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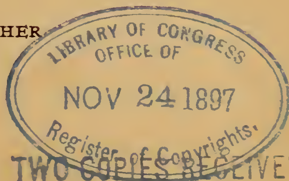
Story Composition

BY

SHERWIN CODY

Author of "How to Write Fiction," "In the Heart of the Hills," etc.

CHICAGO:
A. FLANAGAN, PUBLISHER
1897



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PREFACE.

IN the fall of 1896 I was invited to act as one of the judges in the annual Christmas story competition conducted by The Chicago Record for the school children of Chicago. After the contest was finished I contributed to the Record two articles on "Story-writing as a School Exercise," which were subsequently reprinted by the Record for the benefit of the teachers interested in its contest. With these articles as a nucleus I have endeavored to prepare an exhaustive series of exercises in story-composition which will not only suggest methods of story *writing*, but also serve as a guide and stimulus in the collection of original material for fiction.

As an exercise in school composition, the value of story-writing has never been appreciated. Not only does it call forth the most varied possible use of the English language and teach flexibility and command of expression, but it stimulates close observation and furnishes the only practicable opportunity for the study and discussion of human motives and passions—indeed, the whole of the emotional side of life. Human emotion, though one of the most deeply interesting and important topics of human thought, is too delicate and too complicated for any systematic study in schools; but story-writing, treated primarily as the best possible exercise in English composition, gives an incidental opportunity for a vast amount of extremely fascinating and useful instruction regarding emotion on the part of the teacher.

SHERWIN CODY.

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INTRODUCTION.

MANY of the young people who tried for THE CHICAGO RECORD'S Christmas prizes have no doubt been asking themselves such questions as these: "Why didn't my story win a brevet of authorship?" Or, if a brevet was won, "Why didn't my story win a prize?" Or, perhaps, if a prize was won, "Why can't I write stories for the magazines?" I had the pleasure of reading a large number of the stories submitted, successful and otherwise, and I felt that some of the older writers might very well hope some day to join the great corps of producers of fiction for the public.

More important than lack of talent was lack of knowledge of the right way to begin. Of course it requires talent to do anything. It needs ability to keep up with your classes in school, it needs ability to succeed in business, or to succeed as a day laborer. Much more does it require great talent to enable any one to write stories that will be read and cared for by the vast public. No man can teach

any person how to be a genius; but it is just as possible to learn how to use the English language effectively as it is to learn how to play the piano or how to skate or how to play baseball. Every one wishes to use language effectively for some purpose or other, either in making a good speech or writing a good letter, or in telling a story to a company of friends about the fire. Even if we do not aspire to be story-writers, we wish to know how to speak with force on occasion; and I feel perfectly safe in saying that in no way can this command of language be gained so practically as in studying the art of short-story writing.

The twelve thousand odd competitors in THE RECORD'S contest who failed even to receive a brevet of authorship may be divided into three classes. First, more than 2,000 failed because they were careless about following the rules, and their stories had to be thrown out; while of those who really were admitted to competition perhaps 2,000 more failed even to be considered because they were careless about spelling, grammar, handwriting, neatness, etc. These things are minor matters, and in some cases they might be overlooked. But if one is to master language the very first thing he needs to

know about words is how to spell them, and next he must know how to put them together correctly —that is, grammatically. Some persons find bad spelling a natural weakness, and even some good writers do not spell well. But bad grammar will spoil even the best composition, and if one wishes to write the English language effectively he must first learn to write it grammatically. These elementary matters are taught in all the schools, and must be presupposed before we can even talk about the construction of short stories as such.

The next class may include some 6,000 or 7,000 stories, well-spelled and grammatically written, which were thrown out because the writers did not get started on the right track, did not know what a story ought to be, or how to begin it, or attempted something a thousand times too difficult. This is by far the largest class always, and it is pre-eminently the class that will profit most by a little direction and help. There were thousands of stories that began "Willie's Christmas," "Frankie's Christmas," "Jennie's Christmas," "Tommie's Christmas," "Billy's Christmas," and so on through the whole list of common names, and then the list all over again. These stories showed no

lack of talent, no lack of natural ability; but they were not interesting. First of all, a story must have some interest for somebody. The art of short-story writing is first the art of interesting people, and any young competitor who succeeded in saying anything interesting succeeded in getting his story considered for a prize.

Next to the Frankie-Johnnie-Willie-Tommie class of stories was the class about poor boys who had a hard time and were helped on Christmas day by rich boys or girls. This seems more promising, but, after all, it does not interest, because the same story has been told in one form or another so many thousand times. It is better than the commonplace details of how we went to grandpa's, or how Teddie hung up his stocking and Santa Claus came down the chimney and filled it. The story of the poor little boy or girl who was lucky on Christmas day would be a good story if it were not so old. We want to be told of something we have not heard about before, and something a little different from the things we ourselves do every day. Those who wrote about the little newsboy or the little matchgirl came nearer being interesting, yet this class of stories was so old that

it did not really seem fresh even to a staid old judge who had not read children's stories since he was a boy.

