study of German in a high school and the study of English composition are entirely dissimilar; and a conclusion based upon a fancied analogy is worthless.

It is preferable, then, to practice the construction of wholes rather than the making of exercises; and it is best at the beginning to study the different kinds of wholes, one at a time, rather than all together. No one would attempt to teach elimination by addition and subtraction, by comparison and by substitution, all together; nor would an instructor take up heat, light, and electricity together. In algebra, or physics, certain great principles underlie the whole subject; and these appear and reappear as the study progresses through its allied parts. Still the best results are obtained by taking up these several divisions of the whole one after another. And in English the most certain and definite results are secured by studying the forms of discourse separately, learning the method of applying to each the great principles that underlie all composition.

If the forms of discourse are to be studied one after another, which shall be taken up first? In general, all composition may be separated into two divisions: composition which deals with things, including narration and description; and composition which deals with ideas, comprising exposition and argument. It needs no argument to justify the position that an essay which deals with things seen and heard is easier for a beginner to construct than an essay which deals with ideas invisible and unheard. Whether narration or description should precede appears yet to be undetermined; for many text-books treat one first, and perhaps as many the other. I have thought it wiser to begin with the short story, because it is easier to gain free, spontaneous expression with narration than with description. To write a whole page of description is a task for a master, and very few attempt it; but for the uninitiated amateur about three sentences of description mark the limit of his ability to see and describe. To get started, to gain confidence in one's ability to say something, to acquire freedom and spontaneity of expression,—this is the first step in the practice of composition. Afterward, when the pupil has discovered that he really has something to say,—enough indeed to cover three or four pages of his tablet paper,—then it may be time to begin the study of description, and to acquire more careful and accurate forms of expression. Spontaneity should be acquired first,—crude and unformed it may be, but spontaneity first; and this spontaneity is best gained while studying narration.

There can be but little question about the order of the other forms. Description, still dealing with the concrete, offers an admirable opportunity for shaping and forming the spontaneous expression gained in narration. Following description, in order of difficulty, come exposition and argument.

I should be quite misunderstood, did any one gather from this that during the time in which wholes are being studied, no attention is to be given to parts; that is, to paragraphs, sentences, and words. All things cannot be learned at once and thoroughly; there must be some order of succession. In the beginning the primary object to be aimed at is the construction of wholes; yet during their construction, parts can also be incidentally studied. During this time many errors which annoy and exasperate must be passed over with but a word, in order that the weight of the criticism may be concentrated on the point then under consideration. As a pupil advances, he is more and more competent to appreciate and to form good paragraphs and well-turned sentences, and to single out from the multitude of verbal signs the word that exactly presents his thought. The appreciation and the use of the stronger as well as the finer and more delicate forms of language come only with much reading and writing; and to demand everything at the very beginning is little less than sheer madness.

Moreover there never comes a time when the construction of a paragraph, the shaping of a phrase, or the choice of a word becomes an end in itself. Paragraphs, sentences, and words are well chosen when they serve best the whole composition. He who becomes enamored of one form of paragraph, who always uses periodic sentences, who chooses only common words, has not yet recognized that the beauty of a phrase or a word is determined by its fitness, and that it is most beautiful because it exactly suits the place it fills. The graceful sweep of a line by Praxiteles or the glorious radiancy of a color by Angelico is most beautiful in the place it took from the master's hand. So Lowell's wealth of figurative language and Stevenson's unerring choice of delicate words are most beautiful, not when torn from their original setting to serve as examples in rhetorics, but when fulfilling their part in a well-planned whole. And it is only as the beauties of literature are born of the thought that they ever succeed. No one can say to himself, "I will now make a good simile," and straightway fulfill his promise. If, however, the thought of a writer takes fire, and instead of the cold, unimpassioned phraseology of the logician, glowing images crowd up, and phrases tipped with fire, then figurative language best suits the thought,—indeed, it is the thought. But imagery upon compulsion,—never. So that at no time should one attempt to mould fine phrases for the sake of the phrases themselves, but he should spare no pains with them when they spring from the whole, when they harmonize with the whole, and when they give to the whole added beauty and strength.

It is quite unnecessary at this day to urge the study of literature. It is in the course of study for every secondary school. Yet a word may be said of the value of this study to the practice of composition. There are two classes of artists: geniuses and men of talent. Of geniuses in literature, one can count the names on his fingers; most authors are simply men of talent. Talent learns to do by doing, and by observing how others have done. When Brunelleschi left Rome for Florence, he had closely observed and had drawn every arch of the stupendous architecture in that ancient city; and so he was adjudged by his fellow citizens to be the only man competent to lift the dome of their Duomo. His observation discovered the secret of Rome's architectural grandeur; and the slow accumulation of such secrets marks the development of every art and science. Milton had his method of writing prose, Macaulay his, and Arnold his,—all different and all excellent. And just as the architect stands before the cathedrals of Cologne, Milan, and Salisbury to learn the secret of each; as the painter searches out the secret of Raphael, Murillo, and Rembrandt; so the author analyzes the masterpieces of literature to discover the secret of Irving, of Eliot, and of Burke. Not that an author is to be a servile imitator of any man's manner; but that, having knowledge of all the secrets of composition, he shall so be enabled to set forth for others his own thought in all the beauty and perfection in which he himself conceives it.

One thing further. A landscape painter would not make a primary study of Angelo's anatomical drawings; a composer of lyric forms of music would not study Sousa's marches; nor would a person writing a story look for much assistance in the arguments of Burke. The most direct benefit is derived from studying the very thing one wishes to know about, not from studying something else. That the literature may give the greatest possible assistance to the composition, the course has been so arranged that narration shall be taught by Hawthorne and Irving, description by Ruskin and Stevenson, exposition by Macaulay and Newman, and argument by Webster and Burke. Literature, arranged in this manner, is not only a stimulus to renewed effort, by showing what others have done; it is also the most skillful instructor in the art of composition, by showing how others have done.

It would be quite impossible for any one at the present time to write a text-book in English that would not repeat what has already been said by many others. Nor have I tried to. My purpose has been rather to select from the whole literature of the subject just those principles which every author of a book on composition or rhetoric has thought essential, and to omit minor matters and all those about which there is a difference of opinion. This limits the contents to topics already familiar to every teacher. It also makes it necessary to repeat what has been written before many times. Certain books, however, have treated special divisions of the whole subject in a thorough and exhaustive manner.

There is nothing new to say of Unity, Mass, and Coherence; Mr. Wendell said all concerning these in his book entitled “English Composition.” So in paragraph development, Scott and Denney hold the field. Other books which I have frequently used in the classroom are “Talks on Writing English,” by Arlo Bates, and Genung’s “Practical Rhetoric.” These books I have found very helpful in teaching, and I have drawn upon them often while writing this text-book.

If the field has been covered, then why write a book at all? The answer is that the principles which are here treated have not been put into one book. They may be found in several. These essentials I have repeated many times with the hope that they will be fixed by this frequent repetition. The purpose has been to focus the attention upon these, to apply them in the construction of the different forms of discourse, paragraphs, and sentences, and to repeat them until it is impossible for a student to forget them. If the book fulfils this purpose, it was worth writing.

Acknowledgments are due to Messrs. Charles Scribner’s Sons for their kind permission to use the selections from the writings of Robert Louis Stevenson contained in this book; also, to Messrs. D. Appleton & Co., The Century Co., and Doubleday & McClure Co. for selections from the writings of Rudyard Kipling.

W. F. WEBSTER.

Minneapolis, 1900.

A COURSE OF STUDY

IN LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

The Course of Study which follows is presented, not because it is better than many others which might be made. For the purposes of this book it was necessary that some course be adopted as the basis of the text. The principles which guided in arranging this course I believe are sound; but the preferences of teachers and the peculiarities of environment will often make it wise to use other selections from literature. Of this a large “supplementary list” is given at the back of the book.

It is now a generally accepted truth that the study of English should continue through the four years of a high-school course. The division of time that seems best is to take Narration and Description in the first year. In connection with Description, Figures of Speech should be studied. The next year, Exposition and Paragraphs form the major part of the work. This may be pleasantly broken by a study of Poetry, following the outline in the chapter on Verse Forms. In the third year, while the work in literature is mainly the Novel and the Drama, Sentences and Words should be studied in composition, with a review of the chapters on Narration and Description. Towards the close of the year, Exposition should be reviewed and the study of Argument taken up. The fourth year should be devoted to the study of such College Requirements as have not been taken in the course, and to the study of the History of English Literature as given in some good text book.

In some instances, it will be found impossible to give so much time to the study of English. In such cases, the amount of literature to be studied should be decreased, and the work in the text book should be more rapidly done. The sequence of the parts should remain the same, but the time should be modified to suit the needs of any special environment.

NARRATION

Composition

To give Spontaneity

- I. External Form of Composition (p. [296](#)).
- II. Marks for the Correction of Compositions (p. [300](#)).
- III. Simple Rules for Punctuation (pp. [301-309](#)).
- IV. Forms of Discourse. Definitions (pp. [1-7](#)).
- V. Choice of Subject (pp. [8-12](#)).
- VI. Study of Narration (pp. [13-48](#)).
 - a. Definition and General Discussion.
 - b. Narration without Plot.
Interest the Essential Feature.
 - c. Narration with Plot.
 1. Selection of Main Incident of first Importance.
It gives to the story
Unity,
ridding it of
Long Introductions and Conclusions,
Tedious Enumerations, and
Irrelevant Details.
 2. Arrangement of Material.
Close of Story contains Main Incident.
Opening of Story contains Characters, Place, and Time.
Incidents generally follow in Order of Time.
 3. Movement.
 4. Use of Description in Narration.
 5. Some General Considerations.

Literature

The Great Stone Face, The Gentle Boy, The Gray Champion, Roger Malvin's Burial, and other Stories. *Hawthorne*.

Tales of a Wayside Inn. *Longfellow*.

The Gold Bug. *Poe*.

Marmion, or The Lady of the Lake. *Scott*.

A Christmas Carol, or The Cricket on the Hearth. *Dickens*.

The Vision of Sir Launfal, and other Narrative Poems. *Lowell*.

An Incident of the French Camp, Hervé Riel, The Pied Piper, How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix. *Browning*.

Meaning of the Author, calling for

A Study of Words.

Outline of Story.

Turning Points in the Story.

Central Idea, or Purpose of the Story.

Method of the Author.

Is there a Main Incident?

Do all other Incidents converge to it?

Is the Order a Sequence of Time alone?

Is the Interest centred in Characters or Plot?

Style of the Author.

Compare the Works of the Author.

DESCRIPTION

Composition

To secure Accuracy of Expression (pp. [49-88](#))

- I. Definition and General Discussion.
 - Difficulties in Language as a Means of Picturing.
 - Value of Observation.
- II. Structure of Whole.
 - a. To secure Unity.
 - Select a Point of View.
 - b. To secure Coherence.
 - Arrange Details in Natural Order.
 - c. To secure Emphasis.
 - Arrange and proportion Treatment to effect your Purpose.
- III. Paragraph Structure.
 - Definition.
 - Length of Paragraphs.
 - Development of Paragraphs.
- IV. Words.
 - Specific rather than General.
 - Adjectives, Nouns, and Verbs.
- V. Figures Of Speech (pp. [257-268](#)).
 - Based on Likeness.
 - Based on Sentence Structure.
 - Miscellaneous Figures.

Literature

- The Old Manse, The Old Apple Dealer. *Hawthorne*.
- An Indian-Summer Reverie, The Dandelion, The Birch, The Oak, and other Descriptive Poems. *Lowell*.
- The Fall of the House of Usher. *Poe*.
- The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, Selections from the Sketch Book. *Irving*.
- Selections from Childe Harold. *Byron*.
- The Deserted Village. *Goldsmith*.
- Julius Cæsar. *Shakespeare*.
- Poems selected from Palgrave's Golden Treasury.
- Meaning of the Author (as under Narration).
- Method of the Author.

- Does the Author keep his Point of View?
- Are the Details arranged in a Natural Order?
- Has any Detail a Supreme Importance?

Are the Details treated in Proper Proportion?

Has the Whole a Unity of Effect? Do you see the Picture distinctly?

For what Purpose has the Author used Description?

Does the Author employ Figures?

Style of the Author.