But none of these writers can be said to have got on the right track. They all thought they could make up a story out of nothing. Now, there are two ways of finding material for a story, for it must be found—hunted up in some way. One is to steal it from some other story. Children are not the only ones who do that sort of thing, and in the world of letters it is called plagiarism. When a story is written out as a story it belongs absolutely and wholly to the man or woman or boy or girl who wrote it, and to try to make up another story out of the same idea, or even in the same manner, is universally considered theft pure and simple. But you may take a story that some one has told you and that has never been written out as a story, for when you tell it the telling is all your own. Or you may take an incident from history, for in turning an historical incident into a story you must invent conversation (which seldom or never is reported in history), and the setting and construction of the story as a story are the author's own. Unless the author has added

something of real, vital interest out of his own knowledge, a story cannot be said to be his.

But for all that, though a story must be original, the idea of it must be hunted up. It cannot be evolved out of the point of one's pen, so to speak. To find a good idea for a story requires a great deal of hard work, and patient waiting and thinking things over. But by thinking long enough and hard enough almost any one can find one or two ideas that will be really interesting to some one else.

The third class is composed of a thousand or two stories that might have been good if the writers had known how to tell them properly. The central idea in each was original and strange, and it evidently had interested the author, but somehow he failed to understand how it interested him, or why; and so he failed to get the really interesting thing into the story. An old novelist once said to me that Oliver Wendell Holmes' simile seemed to him best: A story in the mind is like a quart of molasses—it is a good story in the mind, a quartful; but when you try to turn it out it sticks to the sides and makes only a pint.

I.

STORY-WRITING AS AN EXERCISE IN COMPOSITION.

If the teachers in the public schools knew how to manage short-story writing as a regular exercise in English for their pupils, there is no doubt that it would prove the most effective and practical method for teaching not only a command of good English and a knowledge of grammar, punctuation and the significance of words, but what is of more value than a command of language, namely, a command of one's thoughts. To understand and command our feelings, and to know what will interest and touch other people, are two pieces of knowledge that are never taught in the schools, but which would be of infinite value to every one of us if we could learn them. Now, the study of short-story writing as a school exercise will help children to information on both these matters. Of course instruction as to our personal feelings cannot be given in the school, but the effort to write stories will make the writers think about themselves, and the teacher has an admirable opportunity to correct false sentiment, morbidity and so forth when he or she revises the stories the children have written.

Besides, in a school exercise there is not much chance for sentimentality, and children are accustomed to write about seemingly delicate topics in a sane way, and consequently they are much more likely to treat them so in the practical experiences of life. Then as to the art of interesting people: School compositions are not calculated to excite much interest in any one. They are, and are meant to be, mere dry exercises in the collocation of words. But a story is equally good as an exercise on the mechanical side of writing and as a study in the art of interesting. Short story writing is the only practical means we know for getting directly at this general need in school education.

PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS.

Undoubtedly teachers would be only too glad to inaugurate a weekly exercise in story-writing with their classes in place of the usual composition if they only knew how to go about giving instruction. There are many textbooks on essay-writing which aid the teacher in giving instruction by the usual school-composition methods, but the new way of fiction has never been explored, no rules or directions have been laid down, and desultory attempts

have proved—let us be frank, and say—decided failures.

The present writer has given long and careful study to the subject from the point of view of writing himself, and he has experimented with a number of pupils. The directions he gives he believes will prove practical in the results to be attained, and they are confessedly only experimental, and need testing in the class-room. If teachers would co-operate in this attempt to render the study of English more interesting and effective in our schools, no doubt an important step might be gained.

WHERE TO BEGIN.

As in every other study, short-story writing must be learned by starting at the beginning—that is, with simple narrations. To start off on an analysis of sentiment, or the portrayal of a complicated character, or the description of a delicate scene, is sure to end in wreck. We cannot learn French by studying the verbs before we have mastered the nouns, nor can we begin on algebra before we know arithmetic. The great majority of failures to make any progress with story-writing as

an exercise comes from attempting too difficult subjects.

THE FIRST EXERCISE.

A skillful teacher will commence by asking her class to write a simple account of some incident. She will say to her pupils: "Did you ever have a burglar in your house?" Why, yes! Some little tot is all excitement to tell the story of the burglar. Let that pupil write out the best account of the story just as it happened, and send it to be corrected. It will be discovered that some details are elaborated to weariness, others are passed over very slightingly which we wish most to know about. The teacher's own interest will be her sure and infallible guide in judging of this first elementary point.

But the mass of children will never have lived in a house where a burglar has entered, and to ask those children to write a burglary story would be quite fatal to the end we have in mind—namely, to have each one describe a real incident in a way to interest. Perhaps some of the children have been in a runaway. For those who have had that experience, that is the subject to write about.

Others, perhaps, have been present at a skating or swimming catastrophe. Let such describe that. Others may have been in a train wreck; some have seen dangerous Indians; or have heard their parents or grandparents or a friend tell some exciting adventure of the kind. No child but will have some interesting story in his mind, either of his own experience or an experience that has been told him by word of mouth. Under no circumstances should a child be asked or encouraged to rewrite a story he has read. To do that defeats the whole end of story writing as a useful exercise.

NEVER COPY.

To many teachers it may appear that the best way of teaching their pupils to write a good story is to read them a story by Hans Christian Andersen or some other master. By listening to that a child may learn what a really good story is. But no mistake could be greater than this. The child's first impulse is to imitate. If he models his own story on one that has been read to him, and that is a finished work of art, he merely copies the mechanical features and fails to think for himself. To rouse his mind to some original conception is the

chief aim. Model compositions are almost unknown in school rhetorics, and model stories are as useless for elementary instruction. As soon as pupils have come to years of sufficient thoughtfulness, when they really can analyze for themselves, there is no better way than the use of models. The most up-to-date rhetorics are based on this method. Stevenson learned his wonderful style by "playing the sedulous ape," as he himself phrases it. But this is an advanced method, not one for elementary use.

THE RIGHT KIND OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

Practical illustrations of course are the chief means of teaching, and practical illustrations alone will prove helpful in story-writing. But these must be drawn from the pupils themselves. Stories that have been written may be read aloud in the class, just as a declamation is given. The children will then feel instinctively whether the story is a good one or not, and instinctively the apter pupils will improve their method. Human nature will work out its own salvation, even with school children in writing stories, if only it is given a perfectly open field, where its intuitions can be freely brought

into play. If a particularly good story—I mean particular good material for a story—comes out in the exercises, after the original treatment has been read to the class they may be asked to rewrite the story, each one in his own way, and these various drafts may be read aloud by the teacher or the pupils who wrote them, so that the varying treatment may be compared by the pupils.

PERSPECTIVE.

The first exercise will be the simple narration of an incident, an adventure, an accident, a tale. Besides correcting it for sentence structure, the best choice of words, gracefulness of description, etc., the teacher will concentrate her attention on what I may call perspective. This depends directly on a sense for what is really interesting and what is not, and not a few teachers will have to study this matter in the compositions of their pupils with some pains. The interesting item should be expanded in proportion to its interest, the uninteresting detail should be suppressed or condensed in proportion to its lack of interest. The art of narration consists almost wholly in giving the right amount of elaboration to each detail or center of interest.

It is to story-writing what perspective is to drawing. To learn this perspective in fiction there is one very practical way. When the story has been read aloud certain portions will drag. Our instinct always informs us of this. Let such passages be immediately cut out, however important they may seem to the progress of the story or however finely they are written. Cut them out. After these have been taken away the story will be found to be so much too short. To lengthen it, consider carefully what details can be elaborated with interest. You feel that you can give a little more space to this item, and a little more to that, and be perfectly interesting. Sometimes you fail in your attempt to rewrite. Read your story over and submit it to the same process again. Cut out the passages that drag and elaborate those that interest. When the interest is carried through unbroken from beginning to end you know that you have attained the true proportion, the genuine perspective.

CONDUCTING A LESSON.

The management of the first exercises should be as follows: Teacher will announce the story-writing a week in advance, asking pupils to send

in a story as a preparation for that lesson hour. The subjects will not be left to the discretion of the children, however, but should be assigned beforehand in this manner: The teacher will ask: Who had a burglary or robbery in his family? Hands will go up. The names are taken, and this subject assigned to these. Then she will ask: Who has been in a skating accident, or a runaway, or a train wreck, etc. Those who raise their hands for each of these will be assigned their peculiar topics. Those who remain without assignments will have to be questioned to find what peculiar experience each has had, or what tale he has heard from his grandfather or mother, etc. Then, if the exercise is on Monday, the stories may be sent in on Friday, and this will give the teacher time to glance them over in advance and pick out the most interesting. One or two may be analyzed carefully, in order to criticise them in the class after they have been read aloud by the pupils who write them. The reading and discussion of these stories form the work of the first lesson. For the second lesson the pupils will be asked to rewrite any single one of those that have been read aloud, not, of course, their own. These will be brought to the class for

the second exercise, and will be exchanged among the pupils, and picked pupils will be asked to read and criticise—that is, point out bad use of language, bad grammar and bad narration (or what is uninteresting and drags, as well as what might be expanded).