EXPOSITION, PARAGRAPHS, VERSE FORMS

Composition

To encourage Logical Thinking and Adequate Expression (pp. [89](#)⁻²)

Exposition

- I. Definition and General Considerations.
- II. Exposition of Terms. Definition.
- III. Exposition of Propositions.
 - a. Clear Statement of the Proposition in a “Key Sentence.”
This will limit
 - b. The Discussion.
 - 1. What shall be included?
 - 2. What shall be excluded?
 - 3. How shall Important Matters be emphasized?
- Mass and Proportion.
- Expansion and Condensation.
- To effect these ends use an
- 4. Outline.

Paragraphs (pp. [151](#)⁻³)

- I. Definition.
- II. Length of Paragraphs.
- III. Development of Paragraphs.
- IV. Principles of Structure.
 - Unity.
 - Mass.
 - Coherence.

Verse Forms (pp. [269](#)-[291](#))

Poetry Defined.
Kinds of Feet.
Number of Feet in a Verse.
Substitutions and Rests.
Kinds of Poetry.

² See the first essay in *Prose Fancies*.

³ Unless otherwise stated, all page references are to the Riverside Literature Series.

Literature

Essay on Milton. *Macaulay*.

Essay on Addison. *Macaulay*.

Commemoration Ode. *Lowell*.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. *Coleridge*.

Intimations of Immortality, and other Poems. *Wordsworth*.

Selections from Palgrave's Golden Treasury.

The Bunker Hill Oration, or Adams and Jefferson. *Webster*.

Sesame and Lilies. *Ruskin*.

Meaning of the Author.

Outline showing the Main Thesis with the Dependence
of Subordinate Propositions.

Method of the Author.

Does he hold to his Point and so gain Unity

Does he arrange his Material so as to secure Emphasis?

Does one Paragraph grow out of another?

Does each Paragraph treat a Single Topic?

Are the Sentences dovetailed together?

Does the Author use Figures?

Are the Figures Effective?

Are his Words General or Specific?

Style of the Author.

Is it Clear?

Has it Force?

Is the Diction Elegant?

How has he gained these Ends?

SENTENCES, WORDS, ARGUMENT

Composition

Sentences (pp. [200](#)-⁴)

- I. Definition and Classification.
- II. Principles of Structure.
 - a. Unity.
 - b. Mass.
 - 1. Prominent Positions in a Sentence.
 - 2. Periodic Sentences.
 - 3. Loose Sentences.
 - c. Coherence.
 - 1. Parallel Constructions.
 - 2. Connectives.

Words (pp. [235](#)-[256](#))

Reputable Words.
Latin or Saxon Words.
General or Specific.
Figures of Speech.
The One Rule for the Use of Words.

Narration and Description Reviewed

Exposition Reviewed

Literature

Argument (pp. [128](#)-⁵)

- I. Kinds of Argument.
- II. Order of Arguments.
- III. Refutation.

Sir Roger de Coverley Papers. *Addison*.

⁴ *Biglow Papers*, No. X.

⁵ Tennyson's *Ænone*.

The Vicar of Wakefield. *Goldsmith*.

Silas Marner. *Eliot*.

Ivanhoe. *Scott*.

Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, A Midsummer Night's Dream. *Shakespeare*.

Conciliation with the Colonies. *Burke*.

COMPOSITION

In the last year of the course, the compositions should be such as will test the maturer powers of the pupil. They should be written under the careful supervision of the teacher. They should be of all forms of discourse, and the subjects should be drawn from the subjects of study in the high school, especially from the literature.

LITERATURE

Difficult Selections

L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Comus, and Lycidas. *Milton*.

Paradise Lost. Two Books. *Milton*.

Essay on Burns. *Carlyle*.

In Memoriam, The Princess, and other Poems. *Tennyson*.

Selections. *Browning*.

Selections. *Emerson*.

A History of English Literature

ENGLISH: COMPOSITION AND LITERATURE

CHAPTER I FORMS OF DISCOURSE

Composition. Composition, from the Latin words *con*, meaning together, and *ponere*, meaning to place, signifies a placing together, a grouping or arrangement of objects or of ideas. This arrangement is generally made so that it will produce a desired result. Speaking accurately, the putting together is the composition. Much of the desired result is gained by care in the selection of materials. Placing together a well-worn book, a lamp, and a pair of heavy bowed spectacles makes a suggestive picture. The selection and grouping of these objects is spoken of as the composition of the picture. So in music, an author composes, when he groups certain musical tones and phrases so that they produce a desired effect. In literature, too, composition is, strictly speaking, the selection and arrangement of materials, whether the incidents of a story or the details of a description, to fulfill a definite purpose.

English Composition. In practice, however, English composition has come to include more than the selection and arrangement of the materials,—incidents, objects, or ideas, as the case may be; the term has been extended to include the means by which the speaker or writer seeks to convey this impression to other persons. As a painter must understand drawing, the value of lights and shades, and the mixing of colors before he can successfully reproduce for others the idea he has to express, so the artist in literature needs a knowledge of elementary grammar and of the simpler usages of language in order clearly to represent to others the idea which lies in his own mind. As commonly understood, then, *English composition* may be defined as *the art of selecting, arranging, and communicating ideas by means of the English language*.

Composition, Written and Oral. The term “English composition” is now generally understood to mean written composition, and not oral composition. At first thought they seem to be the same thing. So far as the selection and arrangement of matter is concerned, they are the same. Moreover, both use words, and both employ sentences; but here the likeness ends. If sentences should be put upon paper exactly as they were spoken, in most instances they would not convey to a reader the same thought they conveyed to a listener. It is much more exacting to express the truth one wishes to convey, by silent, featureless symbols than by that wonderful organ of communication, the human voice. Now, if to the human voice be added eyes, features, gestures, and pose, we easily understand the great advantage a speaker has over a writer.

Conventions of Composition. Moreover, there are imposed upon a writer certain established rules which he must follow. He must spell words correctly, and he must use correctly marks of punctuation. These things need not annoy a speaker; yet they are conditions which must be obeyed by a writer. A man who eats with a knife may succeed in getting his food to his mouth, yet certain conventions exclude such a person from polite society. So in composition, it is possible for a person to make himself understood, though he write “alright” instead of “all right,” and never use a semicolon; still, such a person could hardly be considered a highly cultured writer. To express one’s thoughts correctly and with refinement requires absolute obedience to the common conventions of good literature.

The study of composition includes, first, the careful selection of materials and their effective arrangement; and second, a knowledge of the established conventions of literature: of spelling; of the common uses of the marks of punctuation,—period, question mark, exclamation point, colon, semicolon, comma; of the common idioms of our language; and of the elements of its grammar.

From the beginning of the high school course, the essay, the paragraph, the sentence, the word, are to be studied with special attention to the effective use of each in adequately communicating ideas.

Five Forms of Discourse. All written composition may be arranged in two classes, or groups. The first group will include all composition that deals with actual happenings and real things; the second, all that deals with abstract thoughts and spiritual ideas. The first will include narration and description; the second, exposition, argument, and persuasion. All literature, then, may be separated into five classes,—narration, description, exposition, argument, and persuasion.

Narration tells what things do; description tells how things look. Narration deals with occurrences; description deals with appearances. Exposition defines a term, or explains a proposition; argument proves the truth or falsity of a proposition; persuasion urges to action upon a proposition. Exposition explains; argument convinces; persuasion arouses. These are the broad lines of distinction which separate the five forms of discourse.

Definitions. *Narration is that form of discourse which recounts events in a sequence.* It includes stories, novels, romances, biographies, some books of travel, and some histories.

Description is that form of discourse which aims to present a picture. It seldom occurs alone, but it is usually found in combination with the other forms of discourse.

Exposition is that form of discourse which seeks to explain a term or a proposition. Text-books, books of information, theses, most histories, many magazine articles, and newspaper leaders are of this class of literature.

Argument is that form of discourse which has for its object the proof of the truth or falsity of a proposition.

Persuasion is that form of discourse the purpose of which is to influence the will.

Difficulty in distinguishing. Though these definitions seem to set apart the great classes of literature, and to insure against any danger of confusion, it is not always easy to place individual pieces of literature in one of these divisions. Whittier's "Barbara Frietchie" and Stevenson's "Treasure Island" are narrative beyond any question; but what about "Snow-Bound" and "Travels with a Donkey" by the same authors? Are they narration or description? In them the narrative and descriptive portions are so nearly equal that one hesitates to set them down to either class; the reader is constantly called from beautiful pictures to delightful stories. The narrative can easily be separated from the descriptive portions; but when this has been done, has it been decided whether the whole piece is narration or description?

When a person takes up the other forms of discourse, the difficulty becomes still greater. Description and narration are frequently used in exposition. If a boy should be asked to explain the working of a steam engine, he would, in all likelihood, begin with a description of an engine. If his purpose was to explain how an engine works, and was not to tell how an engine looks, the whole composition would be exposition. So, too, it is often the easiest way to explain what one means by telling a story. The expression of such thoughts would be exposition, although it might contain a number of stories and descriptions.

Narration and description may be found in a piece of exposition; and all three may be employed in argument. If a person should wish to prove the dangers of intemperance, he might enforce his proof by a story, or by a description of the condition of the nervous system after a drunken revel. And one does not need to do more than explain the results of intemperance to a sensible man to prove to him that he should avoid all excesses. The explanation alone is argument enough for such a person. Still, is such an explanation exposition or argument? If the man cared nothing about convincing another that there are dangers in intemperance, did not wish to prove that the end of intemperance is death and dishonor, the composition is as much exposition as the explanation of a steam engine. If, on the other hand, he explained these results in order to convince another that he should avoid intemperance, then the piece is argument.

Persuasion introduces a new element into composition; for, while exposition and argument are directed to a man's reason, persuasion is addressed to the emotions and the will. Its purpose is to arouse to action. One can readily imagine that a simple explanation of the evils of intemperance might be quite enough to convince a man that its dangers are truly great,—so great that he would determine to fight these evils with all his strength. In such a case explanation alone has convinced him; and it has aroused him to do something. Is the piece exposition, or argument, or persuasion? Here, as before, the answer is found in the purpose of the author. If he intended only to explain, the piece is exposition; if to convince, it is argument; if to arouse to action, it belongs to the literature of persuasion.

It must now be plain that few pieces of literature are purely one form of discourse. The forms are mingled in most of our literature. Hardly a story can be found that does not contain some descriptions; and a description of any considerable length is sure to contain some narrative portions. So, too, narration and description are often found in exposition, argument, and persuasion; and these last three forms are frequently combined.

Purpose of the Author. It must also be evident that the whole piece of literature will best be classified by discovering the purpose of the author. If his purpose is simply to tell a good story, his work is narration; if the purpose is merely to place a picture before the reader's mind, it is description; if to explain conditions and nothing more, it is exposition; if to prove to the reason the truth or falsity of a proposition, it is argument; while, if the writer addresses himself to the emotions and the will, no matter whether he tells anecdotes or paints lurid pictures, explains conditions or convinces of the dangers of the present course,—if he does all these to urge the reader to do something, the composition belongs to the literature of persuasion. The five forms of discourse are most easily distinguished by discovering the purpose of the author.

One addition should be made. Few novels are written in which there is nothing more than a story. Nearly all contain some teaching; and it is a safe conclusion that the authors have taught "on purpose." In "Baa, Baa, Black Sheep," Kipling has shown the imperative necessity of a "real, live, lovely mamma;" in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," Irving has placed before us a charming picture of rural life in a dreamy Dutch village on the Hudson; and in his "Christmas Carol," Dickens shows plainly that happiness is not bought and sold even in London, and that the only happy man is he who shares with another's need. Yet all of these, and the hundreds of their kind, whatever the purpose of the authors when writing them, belong to the "story" or "novel" class. The purpose *in telling* the story is secondary to the purpose *to tell* a story. They are to be classified as narration.

English composition, then, is a study of the selection and arrangement of ideas, and of the methods of using the English language to communicate them. All composition is divided into five great classes. These classes have broad lines of distinction, which are most easily applied by determining the purpose of the author.

CHAPTER II

CHOICE OF SUBJECT

Form and Material. From the considerations in the preceding chapter may be derived several principles regarding the choice of subject. If the composition is to be narrative, it should be upon a subject that readily lends itself to narrative form. One can tell a story about “A Day’s Hunt” or “What We did Hallowe’en;” but it would try one’s powers of imagination to write a story of “A Tree” or “A Chair.” The latter subjects do not lend themselves to narration, but they may be described. Josiah P. Cooke has written a brilliant exposition of “Fire” in “The New Chemistry;” yet a young person would be foolish to take “Fire” as a subject for exposition, though he might easily write a good description of “How the Fire looked from My Window,” or narrate “How a Fireman rescued My Sister.” So in all work in composition, *select a subject that readily lends itself to the form of discourse demanded; or, conversely, select the form of discourse suitable for presenting most effectively your material.*

Author’s Individuality. If an author is writing for other purposes than for conscious practice, he should choose the form of discourse in which he can best work, and to which he can best shape his material. Some men tell stories well; others are debaters; while yet others are wonderfully gifted with eloquence. Emerson understood life thoroughly. He knew man’s feelings, his motives, his hopes, his strength, his weakness; yet one cannot imagine Emerson shaping this material into a novel. But just a little way down the road lived a wizard who could transmute the commonest events of this workaday world to the most beautiful shapes; no one wishes that Hawthorne had written essays. The second principle guiding in the choice of a subject is this: *Select a subject which is suited to your peculiar ability as an author.*

Knowledge of Subject. The form, then, should suit the matter; and it should be the form in which the author can work. There is a third principle that should guide in the choice of a subject. *It should be a subject of which the author knows something.* Pupils often exclaim, “What can I write about!” as if they were expected to find something new to write. An exercise in composition has not for its object the proclaiming of any new and unheard-of thing; it is an exercise in the expression of things already known. Even when the subject is known, the treatment offers difficulties enough. It is not true that what is thoroughly understood is easily explained. Many excellent scholars have written very poor text-books because they had not learned the art of expression. A necessary antecedent of all good composition is a full and accurate knowledge of the subject; and even when one knows all about it, the clear expression of the thought will be difficult enough.

To demand accurate knowledge of the subject before an author begins work upon it narrows the field from which themes may be drawn. Burroughs is an authority on all the tenants of our groves; “Wake-Robin,” “Pepacton,” and his other books all show a master’s certain hand. So Stedman is an authority in matters relating to literature. But Burroughs and Stedman alike would find difficulty in writing an essay on “Electricity in the Treatment of Nervous Diseases.” They do not know about it. A boy in school probably knows something of fishing; of this he can write. A girl can tell of “The Last Parlor Concert.” Both could write very entertainingly of their “First Algebra Recitation;” neither could write a convincing essay on “The Advantages of Free Trade.”

Common Subjects. This will seem to limit the list of subjects to the commonplace. The fact is that in a composition exercise the purpose is not to startle the world with some new thing; it is to learn the art of expression. And here in the region of common things, things thoroughly understood, every bit of effort can be given to the manner of expression. The truth is, it does not require much art to make a book containing new and interesting material popular; the matter in the book carries it in spite of poor composition. Popular it may be, but popularity is not immortality. Columns of poorly written articles upon “Dewey” and “The Philippines” have been eagerly read by thousands of Americans; it would require a literary artist of great power to write a one-column article on “Pigs”

so that it would be eagerly read by thousands. Real art in composition is much more manifest when an author takes a common subject and treats it in such a way that it glows with new life. Richard Le Gallienne has written about a drove of pigs so beautifully that one forgets all the traditions about these common animals.² Choose common subjects, then,—subjects that allow every particle of your strength to go into the manner of saying what you already know.

The requirement that the subject shall be common does not mean that the subject shall be trivial. “Sliding to First,” “How Billy won the Game,” with all of this class of subjects, at once put the writer into a trifling, careless attitude toward his work. The subjects themselves seem to call forth a cheap, slangy vocabulary and the vulgar phrases of sporting life. An equally common subject could be selected which would call forth serious, earnest effort. If a boy knew nothing except about ball games, it would be advisable for him to write upon this subject. Such a condition is hardly possible in a high school. *Choose common subjects, but subjects that call for earnest thinking and dignified expression.*

Interest. Interest is another consideration in the choice of a subject. It applies equally to writer and reader. *Choose subjects that are interesting.* Not only must an author know about the subject; he must be interested in it. A pupil may have accurate knowledge of the uses of a semicolon; but he would not be likely to succeed in a paragraph about semicolons, largely because he is not much interested in semicolons. This matter of interest is so important that it is well to know what things all persons, authors and readers alike, are interested in. What, then, is generally interesting?

The Familiar. First, *the familiar is interesting.* When reading a newspaper each one instinctively turns to the local column, or glances down the general news columns to see if there is anything from his home town. To a former resident, Jim Benson’s fence in Annandale is more interesting than the bronze doors of the Congressional Library in Washington. For the same reason a physician lights upon “a new cure for consumption,” a lawyer devours Supreme Court decisions, while the dealer in silks is absorbed in the process of making silk without the aid of the silkworm. Each is interested in that which to him is most familiar.

Human Life. Second, *human life in all its phases is interesting.* The account of a fire or of a railroad accident takes on a new interest when, in addition to the loss of property, there has been a loss of life. War is horribly fascinating, not so much because there is a wanton destruction of property, as because it involves the slaughter of men. Stories about trees and animals are usually failures, unless handled by artists who breathe into them the life of man. Andersen’s “Tannenbaum” and Kipling’s “Jungle Books” are intensely interesting because in them trees and animals feel and act just as men do.

The Strange. Third, *the romantic, the unique, and the impossible are interesting.* A new discovery, a new invention, a people of which little is known,—anything new is interesting. The stories of Rider Haggard and Jules Verne have been popular because they deal with things which eye hath not seen. This peculiar trait of man allows him to relish a good fish story, or the latest news from the sea-serpent. Just for the same reason, children love to hear of Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella. Children and their parents are equally interested in those things which are entirely outside of their own experience.

These, then, are the general conditions which govern the choice of a subject. It shall easily lend itself to the form of discourse chosen; it shall be suited to the peculiar ability of the author; it shall be thoroughly understood by the author,—common, but not trivial; it shall be interesting to both reader and author.

² See the first essay in *Prose Fancies*.

CHAPTER III

NARRATION

Material of Narration. Narration has been defined as the form of discourse which recounts events in a sequence. It includes not only letters, journals, memoirs, biographies, and many histories, but, in addition, that great body of literature which people generally include in the comprehensive term of “stories.”

If this body of literature be examined, it will be found that it deals with things as opposed to ideas; incidents as opposed to propositions. Sometimes, it is true, the author of a story is in reality dealing with ideas. In the fable about “The Hare and the Tortoise,” the tortoise stands for the idea of slow, steady plodding; while the hare is the representative of quick wits which depend on their ability to show a brilliant burst of speed when called upon. The fable teaches better than an essay can that the dullness which perseveres will arrive at success sooner than brilliancy of mind which wastes its time in doing nothing to the purpose. Andersen’s “Ugly Duckling,” Ruskin’s “King of the Golden River,” and Lowell’s “Sir Launfal” stand for deep spiritual ideas, which we understand better for this method of presentation. In an allegory like “Pilgrim’s Progress,” the passions and emotions, the sins and weaknesses of men are treated as if they were real persons. Ideas are represented by living, breathing persons; and we may say that all such narratives deal, not with ideas, but, for want of a better word, with things.

In Action. Not only does narration deal with things, but with things doing something. Things inactive might be written of, but this would be description. It is necessary in narration that the things be in an active mood; that something be doing. “John struck James,” then, is a narrative sentence; it tells that John has been doing something. Still, this one sentence would not ordinarily be accepted as narration. For narration there must be a series, a sequence of individual actions. *Recounting events in a sequence is narration.*

The Commonest Form of Discourse. Narration is the most popular form of discourse. Between one fourth and one third of all books published are stories; and more than one half of the books issued by public libraries belong to the narrative class. Such a computation does not include the large number of stories read in our papers and magazines. In addition to being the most popular form of discourse, it is the most natural. It is the first form of connected discourse of the child; it is the form employed by the uncultured in giving his impressions; it is the form most used in conversation. Moreover, narration is the first form found in great literatures: the Iliad and the Odyssey, the songs of the troubadours in France, and the minnesingers in Germany, the chronicles and ballads of England,—all are narrative.

Language as a Means of Expression. Narration is especially suited to the conditions imposed by language. Men do not think in single words, but in groups of words,—phrases, clauses, and sentences. In hearing, too, men do not consider the individual words; the mind waits until a group of words, a phrase, or a simple sentence perhaps,—which expresses a unit of thought, has been uttered. In narration these groups of words follow in a sequence exactly as the actions which they represent do. Take this rather lurid bit from Stevenson:—

“He dropped his cutlass as he jumped, and when he felt the pistol, whipped straight round and laid hold of me, roaring out an oath; and at the same time either my courage came again, or I grew so much afraid as came to the same thing; for I gave a shriek and shot him in the midst of the body.” (“Kidnapped.”)

Each phrase or clause here is a unit of thought, and each follows the others in the same order as the events they tell of occurred. On the other hand, when one attempts description, and exposition too in many cases, he realizes the great difficulties imposed by the language itself; for in these forms of

discourse the author not infrequently wishes to put the whole picture before the reader at once, or to set out several propositions at the same time, as belonging to one general truth. In order that the reader may get the complete picture or the complete thought, he must hold in mind often a whole paragraph before he unites it into the one conception the author intended. In narration one action is completed; it can be dropped. Then another follows, which can also be dropped. They need not be held in mind until the paragraph is finished. Narration is exactly suited to the means of its communication. The events which are recorded, and the sentences which record them, both follow in a sequence.

Without Plot. The sequence of events in narration may be a simple sequence of time, in which case the narrative is without plot. This is the form of narration employed in newspapers in giving the events of the day. It is used in journals, memoirs, biographies, and many elementary histories. It makes little demand upon an author further than that he shall say clearly something that is interesting. Interesting it must be, if the author wishes it to be read; readers will not stay over dull material. Newspapers and magazines look out for interesting material, and it is for the matter in them that they are read. So memoirs and biographies are read, not to find out what happens at last,—that is known,—but to pick up information concerning an interesting subject.

Plot. Or the sequence may be a more subtle and binding relation of cause and effect. This is the sequence employed in stories. One thing happens because another thing has happened. Generally the sequence of time and the sequence of cause and effect correspond; for effects come after causes. When, however, more than one cause is introduced, or when some cause is at work which the author hides until he can most advantageously produce it, or when an effect is held back for purposes of creating interest, the events may not be related exactly in the order in which they occurred. When any sequence is introduced in addition to the simple sequence of time, or when the time sequence is disturbed for the purpose of heightening interest, there is an arrangement of the parts which is generally termed plot.

Plot is a term difficult to define. We feel, however, that Grant's "Memoirs" have no plot, and we feel just as sure that "King Lear" has a plot. So, too, we say that "Robinson Crusoe" has little, almost no plot; that the plot is simple in "Treasure Island," and that "Les Misérables" has an intricate plot. A plot seems to demand more than a mere succession of events. *Any arrangement of the parts of a narrative so that the reader's interest is aroused concerning the result of the series of events detailed is a plot.*

It often occurs that a book which, as a whole, is without a plot, contains incidents which have a plot. In "Travels with a Donkey," by Stevenson, no one cares for the plot of the whole book,—in fact there is none; yet the reader is interested in the purchase of the "neat and high bred" Modestine up to the "last interview with Father Adam in a billiard-room at the witching hour of dawn, when I administered the brandy." This incident has a plot. The following is a paragraph from "An Autumn Effect" by Mr. Stevenson. The simple events are perfectly ordered, and there is a delightful surprise at the end. This paragraph has a plot. Yet the thirty pages of "An Autumn Effect" could not be said to have a plot.