By this time the first draft of stories will have been corrected, and may be returned to the writers to be rewritten. The third exercise will be performed by the class itself, various pupils being called on to read, first the original draft of the story, mentioning after the reading the point to be corrected as marked by the teacher, and then the corrected draft, while comments are invited from the class as in the case of any other school exercise. Of course, only the practical points I have indicated should be discussed. Indiscriminate conversation on all topics of life may be a temptation, but one to be avoided strictly. The detailed correction of the rewritten drafts, if the teacher finds it occupies too much of her own time, might very profitably be done by higher classes or especially advanced pupils as a most excellent part of their own study.

II.

THE PRACTICAL CONSTRUCTION OF A SNAKE STORY.

In the preceding article we gave general directions for writing out a simple narrative of an incident or adventure. But when it comes to the actual doing, difficulties arise. We nearly all have had experiences which strike us as good material, but when written out they seem scrappy and insufficient. It is no easy thing to produce a thoroughly readable narrative.

To illustrate the practical process, let us take some incidents from an actual experience, and exhibit the process of building up a story.

MATERIAL FOR A SNAKE STORY.

On the plains west of the Missouri river rattlesnakes were once plentiful, if indeed they are not abundant now. I have heard a friend tell of walking out with his father when a boy to look at some grass they were intending to cut for hay. It was very high, nearly up to his boy's chin, and as they walked through it a rattlesnake was running about in a very lively manner, circling about them.

Once it brushed past him, and he felt its whole length against his shoe, by no means a comfortable sensation. At another time he was sleeping in a bedroom on a side of the frame house in which they lived that was being enlarged. It was summer and very warm. One side of the bedroom had been taken bodily out and moved back a dozen feet or more, and the sides boarded up, making a room of twice the original size, of which the floor of only the old part of the room was intact. Moreover, on account of the heat a window-sash had been taken out of the window-frame and leaned against the wall under the window. Between this window, with its sash on the floor, and the bed there was only a narrow passage, perhaps three feet wide. One morning he woke up rather late and heard the clatter of knives and forks in the dining-room, and knew that the family were eating breakfast without him. So he jumped out of bed and hurried to dress. He hadn't proceeded very far when he heard a hiss and looking down he saw a young rattlesnake slowly crawling out from behind the window-sash, and holding its head up, looking all about. It shot its tongue out in a very uncanny way and started slowly for the door which stood

ajar at the head of the bed. That boy jumped on to the bed and called lustily for his mother, informing her that there was a snake there. "Oh, no," she said, "it is only a worm." He insisted that it was not a worm and presently she came to prove to him that it was. She opened the door and found herself face to face with a rattlesnake two or three feet long, that seemed trying to climb the door-post. You may be sure she retreated with some haste, and the hired man was called in to kill the reptile. After that my young friend was not accused of mistaking worms for snakes.

BUILDING UP THE INTEREST.

This is an incident, but it is rather a tame one. In order to make a good narrative out of it something must be added, and that something may be taken from another incident. In the next house lived a young fellow of seventeen with his father and mother. They had a large herd of cattle which he looked after. One day when his mother and sister were the only persons at home, he came limping into the house and informed them that he had been bitten in the ankle, through his boot, by a rattlesnake. He was deathly white, and his

mother, who was very fond of him, since he was the youngest of a large family and the only one of the boys left at home, was as much frightened as he. She pulled off his boot and stocking immediately and gave him a large glass of whiskey and hot water, but her fear increasing every moment, she seized the ankle and sucked the poison out. By that act alone could the boy's life have been saved. In a few days he was all right again.

Still another story, told by a friend who had lived in the Alleghany mountains: He and other young people were accustomed to pick blueberries on the sides of the mountain, which was infested with very large rattlesnakes. One day a boy and his sister were climbing up the mountain when they came upon a big snake, which the girl accidentally stepped on. The creature was roused in a minute and ready to bite, but was prevented from doing so by the boy's stepping on to its head, where for his own safety after saving his sister he was obliged to stand for an hour until help could be summoned to kill the snake.

ONE STORY OUT OF THREE INCIDENTS.

Out of these three narratives one good story

might be woven. Naturally, the writer takes for the foundation his own experience, because he has in his mind's eye all the details, and can set them down somewhat as I have described the experience of the snake in the bedroom. Now, the boy who was bitten and whose mother sucked the poison out, might have been bitten in the bedroom. Our narrative goes very well up to the point of the appearance of the snake, but it is necessary that something interesting should happen at this point, and we effect this by simply putting the second story on to the end of the first. To make it still more interesting we bring in also a part of the third story. Two children are in the bedroom,—two little brothers, let us say. One of them in dressing, perhaps fooling when he should be putting his clothes on, steps on the snake as it crawls out from behind the sash, and is saved from being bitten only by his brother's putting his foot on the snake's head. The children call for help and the mother comes. The snake is killed, and then it is discovered that the brave little fellow has been bitten, and will die unless something effective is done at once. The mother sucks out the poison.