"Bidding good-morning to my fellow-traveler, I left the road and struck across country. It was rather a revelation to pass from between the hedgerows and find quite a bustle on the other side, a great coming and going of school-children upon by-paths, and, in every second field, lusty horses and stout country-folk a-ploughing. The way I followed took me through many fields thus occupied, and through many strips of plantation, and then over a little space of smooth turf, very pleasant to the feet, set with tall fir-trees and clamorous with rooks, making ready for the winter, and so back again into the quiet road. I was now not far from the end of my day's journey. A few hundred yards farther, and, passing through a gap in the hedge, I began to go down hill through a pretty extensive tract of young beeches. I was soon in shadow myself, but the afternoon sun still colored the upmost boughs of the wood,

and made a fire over my head in the autumnal foliage. A little faint vapor lay among the slim tree-stems in the bottom of the hollow; and from farther up I heard from time to time an outburst of gross laughter, as though clowns were making merry in the bush. There was something about the atmosphere that brought all sights and sounds home to one with a singular purity, so that I felt as if my senses had been washed with water. After I had crossed the little zone of mist, the path began to remount the hill; and just as I, mounting along with it, had got back again from the head downwards, into the thin golden sunshine, I saw in front of me a donkey tied to a tree. Now, I have a certain liking for donkeys, principally, I believe, because of the delightful things that Sterne has written of them. But this was not after the pattern of the ass at Lyons. He was of a white color, that seemed to fit him rather for rare festal occasions than for constant drudgery. Besides, he was very small, and of the daintiest proportions you can imagine in a donkey. And so, sure enough, you had only to look at him to see he had never worked. There was something too roguish and wanton in his face, a look too like that of a schoolboy or a street Arab, to have survived much cudgeling. It was plain that these feet had kicked off sportive children oftener than they had plodded with freight through miry lanes. He was altogether a fine-weather, holiday sort of a donkey; and though he was just then somewhat solemnized and rueful, he still gave proof of the levity of his disposition by impudently wagging his ears at me as I drew near. I say he was somewhat solemnized just then; for with the admirable instinct of all men and animals under restraint, he had so wound and wound the halter about the tree that he could go neither back nor forwards, nor so much as put his head down to browse. There he stood, poor rogue, part puzzled, part angry, part, I believe, amused. He had not given up hope, and dully revolved the problem in his head, giving ever and again another jerk at the few inches of free rope that still remained unwound. A humorous sort of sympathy for the creature took hold upon me. I went up, and, not without some trouble on my part, and much distrust and resistance on the part of Neddy, got him forced backwards until the whole length of the halter was set loose, and he was once more as free a donkey as I dared to make him. I was pleased (as people are) with this friendly action to a fellow-creature in tribulation, and glanced back over my shoulder to see how he was profiting by his freedom. The brute was looking after me; and no sooner did he catch my eye than he put up his long white face into the air, pulled an impudent mouth at me, and began to bray derisively. If ever any one person made a grimace at another, that donkey made a grimace at me. The hardened ingratitude of his behavior, and the impertinence that inspired his whole face as he curled up his lip, and showed his teeth and began to bray, so tickled me and was so much in keeping with what I had imagined to myself of his character, that I could not find it in my heart to be angry, and burst into a peal of hearty laughter. This seemed to strike the ass as a repartee, so he brayed at me again by way of rejoinder; and we went on for awhile, braying and laughing, until I began to grow a-weary of it, and shouting a derisive farewell, turned to pursue my way. In so doing—it was like going suddenly into cold water—I found myself face to face with a prim, little old maid. She was all in a flutter, the poor old dear! She had concluded beyond question that this must be a lunatic who stood laughing aloud at a white donkey in the placid beech-woods. I was sure, by her face, that she had already recommended her spirit most religiously to Heaven, and prepared herself for the worst. And so, to reassure her, I uncovered and besought her, after a very staid fashion, to put me on my way to Great Missenden. Her voice trembled a little, to be sure, but I think her mind was set at rest; and she told me, very

explicitly, to follow the path until I came to the end of the wood, and then I should see the village below me in the bottom of the valley. And, with mutual courtesies, the little old maid and I went on our respective ways.”

Books of travel, memoirs, and biographies, as whole books, are generally without any arrangement serious enough to be termed a plot; yet a large part of the interest in such books would be lost were the incidents there collected not well told, with a conscious attempt to set them out in the very best fashion; indeed, if each incident did not have a plot. In “Vanity Fair” with its six hundred pages, in “Silas Marner” with its two hundred pages, in the short stories of our best magazines, in the spicy little anecdotes in the “Youth’s Companion,”—in the least bit of a good story as well as the three-volume novel, the authors have used the means best suited to retain the interest to the end. They have constructed plots.

Unity, Mass, and Coherence. In the construction of any piece of composition there are three principles of primary importance: they are Unity, which is concerned with the material itself; and Mass and Coherence, which are concerned with the arrangement of the material. A composition has unity when all the material has been so sifted and selected that each part contributes its share to the central thought of the whole. Whether of a sentence, a paragraph, or a whole composition, all those parts must be excluded which do not bring something of value to the whole; and everything must be included which is necessary to give a clear understanding of the whole. Mass, the second principle of structure, demands that those parts of a composition, paragraph, or sentence which are of most importance shall be so placed that they will arrest the attention. By coherence is meant that principle of structure which, in sentences, paragraphs, and whole compositions, places those parts related in thought near together, and keeps separate those parts which are separated in thought.

Main Incident. For the construction of a story that will retain the reader’s interest to the end, for the selection of such material as will contribute to a central thought, for the arrangement of this material so that the most important matter shall occupy the most important position in the theme, one simple rule is of value. It is this: *First choose the main incident* towards which all the other incidents converge, and for the accomplishment of which the preceding incidents are necessary. A few pages will be given to the application of this rule, and to the results of its application.

Its Importance. There should be in each story, however slight the plot, some incident that is more important than the others, and toward which all the others converge. A reader is disappointed if, after reading a story through, he finds that there is no worthy ending, that all the preparation was made for no purpose. If, in “Wee Willie Winkie,” Kipling had stopped just before Miss Allardyce started across the river, it would have been a poor story. It would have had no ending. It is because a story gets somewhere that we like it. Yet not just somewhere; it must arrive at a place worthy of all the preparation that has preceded. A very common fault with the compositions of young persons is that they begin big and end little. It is not infrequent that the first paragraph promises well; the second is not quite so good; and the rest gradually fall off until the end is worthless. The order should be changed. Have the first paragraph promise well, make the second better, and the last best of all. The main incident should be more important than each incident that precedes it. Get the main incident in mind before beginning; be sure it is the main incident; then bend all your energies to make it the most important incident toward which all the other incidents converge.

Unity. The choice of a main incident will determine what incidents to exclude. The world is full of incidents—enough to make volumes more than we now have. A phonograph and a camera could gather enough any day at a busy corner in a city to fill a volume; yet these pictures and these bits of conversation, interesting as each in itself might be, would not be a unit,—not one story, but many. Few persons, indeed, would write anything so disjointed as the report made by this phonograph; yet good writers are often led astray by the brilliancy of their own ideas. They have so many good stories on hand which they would like to tell, that they force some of them into their present story, and so spoil two stories. In the very popular “David Harum,” it would puzzle any one to know why the author

has introduced the ladies from the city and the musical party at the lake. The episode is good enough in itself; but in this story it has not a shadow of excuse. There is a phrase of Kipling's that should ring in every story-teller's ears. Not once only, but a number of times, this prince of modern story-tellers catches himself—almost too late sometimes—and writes, "But that is another story." One incident calls up another; paragraph follows paragraph naturally. It is easy enough to look back and trace the road by which the writer arrived at his present position; yet it would be very hard to tell why he came hither, or to see how the journey up to this point will at all put him toward his destination. He has digressed; he has left the road. And he must get back to the road. By this digression he has wasted just as much time as it has taken to come from the direct road to this point added to the time it will take to go back. Do not digress; tell one story at a time; let no incident into your story which cannot answer the question, "Why are you here?" by "I help;" keep your eye on the main incident; things which do not unquestionably contribute something to the main incident should be excluded.

Introductions and Conclusions. The choice of the main incident towards which all other incidents converge will rid compositions of worthless introductions and trailing conclusions. A story should get under way at once; and any explanations at the beginning, the introduction of long descriptions or tedious paragraphs of "fine writing," will be headed off if the pupil keeps constantly in mind that it must all lead directly toward the main incident. Again, if everything converges to the main incident, when that has been told the story is finished. After that there must be no explanations, no moralizing, nothing. When the story has been told it is a good rule to stop.

An excellent example of a short story well told is "An Incident of the French Camp," by Robert Browning. Only the absolutely necessary has been introduced. The incidents flash before the reader. Nothing can be said after the last line. "Hervé Riel" is a vivid piece of narrative too. Such an exhibition of manliness appeals to all. Was it necessary to attach the last stanza? If this poem needed it, why not the other? If the story has no moral in it, no man can tie it on; if there is one, the reader should be accounted intelligent enough to find it without any help.

Tedious Enumerations. Making all the incidents converge to one main incident will avoid tiresome enumerations of inconsequential events, which frequently fill the compositions of young pupils. Such essays generally start with "a bright, clear morning," and "a party of four of us." After recounting a dozen events of no consequence whatever, "we came home to a late supper, well repaid for our day's outing." These compositions may be quite correct in the choice of words, sentences, and paragraphs, and with it all be flat. There is nothing to them; they get the reader nowhere. Pick out one of the many incidents. Work it up. Turn back to the paragraph from Stevenson and notice how little there is to it when reduced to bare outline. He has worked it up so that it is good. Always remember that a short anecdote well told is worth pages of aimless enumeration.

What to include. The selection of the main incident will guide in determining what to include; for every detail must be included that is necessary to make the main incident possible. A young pupil wrote of a party in the woods. The girls had found pleasant seats in a car and were chatting about their friends, when they felt a sudden lurch, and soon one of the party was besmeared by slippery, sticky whites of eggs. Now, if eggs were in the habit of clinging to the roofs of cars and breaking at unfortunate moments, there would be no need of any explanation; but as the cook forgot to boil the eggs and the girl had put them up into the rack herself, some of this should have been told. Enough at least should be told to make the main incident a possibility. Stories are full of surprises, but they can be understood easily from the preceding incidents; or else the new element is one that happens frequently, and of itself is nothing new. In the paragraph from Stevenson, the entrance of the "prim, little old maid" is a surprise, but it is a very common thing for ladies to walk upon a public highway. Any surprise must be natural,—the result of causes at work in the story, or of circumstances which are always occurring and by themselves no surprises. If the story be a tangled web of incidents culminating in some horror, as the death of the beautiful young wife in Hawthorne's "Birthmark," all the events must be told that are necessary to carry the reader from the first time he beholds her

beauty until he sees her again, her life ebbing away as the fairy hand fades from her cheek. In “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep” it would be impossible to pass directly from the sweet boy of the first chapter to the little liar of the last; something must be told of those miserable days that intervene, and their telling effect on the little fellow. So a reader could not harmonize his idea of old Scrooge gained in the first chapter with generous Mr. Scrooge of the last without the intermediate chapters. Keeping the main incident in mind, include all that is necessary to make it possible.

Consistency. This same rule more than any other will make a story consistent. If incidents are chosen with relation to the one main incident, they will all have a common quality; they can scarcely be inconsistent. It is much more essential that a story be consistent than that it be a fact. Indeed, facts are not necessary in stories, and they are dangerous. Ian Maclaren says that the only part of his stories that has been severely criticised is a drowning episode, which was a fact, and the only one he ever used. Yet to those who have read “The Bonnie Brier Bush,” the old doctor is as well known as any person who lives across the street; he is real to us, though he never lived. “Old Scrooge” and “Brom Bones” are better known than John Adams is. A good character or a good story need not be drawn from facts. Indeed, in literature as in actual life, facts are stubborn things, and will not accommodate themselves to new surroundings. Make the story consistent; be not too careful about the facts.

A story may be good and be entirely contrary to all known facts. “The Ugly Duckling” is as true as Fiske’s “History of the United States,” and every whit as consistent. “Alice in Wonderland” is an excellent story; yet it contains no facts. The introduction of a single fact would ruin the story; for between the realm of fact and the region of fancy is a great gulf fixed, and no man has successfully crossed it. Whatever conditions of life and action are assumed in one part of a story must be continued throughout. If walruses talk and hens are reasonable in one part of the story, to reduce them to everyday animals would be ruinous. Consistency, that the parts stand together, that the story seem probable, —this is more essential than facts. And to gain this consistency the surest rule is to test the material by its relation to the main incident.

The choice of the main incident, then, will determine to a great degree what to exclude and what to include; it will assist in ridding compositions of countless enumerations, aimless wanderings, and flat endings; it will help the writer to get started, and insure a stop when the story is told; and it will give to the story the quality most essential for its success, consistency.

An Actor as the Storyteller. There is yet another condition that enters into the selection of materials: it makes a difference who tells the story. If the story be told in the first person, that is, if one of the actors tell the story, he cannot be supposed to know all that the other persons do when out of sight and hearing, nor can he know what they think. To take an illustration from a pupil’s essay. A girl took her baby sister out upon the lake in a rowboat. A violent storm arose, lashing the lake into a fury. The oars were wrenched from her hands. Helpless on the water, how was she to be saved? Here the essayist recited an infinite amount of detail about the distress at home, giving the conversation and the actions. These things she could not have known in the character she had assumed at the beginning, that of the chief actor. All of that should have been excluded. When Stevenson tells of the fight in the round house, though he knew what those old salts were doing outside, matters of great interest to the reader, he does not let David say anything except what he could see or hear, and a very little of what he “learned afterwards.” Stevenson knew well who was telling the story; David is too good a story-teller to tell what he could not know. In the pupil’s essay and in “Kidnapped,” all such matters would have a direct bearing on the main incident; they could be included without destroying the unity of the story. But they cannot be included when the story is told by one of the actors.

The Omniscience of an Author. Many stories, probably most stories, are told in the third person. In this case the author assumes the position of an omniscient power who knows everything that is done, said, or thought by the characters in his story. Not only what happens in the next room, but what is thought at the other side of the world, is comprehended in his omniscience. This is the position assumed by Irving in “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” by Kipling in the series of stories

included with “Wee Willie Winkie,” by Scott in “Marmion,” and by most great novelists. Omniscience is, however, a dangerous prerogative for a young person. The power is so great that the person who has but recently come into possession of it becomes dizzy with it and uncertain in his movements. A young person knows what he would do under certain conditions; but to be able to know what some other person would do and think under a certain set of circumstances requires a sure knowledge of character, and the capability of assuming entirely different and unaccustomed points of view. It is much safer for the beginner to take the point of view of one of the actors, and tell the story in the first person. Then when the grasp has become sure from this standpoint, he may assume the more difficult role of the omniscient third person.

To sum up what has been said about the selection of materials: only those materials should be admitted to a story which contribute to its main incident, which are consistent with one another, and which could have been known by the narrator.

The Climax. When the materials for a story have been selected, the next consideration is their arrangement. If the materials have been selected to contribute to the main incident and converge toward it, it will follow that *the main incident* will come last in the story; it *will be the climax* towards which the several parts of the story are directed. Moreover, it should be last, in order to retain the interest of the reader up to that time. This is in accordance with the demands of the second great principle of structure, Mass. An essay is well massed if the parts are so arranged that things of importance will arrest the attention. In literature to be read, to arrest the attention is almost equivalent to catching the eye. The positions that catch the eye, whether in sentence, paragraph, or essay, are the beginning and the end. Were it not for another element which enters into the calculation, these positions would be of nearly equal importance. Since, however, the mind retains the most vivid impression of the thing it received last, the impression of the end of the sentence, paragraph, or essay is stronger than the impression made by its beginning. The climax of a story should come at the end, both because it is the result of preceding incidents, and because by this position it receives the additional emphasis due to its position.

Who? Where? When? Why? The beginning is the position of second importance. What, then, shall stand in this place? A story resembles a puzzle. The solution of the puzzle is given at the end; the thing of next importance is the conditions of the puzzle. In “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep” the story culminates in the surprise of a devoted mother when she discovers that her boy is a secretive little liar, who now deserves to be called “Black Sheep.” This is the end; what was the beginning,—the conditions necessary to bring about this deplorable result? First, they were *the persons*; second, *the place*; third, *the time*. In many stories there is introduced the reason for telling the story. These conditions, answering the questions Who? Where? When? and Why? are all, or some of them, introduced at the beginning of any narrative, and as soon as it can be done, they ought all to be given. In a short essay, they are in the first paragraph; in a novel, in the first chapters. In “Marmion” the time, the place, and the principal character are introduced into the first canto. So Irving begins “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” with the place and time, then follow the characters. In all stories the beginning is occupied in giving the conditions of the story; that is, the principal characters, the time, and the place.

In what Order? Having the end and the beginning clearly in mind, the next question is how best to get from one to the other. Shall the incidents be arranged in order of time? or shall other considerations govern? If it be any narrative of the journal form, whether a diary or a biography, the chronological arrangement will direct the sequence of events. Again, if it be a simple story with a single series of events, the time order will prevail. If, however, it be a narrative which contains several series of events, as a history or a novel, it may be wise, even necessary, to deviate from the time sequence. It would have been unwise for Scott to hold strictly to the order of time in “Marmion;” after introducing the principal character, giving the time and the setting, it was necessary for him to bring in another element of the plot, Constance, and to go backward in time to pick up this thread

of the story. The really essential order in any narrative is the order of cause and effect. As causes precede effects, the causal order and the time order generally coincide. In a single series of events, that is, where one cause alone produces an effect, which in turn becomes the cause of another effect, the time order is the causal order. In a novel, or a short story frequently, where there are more than one series of incidents contributing to and converging towards the main incident, these causes must all be introduced before the effect, and may break the chronological order of the story. In "Roger Malvin's Burial," it would be impossible to tell what the stricken father was doing and what the joyous mother was thinking at the same time. Hawthorne must leave one and go to the other until they meet in their awful desolation. The only rule that can be given is, introduce causes before effects. In all stories, short or long, this will result in an approximation to the order of time; in a simple story it will invariably give a time sequence.

There is one exception to this rule which should be noted. It is necessary at the very beginning to have some incident that will arrest the attention. This does not mean that persons, place, and time shall not come first. They shall come first, but they shall be so introduced as to make an interesting opening to the story. The novels of some decades ago did not sufficiently recognize the principle. One can frequently hear it said of Scott's stories, "I can't get started with them; they are too dry." The introductory chapters are often uninteresting. So much history is introduced, so much scenery is described before the author sets out his characters; and all this is done before he begins the story. Novelists of to-day realize that they must interest the reader at the beginning; when they have caught him, they are quite certain that he will bear with them while they bring up the other divisions of the story, which now have become interesting because they throw light on what has already been told. Even more than novelists, dramatists recognize this principle. When the curtain rises on the first act, something interesting is going on. The action frequently begins far along in the time covered by the story; then by cleverly arranged conversation all circumstances before the time of the opening that are necessary to the development of the plot are introduced. The audience receives these minor yet essential details with no impatience, since they explain in part a situation already interesting. The time order may be broken in order to introduce at the beginning of the story some interesting situation which will immediately engage the reader's attention.

In arranging the materials of a story, the main considerations are Mass and Coherence. Mass demands important matters at the beginning and at the end of a story. Coherence demands that events closely related shall stand close together: that an effect shall immediately follow its cause. Beginning with some interesting situation that will also introduce the principal characters, the time, and the setting, the story follows in the main the order of time, and concludes with the main incident.

An Outline. One practical suggestion will assist in arranging the parts of a story. Use an outline. It will guard against the omission of any detail that may afterward be found necessary, and against the necessity of offering the apology, inexcusable in prepared work, of "forgetting to say;" it will help the writer to see the best arrangement of the parts, to know that causes have preceded effects. The outline in narration should not be too much in detail, nor should it be followed if, as the story progresses, new light comes and the writer sees a better way to proceed. The writer should be above the outline, not its slave; but the outline is a most valuable servant of the writer.

Movement. *Movement is an essential quality of narrative;* a story must advance. This does not mean that the story shall always go at the same rate, though it does mean that it shall always go. If a story always had the rapidity and intensity of a climax, it would be intolerable. Music that is all rushing climaxes is unbearable; a picture must not be a glare of high lights. The quiet passages in music, the grays and low tones in the background of the picture, the slow chapters in a story, are as necessary as their opposites; indeed, climaxes are dependent on contrasts in order to be climaxes.

Rapidity. The question of movement resolves itself into these two: how is rapidity of movement obtained, and how can the writer delay the movement. Rapidity is gained by the omission of all unnecessary details, and the use of the shortest, tersest sentences to express the absolutely essential.

Dependent clauses disappear; either the sentences are simple, just one sharp statement, or they are made of coördinate clauses with no connectives. Every weight that could clog the story is thrown away, and it runs with the swiftness of the thought. At such a time it would be a waste of good material to introduce beautiful descriptions or profound philosophy. Such things would be skipped by the reader. Everything must clear the way for the story.

Slowness. What has been said of rapidity will indicate the answer to the second question. Slowness of movement is obtained by introducing long descriptions, analyses of characters, and information regarding the history or customs of the time. Sentences become long and involved; dependent clauses abound; connective words and phrases are frequent. Needless details may be introduced until the story becomes wearisome; it has almost no movement.

Very closely connected with what has been said above is another fact concerning movement. Strip the sentences as you may, there are still the verbs remaining. Verbs and derivatives from verbs are the words which denote action. If other classes of words be taken out, the ratio of verbs to the other words in the sentence is larger. Shorter sentences and an increased ratio of verbs mark the passages in which the movement is more rapid. In “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep” the sentences average twenty-five words in the slower parts; in the intenser paragraphs the sentences have an average of fifteen words. Poe’s “Gold-Bug” changes from thirty-eight to twenty-one. Again, Stevenson’s essays have a verb to eight words, while the fight at the round house has a verb to about five and a half words. One of Kipling’s stories starts in with a verb to eight and a half words, and the climax has a verb in every four words. These figures mean that as the sentences are shortened, adjectives, adverbs, phrases, connectives, disappear. Everything not absolutely necessary is thrown away when the passage is to express rapid movement.

No person should think that, by eliminating all dependent clauses, cutting away all unnecessary matters, and putting in a verb to every four words, he can gain intensity of expression. These are only accompanying circumstances. Climaxes are in the thought. When the thought moves rapidly, when things are being done with a rush, when the climax has been reached, then the writer will find that he can approach the movement of the thought most nearly by using these means.

Description and Narration. *A valuable accessory to narration is description;* in truth, description for its own sake is not frequently found. The story must be somewhere; and it is more real when we know in what kind of a place it occurs. Still it is not wise to do as Scott so often has done, —give chapters of description at the beginning of the story. Rather the setting should be scattered through the story so that it is hardly perceptible. At no time should the reader halt and realize that he is being treated to a description. Even in the beautiful descriptions by Stevenson quoted in the next chapter, the work is so intimately blended with the story that the reader unfortunately might pass over it. A large part of the pleasure derived from the best stories is supplied by good descriptions, giving a vivid picture of the setting of the story.

Description has another use in narration beside giving the setting of the story; it is often used to accent the mood of the action. In “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Poe, much of the gloomy foreboding is caused by the weird descriptions. Hawthorne understood well the harmony between man’s feelings and his surroundings. The Sylvan Dance in “The Marble Faun” is wonderfully handled. Irving, in “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” throws about the story a “witching influence,” and long before the Headless Horseman appears, the reader is quite sure that the region abounds in “ghosts and goblins,” dwelling in its “haunted fields, and haunted brooks, and haunted bridges, and haunted houses.” The danger in the use of description for this purpose is in overdoing it. The fact is, as Arlo Bates says, “the villains no longer steal through smiling gardens whose snowy lilies, all abloom, and sending up perfume like incense from censers of silver, seem to rebuke the wicked.” Yet when handled as Stevenson and Irving handled it, description assists in accenting the mood of the action.

Characters few, Time short. *The number of characters should be few* and the time of the action short. Pupils are not able to handle a large number of persons. There is, however, a stronger

reason for it than incapacity. A young person would have great trouble in remembering the large number of persons introduced into “Little Dorrit.” Many of them would always remain entire strangers. Such a scattering of attention is unfavorable to a story. To focus the interest upon a few, to have the action centred in these few, increases the movement and intensity of the narrative. The writers of short stories in France (perhaps the best story-tellers of the present), Kipling, Davis, Miss Wilkins, and some others of our best authors, find few characters all that are necessary, and they gain in intensity by limiting the number of characters.

For the same reason *the time should be short*. If all the incidents chosen are crowded into a short period of time, the action must be more rapid. The reader does not like to know five years have elapsed between one event and the next, even if the story-teller does not try to fill up the interim with matters of no consequence to the narrative. One exception must be made to this rule. In stories whose purpose is to portray a change of character, a long time is necessary; for the transformation is not usually the result of a day’s experience, but a gradual process of years. “Silas Marner” and “Baa, Baa, Black Sheep” demand time to make naturally the great changes recounted. In general, however, the time should be short.