HOW TO WRITE THE STORY OUT.

Here we have the material for a good story, a simple narrative of adventure, and the story is now blocked out. The next point is the method of telling it. First, how should it begin?

Observe the order in which we set down the facts in the little account of a personal experience. The story is located on the plains west of the Missouri river. There "rattlesnakes were plentiful." Next comes a little incident to show how plentiful they are, and how little people seem to mind them.

THE OPENING PARAGRAPH.

The good story-writer always begins with the thing that makes the story. In this case it is a rattlesnake. And almost in the same sentence he contrives to give the reader some idea of the place and the conditions. It helps to make a vivid picture in the mind. A snake story might be located in India, or Vermont, or South America. But the place alters the character of the story not a little. Perhaps we might open our tale thus:

"On the plains west of the Missouri river rattlesnakes are abundant. They live in squirrels' holes in the prairie, and come out at all times

when they find it warm enough and crawl about in the grass, curl up under doorsteps, secrete themselves in bedrooms;—in fact, you never know where a rattlesnake may not turn up. Men think nothing of walking through the tall grass and feeling a hard, scaly body rubbing against the thick leather of their shoes, as familiarly as a purring cat."

This paragraph also illustrates the art of amplifying, and shows how important it is that the writer should know by personal experience the subject he chooses. In speaking of rattlesnakes, the keystone of our story, we mention a number of interesting facts, incidentally, all going to show the general prevalence of the snakes. We wish to make the introductory paragraph long enough to impress the reader with the fact that snakes are common on the plains. To get this clearly in mind, his thoughts must be kept on the subject a certain length of time,—the length of time that it takes him to read this paragraph. The time is also well utilized in giving facts of useful information about the habits of the snakes.

THE REMAINDER OF THE STORY.

Next come the details of the bedroom and the

location. Every important fact is set down. It was summer, and very warm: that explains the window sash being out. The room had been enlarged and only the floor of the original portion was intact: that explains how the snake got in. The artistic narrator does not say these things; but he sets down all his facts in the right place, so that his readers can put two and two together for themselves and understand the circumstances.

The way in which the facts are set down in the paragraph we have given in some detail in the beginning of this article will show how the imaginary circumstances should be described, which are to follow the discovery of the snake, crawling out from behind the sash. It was easy to put down the right details in the part of the story the writer himself had experienced; he simply describes as he remembers, as he actually saw. Beginning with an actual incident gets the mind into the right habit, and it is not so difficult to fill out the imaginary picture. A person with a good imagination can see the two children instead of one, the scuffle while they are dressing, the stepping on the snake and the angry hiss which follows, perhaps the slipping and falling of the child who has stepped on

the snake, and the quick wit of the other boy in putting his foot on the head of the reptile. Just how he was bitten it is not necessary to say. In the excitement nobody knows. But when it is all over the bite is discovered.

The writing of a good narrative consists in filling out all the little details of this incident, putting down realistically everything that should have happened. It is doubtless the hardest thing in the whole art of story-writing, though it seems the easiest.

III.

THE ART OF DESCRIPTION.

The art of short story writing is more the art of thinking than of using words. A person with a very small command of language may write a good story if his thoughts supply him the right thing to say. The study of this art in the schools would do more to cultivate accurate, truthful, every day observation than any other study that could be invented. Sometimes, for the purpose of cultivating observation, an exercise is assigned requiring the pupil to describe everything he saw on the way to school, in order to ascertain which of the pupils saw the most. This is excellent as far as it goes, but it is very limited in its application. It is generally assumed that story-writing is an exercise of the imagination and not particularly of the observing powers. But this is an error. The secret of good description is to give details which have actually been observed by the writer. The real picture may be incomplete and he may call in his imagination to assist in filling it out; but first hand observation must be exhausted first. Indeed, where one memory picture is incomplete, another can often be pieced

on with great success, as in the case of the narrative of a snake story in the preceding chapter.

OBSERVATION THE BASIS FOR DESCRIPTION.

The advantage in the matter of interest of a description direct from nature over one constructed purely from general hearsay—in other words, out of the imagination,—lies in the fact that if the most ordinary person really observes he will see and include in his description something novel and interesting, whereas the so-called imaginary description will be quite bare. Take the following, for instance, the opening paragraph of an otherwise very good story:

TWO ILLUSTRATIONS.