Simple Plot. Moreover, *the plot should be simple*. This is not saying that the plot should be evident. No one is quite satisfied if he knows just how the story will turn out. There are, however, so many conditions in a story that the accentuation of one or the subordination of another may bring about something quite unexpected, yet perfectly natural. Complicated plots have had their day; simple plots are now in vogue. They are as natural as life, and quite as unfathomable. In Davis’s “Gallegher” there is nothing complicated; one thing follows another in a perfectly natural way; yet there are many questions in the reader’s mind as to how the little rascal will turn out, and whether he will accomplish his mission. Much more cleverness is shown by the sleight-of-hand trickster, who, unassisted and in the open, with no accessories, dupes his staring assembly, than by him who, on the stage, with the aid of mirrors, lights, machines, and a crowd of assistants, manages to deceive your eyes. A story that by its frank simplicity takes the reader into its confidence, and brings him to a conclusion that is so natural that it should have been foreseen from the beginning, has a good plot. The conclusion of a story must be natural,—the result of the causes at work in the story. It must be an expected surprise. If it cannot be accounted for by the causes at work in the story, the construction is faulty. In the world of fiction there is not the liberty one experiences in the world of fact. There things unexpected and unexplainable occur. But the story-teller has no such privilege. Truth is stranger than fiction dare be. A simple, natural story, with few characters and covering but a short period of time, has three elements of success.

Paragraph structure, sentence structure, and choice of words are taken up in subsequent chapters. Of paragraphs it may be wise to say that there will be as many as there are divisions in the outline; and sometimes, by reason of the length of topic, a subdivision may be necessary. The paragraph most common in narration is the paragraph of details, the first form presented in the chapter on paragraphs. What needs to be said of sentences has already been said when treating of movement. Of words one thing may be suggested. Choose live words, specific words, words that have “go” in them.

It should be remembered that everything cannot be learned at once. The study of the whole is the principal occupation just now. Select the main incident; choose other incidents to be consistent with it; start out at once giving the conditions of the story; proceed now fast, now slow, as the thought demands, arriving at a conclusion that is an expected surprise, the result of forces at work in the story.

SUGGESTIVE QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

The questions are only suggestive. They indicate how literature can be made to teach composition. Some questions may seem hard, and will provoke discussion. To have even a false

opinion, backed by only a few facts, is better than an entire absence of thought. Encourage discussion. The answers to the questions have not been suggested in the questions themselves. The object has been to throw the pupil upon his own thinking.

These questions upon the “Method of the Author” should not be considered until the far more important work of deriving the “Meaning of the Author” has been finished. Only after the whole piece has been carefully studied can the relation of the parts to the whole be understood. Reserve the questions for the review.

QUESTIONS

THE GREAT STONE FACE

(Riverside Literature Series, No. 40.)

- In what paragraphs is the main incident?
- Can you find one sentence on the second page of the story that foreshadows the result?
- How many incidents or episodes contribute to the story?
- Do these help in the development of Ernest’s character? If not, what is the use of them?
- Why are they arranged in this order?
- Introduce into its proper place an incident of a scientist. Write it up.
- Do you think one of the incidents could be omitted? Which one?
- Are the incidents related in the order in which they occurred? Is one the cause of another?
- Has the story a plot? Why do you think so? What is a plot?
- Where are introduced the time, place, and the principal character?
- What is the use of the description of “the great stone face”?
- Why does the author tell only what “was reported” of the interior of Mr. Gathergold’s palace?
- Is it better so?
- Are the descriptions to accent the mood of the story? or are they primarily to make concrete and real the persons and places?
- Is there any place where the movement of the story is rapid?
- Does the author begin at once, and close when the story is told?
- Did you find any use of comparisons in the piece? (See top of p. 6, top of p. 19, middle of p. 22.)³
- Of what value are they in composition?

THE GENTLE BOY

(Riverside Literature Series, No. 145.)

- What is the main incident?
- In relation to the whole story, in what place does it stand?

³ Unless otherwise stated, all page references are to the Riverside Literature Series.

Do the other incidents serve to develop the character of “the gentle boy”? or are they introduced to open up to the reader that character? (Compare with “Wee Willie Winkie.”)

Do you consider all the incidents necessary?

Why has the author introduced the fact that Ilbrahim gently cared for the little boy who fell from the tree?

What is the use of the first two pages of the story?

Where does the story really begin?

How could you know the time, if the first page were not there? Is it a delicate way of telling “when”?

Notice that time, place, and principal characters all are introduced into the first paragraph of the real story.

Why does the author note the change in Tobias’s circumstances? Does it add to the interest of the story? Would you omit it?

Do you think this plot more complicated than that of “The Great Stone Face”?

What is the use of the description on p. 31?

What do you note as the difference between

(a) second line of p. 19, sixth line of p. 27, sixteenth line of p. 29, and (b) fourth line of p. 25, the figure in the complete paragraph on p. 40?

THE GRAY CHAMPION

(Riverside Literature Series, No. 145.)

Note the successive stages by which the time is approached. (Compare with the beginning of “Silas Marner.”)

Can you feel any difference between the movement of this story and the movement in “The Gentle Boy”?

Is there any difference in the length of the sentences? (Remember that the independent clauses of a compound sentence are very nearly the same as simple sentences.)

Is there any difference in the proportion of verbs and verbals? What parts of speech have almost disappeared?

ROGER MALVIN’S BURIAL

(Riverside Literature Series, No. 145.)

Why is the first paragraph needed?

Why could the incident in the first paragraph on p. 50 not be omitted? Do you find it later?

How many chapters could you divide the story into? What is the basis of division?

Why did not Hawthorne tell the result of the shot at once?

A plot is usually made by introducing more than one cause, by hiding one of the causes, or by holding back an effect. Which in this story?

Is there a change of movement between the beginning and the end of the story? Look at the last two pages carefully. How has the author expressed the intensity of the situation?

Does the story end when it is finished?

THE WEDDING KNELL

(Riverside Literature Series, No. 145.)

Of the three common ways of giving uncertainty to a plot, which has been used?
Do you call this plot more complicated than those of the other tales studied?
Why does the author say, at the top of p. 72, “necessary preface”? Could it not be omitted? If not, what principle of narrative construction would be violated by its omission?
Why has he introduced the last paragraph on p. 74 reaching over to p. 75?

THE AMBITIOUS GUEST

(Riverside Literature Series, No. 40.)

In what order are the elements of the story introduced?
Pick out phrases which prepare you for the catastrophe.
Can you detect any difference in the movement of the different parts of the story? What aids its expression?

THE GOLD-BUG

(Riverside Literature Series, No. 120.)

Would you have been satisfied if the story had stopped when the treasure was discovered? What more do you want to know?
What, then, is the main incident? Was the main incident the last to occur in order of time? Why did Poe delay telling it until the end?
Do you see how relating the story in the first person helped him to throw the main incident last? Why could he not tell it before?
Does Poe tell any other stories in the first person?
In what person are “Treasure Island” and “Kidnapped” told? Are they interesting?
If a friend is telling you a story, do you care more for it if it is about a third party or about himself? Why?
What, then, is the advantage of making an actor the narrator? What are some of the disadvantages?
Do you think this plot as good as those of Hawthorne’s stories?
Why was it necessary to have “a day of remarkable chilliness” (p. 3), and a Newfoundland dog rushing into the room (p. 6)?
What principle would it violate to omit these little matters? (Text-book, p. 24.)
What of the rapidity of movement when they are digging? How has rapidity been gained?
What form of wit does Poe attempt? Does he succeed?
Do you think the conversation is natural? If not, what is the matter with it?

Are negroes usually profane? Does Jupiter's general character lead you to expect profanity from him? Is anything gained by his oaths? Is anything sacrificed? In this story is profanity artistic? (To know what is meant by "artistic," read the last line of "L'Envoi" on p. [253](#) of the text-book.)

THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

(Riverside Literature Series, No. 30.)

What is the purpose of the first stanza?

What connection in thought is there between the second, third, and fourth stanzas? What have these stanzas to do with the story? If they have nothing to do with it, what principle of structure do they violate? Would Lowell be likely to do this?

What is the use of the description beginning "And what is so rare as a day in June"?

Would the story be complete without the preludes? Would the teaching be understood without them?

Are time and place definitely stated in the poem? Why should they be, or not be?

Why does so much time elapse between Part I. and Part II. of the story?

In what lines do you find the main incident?

In the first prelude is Lowell describing a landscape of New England or Old England? Where is the story laid? What comment have you to make upon these facts?

Pick out the figures. Are they useful?

Can you find passages of exposition and description in this narrative? Why do you call it narration?

What is Lowell's criticism upon himself? (See "Fable for Critics.")

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

(Riverside Literature Series, No. 57.)

Is the opening such as to catch the attention?

What is the essential idea in the description of Scrooge? Do all details enforce this idea? Do you know Scrooge?

In what paragraph does Dickens tell where the story occurs?

Find places on p. 19 and p. 96 where Dickens has used "in" or "into."

What advantage to the story is the appearance in Scrooge's office of his nephew and the two gentlemen? Do they come into the story again?

Are the details in the description of the apparition on p. 41 in the order in which they would be noted? Which is the most important detail? Where is it in the description?

Is the description of Mrs. Fezziwig on p. 52 successful?

What helps express rapidity of movement in the paragraph at the bottom of p. 53? (See also paragraph on p. 85.)

Examining the words used by Dickens and Hawthorne, which are longer? Which are most effectual? Are you sure? Rewrite one of Hawthorne's paragraphs with a Dickens vocabulary. What is the result?

What word is the topic of the last paragraph on p. 73?

Recast the first sentence of the last paragraph on p. 77.

Does Dickens use slang? (Do not consider conversation in the answer to this question.)
What is the main incident? Is there one of the minor incidents that could be omitted?
Which one could you most easily spare?
What is the need of the last chapter?

MARMION

(Rolfe's Student's Series, Vol. 2.)

How do you know the time of "Marmion"?
Do you see any reason why stanza vi. of Canto I. would better precede stanza v.?
Where is the first mention of De Wilton? the first intimation of Clara de Clare? of Constance?
What form of discourse in stanza vii. of Canto II.?
What part in the development of the narrative does Fitz-Eustace's song make?
Does the tale related by the host break the unity of the whole? Is it "another story"? What value has it?
Why does Scott not tell of Marmion's encounter with the Elfin Knight in Canto III.? Where is it told? Why there?
Why is Canto II. put after Canto I.? Did the events related in II. occur after those related in I.?
How many of the descriptions of persons in "Marmion" begin with the face? How many times are they of the face only?
Try to write the incident related in stanzas xix., xx., xxi., and xxii. of Canto III. in fewer words than Scott has done it without sacrificing any detail.
Are you satisfied with the description of King James in stanza viii. Canto V.? Do you see him?
Write an outline of the plot of "Marmion" in two hundred words.
Why is the story of Lady Clare reserved until Canto V.?
What cantos contain the main incident?
Were all that precedes omitted, would "The Battle" be as interesting?
Do you think the plot good? Is it complicated?
What of the number of figures used in the last canto compared with those used in any other canto? Do you find more in narrative or descriptive passages? Why?
Read stanza viii. Canto III. Can you describe a voice without using comparison?
Do the introductions to the several cantos form any part of the story? Would they be just as good anywhere else? Would the story be better with them, or without them? What principle of structure do they violate?

EXERCISES

The subjects for composition given below are not intended as a course to be followed, but only to suggest a plan for the work. The individual topics for essays may not be the best for all cases. Long lists of topics can be found in rhetorics. Bare subjects, however, are usually unsuggestive. They should be adapted to the class. Put the subjects in such shape that there is something to get hold of. Give the pupils a fair start.

1. through 4. In order to place before the pupils good models for constructing stories, read one like "A Piece of String" in "An Odd Number," by Maupassant. Stories for this purpose should not be long. Talk the story over with the pupils, bringing out clearly the main incident and the several episodes which contribute to

it. Have them notice how characters, time, and place are introduced; and how each succeeding event is possible and natural. Then have it rewritten. This will fix the idea of plan. For this purpose some of Miss Wilkins's stories are excellent; Kenneth Grahame's "The Golden Age," and Miss Jewett's short stories are good material. Some of the short stories in current magazines serve well.

2. and 6. Read the first of a story and its close,—enough to indicate the main incident and the setting of the story. Have the pupils write it complete.

3. Read the close of a story. The pupils will then write the whole.

4. Read the opening of a story. Have the pupils complete it.

5. Finish "The Circus-Man's Story" (Text-book, p. 297.)

6. My First Algebra Lesson. Remember that in composition a good story is worth more than a true one. The basis may be a fact. Do not hesitate to fix it up.

7. A delivery horse runs away. No persons are in the wagon. Tell about it.

8. Write about a runaway in which you and your little sister are injured. (I have found it very helpful to use the same subject, but having the relation of the narrator to the incident very different. It serves to bring out a whole new vocabulary in order to express the difference in the feelings of the narrator.)

9. Write the story suggested to your mind by these words: Digging in the sand I found a board much worn by the waves, on which were cut, in characters scarcely traceable, these words: "Dec.—18 9, N. J."

10. A humorous incident in a street car, in which the joke was on the other fellow.

11. Another in which the joke was on me. The same incident may be used with good effect. The choice of new words to express the difference of feelings makes an excellent exercise.

12. Tell the story that Doreas related to her neighbors about her husband's escape and her father's death.

13. To bring out the fact that the language must be varied to suit the character of the reader or listener, tell a fairy story to a sleepy five-year old so that he will not go to sleep. Do not hesitate at exaggerations. Only remember it must be consistent.

14. Have "The Gentle Boy" tell one of the incidents in which he was cruelly treated. This may well be an incident of your own life adapted to its purpose.

15. and 20. Jim was a mean boy. Meanness seemed to be in his blood. He was all mean. His hair was mean; his freckles were mean; his big, chapped hands were mean. And he was always mean. He was mean to his pets; he was meaner to small boys; and he was as mean as he dared to be to his equals in size.

Write one incident to show Jim's meanness.

Write another to show how Jim met his match, and learned a lesson.

16. Work up the following into a story. It all occurs in one day at the present time. Place, your own city. Characters, a poor sewing girl, her little sick brother, and a wealthy society lady. Incidents: a conversation between brother and sister about some fruit; a conversation between the sewing girl and the lady about money due for sewing; stealing apples; arrest; appearance of the lady. Title: Who was the Criminal?

17. A story of a modern Sir Launfal.

18. The most thrilling moment of my life.

19. Tell the whole story suggested by the stanza of "A Nightingale in the Study," by Lowell, which begins, "Cloaked shapes, a twanging of guitars."

20. Write a story which teaches a lesson. Remember that the lesson is in the story, not at its end.

In the work at this time but little attention can be given to the teaching of paragraphs and sentences. The pupil should learn what a paragraph is, and should have his composition properly divided into paragraphs. But the form and massing of paragraphs cannot be taken up at this time. The same may be said of sentences. He should have no sentences broken in two by periods; nor should he have two sentences forced into one. Grammatical errors should be severely criticised. However, the present work is to get the pupils started; and they cannot get started if there is a teacher holding them back by discouraging criticisms. Mark all mistakes of whatever kind; but put the stress upon the whole composition: its unity, its coherence, its mass, and its movement. Everything cannot be done at once; many distressing faults will have to be passed over until later.

CHAPTER IV DESCRIPTION

Difficulties of Language for making Pictures. Description has been defined as the form of literature which presents a picture by means of language. In the preceding chapter, it has been pointed out that the sequence of language is perfectly adapted to detail the sequence of action in a narrative. For the purpose of constructing a picture, the means has serious drawbacks. The picture has to be presented in pieces; and the difficulties are much as would be experienced if “dissected maps and animals” used for children’s amusement were to be put together in the head. It would not be easy to arrange the map of the United States from blocks, each containing a small part of it, taken one at a time from a box. Yet this closely resembles the method language forces us to adopt in constructing a picture. Each phrase is like one of the blocks, and introduces a new element into the picture; from these phrases the reader must reconstruct the whole. This means not alone that he shall remember them all, but there is a more serious trouble: he must often rearrange them. For example, a description by Ruskin begins, “Nine years old.” Either a boy or a girl, the reader thinks, as it may be in his own home. In the case of this reader it is a boy, rather tall of his age, with brown hair and dark eyes. But the next phrase reads, “Neither tall nor short for her age.” Now the reader knows it is a girl of common stature. Later on he learns that her eyes are “deep blue;” her lips “perfectly lovely in profile;” and so on through the details of the whole sketch. Many times in the course of the description the reader makes up a new picture; he is continually reconstructing. Any one who will observe his own mind while reading a new description can prove that the picture is arranged and rearranged many times. This is due to the means by which it is presented. Language presents only a phrase at a time, —a fragment, not a whole,—and so fails in the instantaneous presentation of a complete picture.

Painting and Sculpture. The painter or sculptor who upon canvas or in stone flashes the whole composition before us at the same instant of time, has great advantages over the worker in words. In these methods there is needed no reconstruction of previous images, no piecing together of a number of fragments. Without any danger of mistakes which will have to be corrected later, the spectator can take in the whole picture at once,—every relation, every color, every difference in values.

It is because pictures are the surest and quickest means of representing objects to the mind that books, especially text-books, and magazines are so profusely illustrated. No magazine can claim popularity to-day that does not use illustrations where possible; no text-book in science or history sells unless it contains pictures. And this is because all persons accurately and quickly get the idea from a picture.

Advantages of Language. Whatever be the disadvantages of language, there are some advantages. Who could paint this from Hawthorne?

“Soon the smoke ascended among the trees, impregnated with *savory incense*, not *heavy*, *dull*, and *surfeiting*, like the steam of cookery indoors, but *sprightly* and *piquant*. The *smell* of our feast was akin to the woodland odors with which it mingled.” (“Mosses from an Old Manse.”)

Or this from Lowell?—

“Under the yaller-pines I house,
When sunshine makes ’em all *sweet-scented*,
An’ *hear* among their furry boughs
The *baskin’* west wind *purr contented*,
While ’way o’erhead, ez *sweet* an’ *low*
Ez *distant bells* thet ring for meetin’,

The wedged wil' geese *their bugles blow*,
Further an' further South retreatin'."4

Or cut this from marble?—

“O mother Ida, many-fountained Ida,
Dear mother Ida, hearken ere I die.
For now the noonday quiet holds the hill;
The grasshopper is silent in the grass;
The lizard, with his shadow on the stone,
Rests like a shadow, and the winds are dead.
The purple flower droops; the golden bee
Is lily-cradled; I alone awake.
My eyes are full of tears, my heart of love,
My heart is breaking, and my eyes are dim,
And I am all aweary of my life.”5

The painter cannot put sounds upon a canvas, nor can the sculptor carve from marble an odor or a taste. We use the other senses in determining qualities of objects; and words which describe effects produced by other senses beside sight are valuable in description. As Lowell says, “we may shut our eyes, but we cannot help knowing” a large number of beautiful things. Moreover, language suggests hidden ideas that the representative arts cannot so well do. The following from a “Song” by Lowell has in it suggestions which the picture could not present.

“Violet! sweet violet!
Thine eyes are full of tears;
Are they wet
Even yet
With the thought of other years?
Or with gladness are they full,
For the night so beautiful,
And longing for those far-off spheres?

“Thy little heart, that hath with love
Grown colored like the sky above,
On which thou lookest ever,—
Can it know
All the woe
Of hope for what returneth never,
All the sorrow and the longing
To these hearts of ours belonging?”

Enumeration and Suggestion Description, like narration, has two large divisions: one simply to give information or instruction; the other to present a vivid picture. One is *representative* or *enumerative*; the other, *suggestive*. One may be illustrated by guide-books; the other by the descriptions of Stevenson or Ruskin. And in the most artistic fashion the two have been made to

⁴ *Biglow Papers*, No. X.

⁵ Tennyson's *Enone*.

supplement each other in the following picture of “bright and beautiful Athens” by Cardinal Newman. From the first, to the sentence beginning “But what he would not think of,” there is simply an enumeration of features which a commercial agent might see; the rest is what the artistic soul of the lover of beauty saw there. One is enumeration; the other a gloriously suggestive picture.

“A confined triangle, perhaps fifty miles its greatest length, and thirty its greatest breadth; two elevated rocky barriers, meeting at an angle; three prominent mountains, commanding the plain,—Parnes, Pentelicus, and Hymettus; an unsatisfactory soil; some streams, not always full;—such is about the report which the agent of a London company would have made of Attica. He would report that the climate was mild; the hills were limestone; there was plenty of good marble; more pasture land than at first survey might have been expected, sufficient, certainly, for sheep and goats; fisheries productive; silver mines once, but long since worked out; figs fair; oil first-rate; olives in profusion. But what he would not think of noting down was that that olive-tree was so choice in nature and so noble in shape that it excited a religious veneration; and that it took so kindly to the light soil as to expand into woods upon the open plain, and to climb up and fringe the hills. He would not think of writing word to his employers, how that clear air, of which I have spoken, brought out, yet blended and subdued, the colors on the marble, till they had a softness and harmony, for all their richness, which in a picture looks exaggerated, yet is after all within the truth. He would not tell how that same delicate and brilliant atmosphere freshened up the pale olive, till the olive forgot its monotony, and its cheek glowed like the arbutus or beech of the Umbrian hills. He would say nothing of the thyme and the thousand fragrant herbs which carpeted Hymettus; he would hear nothing of the hum of its bees; nor take account of the rare flavor of its honey, since Gaza and Minorca were sufficient for the English demand. He would look over the Ægean from the height he had ascended; he would follow with his eyes the chain of islands, which, starting from the Sunian headland, seemed to offer the fabled divinities of Attica, when they would visit their Ionian cousins, a sort of viaduct thereto across the sea; but that fancy would not occur to him, nor any admiration of the dark violet billows with their white edges down below; nor of those graceful, fan-like jets of silver upon the rocks, which slowly rise aloft like water spirits from the deep, then shiver, and break, and spread, and shroud themselves, and disappear in a soft mist of foam; nor of the gentle, incessant heaving and panting of the whole liquid plain; nor of the long waves, keeping steady time, like a line of soldiery as they resound upon the hollow shore,—he would not deign to notice the restless living element at all except to bless his stars that he was not upon it. Nor the distinct details, nor the refined coloring, nor the graceful outline and roseate golden hue of the jutting crags, nor the bold shadows cast from Otus or Laurium by the declining sun;—our agent of a mercantile firm would not value these matters even at a low figure. Rather, we must turn for the sympathy we seek to yon pilgrim student, come from a semi-barbarous land to that small corner of the earth, as to a shrine, where he might take his fill of gazing on those emblems and coruscations of invisible unoriginate perfection. It was the stranger from a remote province, from Britain or from Mauritania, who in a scene so different from that of his chilly, woody swamps, or of his fiery, choking sands, learned at once what a real University must be, by coming to understand the sort of country which was its suitable home.”⁶

⁶ *Historical Sketches*, by Cardinal Newman.

Enumerative Description. Enumerative description has one point of great difference from suggestive description. In the former everything is told; in the latter the description is as fortunate in what it omits as in what it includes. Were an architect to give specifications for the building of a house, every detail would have to be included; but after all the pages of careful enumeration the reader would know less of how it looked than after these few words from Irving. “A large, rickety wooden building stood in its place, with great gaping windows, some of them broken and mended with old hats and petticoats, and over the door was painted ‘The Union Hotel, by Jonathan Doolittle.’” So the manual training student uses five hundred words to describe in detail a box which would be thrown off with but a few words in a piece of literature. In enumerative description, one element is of as much importance as another; no special feature is made primary by the omission or subdual of other qualities. It has value in giving exact details of objects, as if for their construction, and in including an object in a class.

Suggestive Description. Suggestive description, description the aim of which is not information, but the reproduction of a picture, is the kind most employed in literature. To present a picture, not all the details should be given. The mind cannot carry them all, and, much worse, it cannot arrange them. Nor is there any need for a detailed enumeration. A room has walls, floor, and ceiling; a man naturally has ears, arms, and feet. These things may be taken for granted. It is not what is common to a class that describes; it is what is individual, what takes one object out of a class.