"Among the mountains of the far north, where the dark Norwegian pines lift their dusky arms to heaven and stand like sentinels to defend the inhabitants of the valley, where the lovely Friga and the hammer-throwing Thor hold divine sway, lies the estate of Hakou, the great earl of Sogne."

Compare with the preceding this paragraph from Bret Harte's "The Luck of Roaring Camp," a description of an assemblage of men evidently made from actual observation:

"The assemblage numbered about a hundred men. One or two of these were actual fugitives from justice, some were criminal, and all were reckless. Physically, they exhibited no indications of their past lives and character. The greatest scamp had a Raphael face, with a profusion of blond hair; Oakhurst, a gambler, had the melancholy air and intellectual abstraction of a Hamlet; the coolest and most courageous man was scarcely over five feet in height, with a soft voice and an embarrassed, timid manner. The term 'roughs,' applied to them, was a distinction rather than a definition."

The man merely with an imagination would have described the hard faces, the rough manners, the cold, reckless eyes of this assemblage of miners. Bret Harte, from having actually seen that of which he was writing, is able to make his description interesting by the strangeness what he says.

A VERY SIMPLE DESCRIPTION.

If the pupil should complain that Bret Harte uses figures of speech in his description which are rather hard of execution, certainly the following very simple description, which is also excellent, is within the range of all:

"The trapper's household outfit consisted of a table, standing against the side of the wall; a crude but comfortable bench, made of half a log, that stood before the table, and a bunk high up in a corner, serving for his bed, in which a thick layer of pine boughs formed a mattress. Beneath this bunk lay various traps, bundles of furs, and other articles. On the opposite wall stood a hollowed out log which formed a serviceable washbasin. Over this, pans and other kitchen utensils were hung, neatly washed, for he was clean in his ways, indicating a clean character."

This little description, actually written by a young girl, lacks the vigorous command of language and imagery of Bret Harte's description of the company of miners; but it is good because the writer confines herself to facts, and the slight awkwardness of phrasing is passed over in the interest of the simple picture.

DESCRIPTION AN EXERCISE IN THE USE OF ADJECTIVES. FIRE.

The writing of descriptions is an exercise in the use of adjectives, and one that should be followed out repeatedly and persistently, *never* al-

lowing the pupil to lapse into vague fineries. The first subject for description that suggests itself is fire. Nothing is more wonderful or more beautiful than fire, and every one has seen it. Some have seen the burning of immense buildings, with the great sheets and tongues of flames lapping up to heaven against an inky black sky; they will remember the crackling of timbers, the charred but still glowing rafters as they break and fall, the sudden pouring out of smoke through a window that has fallen in, the glowing sticks and cinders on the ground below. But those who have not seen a great building burn, have at least watched the glowing coals in an open grate, with its little tongues of flame that burn a full foot above the coals, as if they had run away and were being chased by a big old father flame; the blue light hovering softly over the coals themselves; and then the falling of the coal into gray ashes, the gradual dying out of the heat and the glow, and at last the cold hearth, with only one faint gleam coming out the dark background.

SUBJECTS FOR DESCRIPTION.

Other common and easy subjects for descrip-

tion are a thunder-storm, a snow-storm, a hot day in July, a very cold day in winter, a skating party, the scampering about of the children in a large school at recess, a funeral, a wedding, a baby-show, and so on and so on. In addition to these material pictures, which are to be drawn simply as pictures, without incident of any kind, the pupils as they advance may be asked to describe their feelings on various occasions, as they feel when it is believed that a brother or friend has fallen into a pond or otherwise been killed or injured; and in connection with this the fear felt at the thought of being punished for doing something wrong; or the fear felt in view of a possible failure in speaking a piece or reciting a lesson. Advanced pupils may be very greatly interested by having their minds turned toward a study of the differences in the emotion of fear on the various occasions.

TO ACQUIRE FACILITY IN THE USE OF LANGUAGE.

The first, the great difficulty, is to acquire the habit of actually examining in our minds our own real experiences of whatever kind, the habit of looking at a thing long enough and hard enough to see what there really is in it. Few people take the time

or trouble to learn to concentrate their minds; and this is one of the greatest reasons why they should be taught to do so. And next to this is the question of finding suitable words, chiefly adjectives, to describe what has been observed. Thinking is more important than expressing; but expressing is only less important. To get the necessary words and phrases, especially to put a record of our emotions on paper, requires long and thorough practice. In order to increase this facility the pupil should read with great care a passage from a well known writer, and then try to reproduce it in as good language as the original. The passage should be short, and should be examined with great attention. To read it over once is not enough; twenty times would not be too many even for the brightest. These passages, however, should be selected with care.

AN ILLUSTRATION FROM DICKENS.

The writer who has the greatest facility in common, everyday description, is probably Dickens. Take the description of Scrooge at the beginning of "A Christmas Carol," and this paragraph in particular:

"Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the

grindstone, was Scrooge; a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! External heat and cold had little influence on him. No warmth could warm, no cold could chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain and snow and hail and sleet could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect,—they often 'came down' handsomely, and Scrooge never did."

The facts at the bottom of this description are common and simple enough. Who of us has not seen a grasping old miser! But nobody ever found such a multitude of words and phrases in which to express the idea. It is not only adjectives that he uses, but all sorts of phrases and comparisons.

ANOTHER FROM MACAULAY.

For an entirely different kind of description, read the short passage in Macaulay's "Essay on Milton" in which he describes the Puritans. Study with care even this short paragraph:

"They were, as a body, unpopular; they could not defend themselves; and the public would not take them under its protection. They were aban-

doned, therefore, without reserve, to the tender mercies of the satirists and dramatists. The ostentatious simplicity of their dress, their sour aspect, their nasal twang, their stiff posture, their long graces, their Hebrew names, the Scriptural phrases which they introduced on every occasion, their contempt of human learning, their detestation of polite amusements, were indeed fair game for the laughers."

NOT THE WAY TO LEARN DESCRIPTION.

But the study of such passages as these will never teach the art of description. They are too difficult, too unnatural, too far away from the things the pupil has actually seen and heard with his own eyes and ears. They do, however, teach new methods of expression when the pupil has exhausted his own original stock.

IV.

PLOT-CONSTRUCTION. IMAGINATION.

The first thing in the study of story-writing is to train the mind to careful, habitual observation of small details. Observation comes first, imagination afterward. But now we will see what is the practical way of using the imagination in building up a story. In the snake story we saw that the actual facts and pictures which we have in our memories are not enough. They must be modified, enlarged, built up. The difficulties on this head may be illustrated by the following story, one of the brevet winners in THE CHICAGO RECORD'S Christmas Competition (1896). An actual spoon, dating back seventy years, was found in a stove, and had probably come out of the kindling wood, taken from an old tree near the house, that had lately been cut down. About this single fact the young writer of this story attempted to weave an imaginary plot:

"MY GRANDMOTHER'S SILVER SPOON.

"Three little heads lay on their pillows one Christmas eve many years ago, sleeping soundly.

Their names were Priscilla, and Cynthia and Patience, the twins. It had been the custom of Mrs. Van Wyck, their mother, to give Priscilla a silver spoon on Christmas, because she was the eldest. So on Christmas morning while it was yet dusk, three little pairs of feet crept out of bed and ran for their stockings; and what should Priscilla see but a little silver spoon peeping out of hers. This spoon was not a fancy one like those we have nowadays, for there was no decoration on it, and the name was engraved in very small letters.

"The old homestead had even then seen fifty years come and go. It was situated in sight of the ocean on Long Island. Surrounding the house were apple and pear orchards; and the fields which stretched for miles around were picturesque in their white and glittering mantle of snow. Within the house the outline of the furniture could be distinguished by the warm and ruddy glow which the wide old fireplace sent out. Also upstairs in the children's room there was a sight which, if put on canvas, would excite admiration. There the children were in their snow-white night-gowns, their little feet half showing on the home-made rag carpet and their faces glowing with delight as they

unwrapped their presents. Added to this picture was little Gipsy, the monkey, with his back before the hearth, grinning at them with his saucy little face.

"The morning passed away pleasantly, and in the afternoon they were expecting several little poor children whom they had invited to share some of their pleasure. Priscilla and the twins had spread all their presents out on a table and had gone down to breakfast, little knowing how brimful of mischief Gipsy was. He was very much pleased with the pretty array of presents, but took a particular fancy to the silver spoon. He took the spoon up and examined it, and thought he would like to have it where he could see it whenever he wanted to. So after leaving the room with it, a few minutes later he returned without it. When the children came back he looked very innocent; but they did not miss anything, for just then the poor children came.

"They had a very pleasant day with the poor children. When they went away in a large old-fashioned sleigh with Mr. Van Wyck, Priscilla watched them until they were out of sight. Then she went back into her quaint old home.

"The last thing the children did before going to bed was to look at their presents again. But to their surprise, the silver spoon was gone. Where, when, and how it had disappeared they did not know. They called their mother and father in, and together they hunted high and low, but could not find it.

"Outside the air was cold and clear, and there reigned on earth a stillness and peace which raised the soul into unknown realms; and the twinkling stars echoed the joyful song, 'Peace on earth, good will toward men.'

"Many years had passed, and if we again look into the old homestead more quaint than at the beginning of the story, we should not find Cynthia and Patience, but Priscilla and her grandchildren. Priscilla was the only one left of that once happy family, and I am afraid you would not know the bright little girl; for years and sorrow have told on the pretty face. But she is a kind and loving grandmother to her grandchildren.