Value of Observation. This leads to the suggestion that *good description depends largely on accurate observation*. A selection frequently quoted, but none the less valuable because often seen, is in point here. It is the last word on the value of observation.

“Talent is long patience. It is a question of regarding whatever one desires to express long enough and with attention close enough to discover a side which no one has seen and which has been expressed by nobody. In everything there is something of the unexplored, because we are accustomed to use our eyes only with the thought of what has already been said concerning the thing we see. The smallest thing has in it a grain of the unknown. Discover it. In order to describe a fire that flames or a tree in the plain, we must remain face to face with that fire or that tree until for us they no longer resemble any other tree or any other fire. This is the way to become original.

“Having, moreover, impressed upon me the fact that there are not in the whole world two grains of sand, two insects, two hands, or two noses absolutely alike, he forced me to describe a being or an object in such a manner as to individualize it clearly, to distinguish it from all other objects of the same kind. ‘When you pass,’ he said to me, ‘a grocer seated in his doorway, a concierge smoking his pipe, a row of cabs, show me this grocer and this concierge, their attitude, all their physical appearance; suggest by the skill of your image all their moral nature, so that I shall not confound them with any other grocer or any other concierge; make me see, by a single word, wherein a cab-horse differs from the fifty others that follow or precede him.’... Whatever may be the thing which one wishes to say, there is but one word for expressing it; only one verb to animate it, but one adjective to qualify it. It is essential to search for this verb, for this adjective, until they are discovered, and never to be satisfied with anything else.”⁷

The Point of View. With the closest observation, an author gets into his own mind what he wishes to present to another; but with this essential step taken, he is only ready to begin the work of communication. For the successful communication of a picture there are some considerations of value. And first is *the point of view*. It has much the same relation to description as the main incident

⁷ *Pierre et Jean*, by Maupassant. Quoted from Bates’s *Talks on Writing English*.

has to narration. In large measure it determines what to exclude and what to include. When a writer has assumed his point of view, he must stay there, and tell not a thing more than he can see from there. It would hardly be possible for a man, telling only so much as he saw while gazing from Eiffel Tower into the streets below, to say that the people looked like Lilliputians and that their hands were dirty. To one lying on the bank of a stream, it does not look like “a silver thread running through the landscape.” Things do not look the same when they are near as when at a distance. This fact has been acted upon more by the modern school of painting than ever before in art. Verboeckhoven painted sheep in a marvelous way. The drawing is perfect, giving the animal to the life. Still, no matter how far away the artist was standing, there are the same marvelously painted tufts of wool, showing almost the individual fibres. Tufts of wool were on the sheep, and made of fibres; but no artist at twenty rods could see them. The new school gives only what actually can be seen. Its first law is that each “shall draw the thing as he sees it for the God of Things as They Are.” Make no additions to what you can actually see because, as a result of experience, you know that there are some things not yet mentioned in your description; the hands may be dirty, but the man on the tower cannot see the dirt. Neither make an addition simply because it sounds well; the “silver thread through the landscape” is beautiful, but, unfortunately, it is not always true.

Not only does distance cut out details from a picture; the fact that man sees in a straight line and not around a corner eliminates some features. In describing a house, remember that as you stand across the street from it, the back porch cannot be seen, neither can the shrubbery in the back yard. A writer would not be justified in speaking of a man’s necktie, if the man he was describing were walking in front of him. In enumerative description the inside of a box may be told of; a man may be turned around, as it were; but to present a picture, only one side can be described, just as it would be shown in a photograph. Any addition to what can actually be known from the point of view assumed by the author is a fault and a source of confusion. Choose your point of view; stay there; and tell only what is seen from that point.

Moving Point of View. It has been said that the point of view should not be changed. This requires one modification. It may be changed, if the reader is kept informed of the changes. If a person wished to describe an interior, he would be unable to see the whole from any one point of view. As he passed from room to room he should inform his reader of his change of position. Then the description, though a unit, is a combination of several descriptions; just as the house is one, though made of dining-room, sitting-rooms, bedrooms, and attic. This kind of description is very common in books of travel, in which the author tells what he sees in passing. The thing to be remembered in writing this kind of description is to inform the reader where the author is when he writes the different parts of the description,—to give the points of view.

The Point of View should be stated. The point of view, whether fixed or moving, should be made clear. Either it should be definitely stated, or it should be suggested by some phrase in the description. In the many examples which are quoted in this chapter, it would be well to see what it is that gives the point of view. The picture gains in distinctness when the point of view is known. The following sentences are from “The Old Manse;” there is no mistake here. The reader knows every move the author makes. It opens with:—

“Between two tall gateposts of rough-hewn stone (the gate itself having fallen from its hinges at some unknown epoch) we beheld the gray front of the old parsonage terminating the vista of an avenue of black ash-trees.”

From the street the reader is taken to “the rear of the house,” where there was “the most delightful little nook of a study that ever offered its snug seclusion to a scholar.” Through its window the clergyman saw the opening of the “deadly struggle between two nations.” He heard the rattle of musketry, and

“there needed but a gentle wind to sweep the battle smoke around this quiet house. Perhaps the reader, whom I cannot help considering as my guest in the Old Manse and entitled to all courtesy in the way of sight-showing,—perhaps he will choose to take a nearer view of the memorable spot. We stand now on the river’s brink.”... “Here we are, at the point where the river was crossed by the old bridge.”... “The Old Manse! We had almost forgotten it, but will return thither through the orchard.”... “What with the river, the battle-field, the orchard, and the garden, the reader begins to despair of finding his way back into the Old Manse. But in agreeable weather it is the truest hospitality to keep him out-of-doors. I never grew quite acquainted with my habitation till a long spell of sulky rain had confined me beneath its roof. There could not be a more sombre aspect of external nature than as then seen from the windows of my study.”

And so Hawthorne continues through this long and beautiful description of “The Old Manse;” every change in the point of view is noted.

Mental Point of View. Closely connected with the physical point of view is the mood or purpose of the writer; this might be called *the mental point of view*. Not everything should be told which the author could know from his position, but only those things which at the time serve his purpose. In the description already quoted from Newman, the mercantile gentleman notes a large number of features which are the commercial advantages of Attica; of these but three are worthy of mention by “yon pilgrim student” in giving his impression of Athens as “a shrine where he might take his fill of gazing on those emblems and coruscations of invisible unoriginate perfection.” The others—the soil, the streams, the climate, the limestone, the fisheries, and the silver mines—do not serve his purpose. Hawthorne in the long description already mentioned has retained those features which suggest quiet and peace. Such a profusion of “quiet,” “half asleep,” “peaceful,” “unruffled,” “unexcitable” words and phrases never “loitered” through forty pages of “dreamy” and “whispering” description.

In the following bit from “Lear,” where Edgar tells his blinded father how high the cliff is, only those details are included which measure distance.

“How fearful
And dizzy ’tis to cast one’s eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles; half way down
Hangs one that gathers samphire,—dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head:
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,
Appear like mice; and yond tall anchoring bark,
Diminished to her cock; her cock, a buoy
Almost too small for sight: the murmuring surge,
That on th’ unnumbered idle pebbles chafes,
Cannot be heard so high.—I’ll look no more,
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong.”

The following is from Kipling’s “The Light that Failed:”—

“What do you think of a big, red, dead city built of red sandstone, with green aloes growing between the stones, lying out neglected on honey-colored sands? There are forty dead kings there, Maisie, each in a gorgeous tomb finer than all the

others. You look at the palaces and streets and shops and tanks, and think that men must live there, till you find a wee gray squirrel rubbing its nose all alone in the marketplace, and a jeweled peacock struts out of a carved doorway and spreads its tail against a marble screen as fine pierced as point-lace. Then a monkey—a little black monkey—walks through the main square to get a drink from a tank forty feet deep. He slides down the creepers to the water's edge, and a friend holds him by the tail, in case he should fall in.

“Is all that true?”

“I have been there and seen. Then evening comes and the lights change till it's just as though you stood in the heart of a king-opal. A little before sundown, as punctually as clockwork, a big bristly wild boar, with all his family following, trots through the city gate, churning the foam on his tusks. You climb on the shoulder of a big black stone god, and watch that pig choose himself a palace for the night and stump in wagging his tail. Then the night-wind gets up, and the sands move, and you hear the desert outside the city singing, ‘Now I lay me down to sleep,’ and everything is dark till the moon rises.”

Note how every detail introduced serves to make the city dead. Dead kings, a wee gray squirrel, a little black monkey, a bristly wild boar, the night wind, and the desert singing,—these could not be seen or heard in a live city with street cars; but all serve to emphasize the fact that here is “a big, red, dead city.”

At the risk of over-emphasizing this point that the purpose of the author, the mental point of view of the writer, the feeling which the object gives him and which he wishes to convey to the reader, the central thought in the description, is primary, and an element that cannot be overlooked in successful description, I give another example. This point really cannot be over-emphasized: a writer cannot be too careful in selecting materials. Careless grouping of incongruous matters cannot make a picture. Nor does the artistic author leave the reader in doubt as to the purpose of the description; its central thought is usually suggested in the first sentence. In the quotations from Shakespeare and Kipling, the opening sentences are the germ of what follows. Each detail seems to grow out of this sentence, and serves to emphasize it. In the following by Stevenson, the paragraphs spring from the opening sentence; they explain it, they elaborate it, and they accent it.

“Night is a dead monotonous period under a roof; but in the open world it passes lightly, with its stars and dews and perfumes, and the hours are marked by changes in the face of Nature. What seems a kind of temporal death to people choked between walls and curtains is only a light and living slumber to the man who sleeps afield. All night long he can hear Nature breathing deeply and freely; even as she takes her rest she turns and smiles; and there is one stirring hour unknown to those who dwell in houses, when a wakeful influence goes abroad over the sleeping hemisphere, and all the outdoor world are on their feet. It is then that the first cock crows, not this time to announce the dawn, but like a cheerful watchman speeding the course of the night. Cattle awake on the meadows; sheep break their fast on the dewy hillsides, and change to a new lair among the ferns; and houseless men, who have lain down with the fowls, open their dim eyes and behold the beauty of the night.

“At what inaudible summons, at what gentle touch of Nature, are all these sleepers thus recalled in the same hour to life? Do the stars rain down an influence, or do we share some thrill of mother earth below our resting bodies? Even shepherds and old country-folk, who are the deepest read in these arcana, have not a guess as to the means or purpose of this nightly resurrection. Towards two in the morning

they declare the thing takes place; and neither know nor inquire further. And at least it is a pleasant incident. We are disturbed in our slumber only, like the luxurious Montaigne, 'that we may the better and more sensibly enjoy it.' We have a moment to look upon the stars. And there is a special pleasure for some minds in the reflection that we share the impulse with all outdoor creatures in our neighborhood, that we have escaped out of the Bastille of civilization, and are become, for the time being, a more kindly animal and a sheep of Nature's flock." ("Travels with a Donkey.")

Length of Descriptions. There is one more step in the exclusion of details. This considers neither the point of view nor the purpose of the writer, but it is what is due the reader. Stevenson says in one of his essays that a description which lasts longer than two minutes is never attempted in conversation. The listener cannot hold the details enumerated. The clearest statement regarding this comes from Jules Lemaître in a criticism upon some descriptions by Emile Zola which the critic says are praised by persons who have never read them. He says:—

"It has been one of the greatest literary blunders of the time to suppose that an enumeration of parts is a picture, to think that forever placing details side by side, however picturesque they may be, is able in the end to make a picture, to give us any conception of the vast spectacles in the physical universe. In reality, a written description arranges its parts in our mind only when the impression of the first features of which it is formed are remembered sufficiently, so that we can easily join the first to those which complete and end it. In short, a piece of description is ineffective if we cannot hold in mind all its details at one time. It is necessary that all the details coexist in our memory just as the parts of a painting coexist under our eye. This becomes next to impossible if the description of one definite object last over fifteen minutes of reading. The longer it is, the more obscure it becomes. The individual features fade away in proportion to the number which are presented; and for this reason one might say that we cannot see the forest for the trees. Every description which is over fifty lines ceases to be clear to a mind of ordinary vigor. After that there is only a succession of fragmentary pictures which fatigues and overwhelms the reader."⁸

⁸ *Impressions de Théâtre*, by Jules Lemaître.

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