"One day in November there was quite a stir in the homestead, because a silver spoon with Grandma's name engraved upon it was found in the kitchen stove. No one knew anything about

it, and all were eager for Grandma's return from the city. Priscilla returned a few days before Christmas, and in their joy of seeing her, the spoon was forgotten, until on Christmas afternoon, when all were gathered around the family hearth, when Fred, Priscilla's only grandson, brought the spoon, and all asked eager questions about it. Grandma told them the story of that Christmas when she was a little girl, and all came to the conclusion that Gipsy must have hidden it in a tree near the house. The wood had grown around it, and as they were using the trees for kindling, it must have gotten into the stove in this way. They all had a good laugh about Gipsy, and a pretty picture they made, dear old Grandma with snow-white hair smiling sweetly upon all her grandchildren who, with faces upturned to hers, listened to the tales of days gone by. Thus they sat until the glow of the embers grew dim and again the 'Peace of God' rested upon the souls in that quaint old homestead on Christmas night."

DEFECT OF THE STORY.

Now this story shows plenty of imagination, and of the right kind, too. The description of the

Christmas seventy years ago, and likewise the scene at the end, and even the starlight night, are all taken from similar scenes of personal observation, and are just as real as if they had happened in the connection described. But the fine and healthy imagination is *not used in the right way*. The story is not properly constructed, and for that reason fails to interest the reader except for its excellent description.

THE NEED OF HUMAN INTEREST.

To make a good plot out of the simple fact that a silver spoon lost seventy years before was found in the wood of a tree, we may very well presume that the monkey put it in the tree. But this is not quite enough. Some human interest should be added. Perhaps the loss of that spoon was laid to one of the poor children the writer speaks of. They conclude that this child, who is known to have come of a bad family, stole it; the suspicion blights the little one's character, and it goes down to its grave never justified. Seventy years afterward the spoon is found in the tree in such a manner as completely to clear away the imputation. Here we have a little bit of life's tragedy, and this

will make the difference between a good story and a poor one.

THE PROPER ARRANGEMENT.

But we must rearrange the story. The twins, Cynthia and Patience, have nothing to do with the tale, and should not be mentioned. And the little description of a Christmas morning with which the story opens gives no clew to the interest. The main thing is the finding of the spoon. So that should come at the beginning and not at the end. But if we put the paragraph (telling about the finding of the spoon), at present in the latter part of the story at the beginning, there should be no break, such as that caused by the spoon being found and then forgotten and the story told on Christmas day. That spoils the movement. The reader wants the story to go on quickly.

THE STORY AS IT SHOULD BE.

Let the story begin thus: The spoon is found. All is excitement. The children take it to Grandma. She looks at it, grows pale, lays her head back, closing her eyes. That spoon calls up pain-

ful memories of long ago. The children stand around in silence, waiting to hear what it all means. Then Grandma rouses herself and tells the story. Put it in Grandma's own words:

"That spoon was my Christmas present, seventy years ago. How well I remember that morning! [Here comes in the little description, so nicely given in the original story, of the Christmas morning at the old homestead.] As I was the eldest, I had each Christmas a silver spoon. You see what a simple, plain old spoon it is, not like the spoons nowadays. We spread all our things out on the bed, and leaving Gipsy, our monkey, to guard them, we went down to breakfast; and by the time we had finished, our guests of the day arrived. [There should be a little description of the monkey, and also a detailed description of the children, especially of the one who it is supposed should be the thief.]

"When after a time we went upstairs to look at our things, there was Gipsy looking very innocent. No one could have suspected him of doing anything wrong. We were so busy talking and showing little Ellen and the rest all the big things that we never thought about the spoon, such a plain, unim-

portant thing as a spoon. But when they were gone, and mother went to pick up the things, while we followed behind very sleepy, she asked me where my spoon was, and I could not tell her. We hunted high and low: it could not be found. We none of us said it, but we were all thinking that little Ellen, whose father had gone to the penitentiary for stealing, had taken it away with her. When father came back mother told him, and he was very angry, and said that came of inviting such children to a holiday. He would go straight over and force her to confess. He went; she denied having touched the spoon; nobody believed her. People seldom went to see her after this; after a time her mother died; then her sisters; and she was left a lonely old maid, living solitary in her cabin until she, too, died.

"And here is the spoon, hidden in the wood of that tree, high up among its branches. Only Gipsy could have gotten up there; but he would often climb that tree, and I remember how that very morning he scampered out on the snow and ran up the tree, and we had to coax him for a long time before he would come down."

THE SECRET OF SUCCESSFUL STORY-WRITING.

Told thus, we have an interesting and beautiful story. But it is the human interest that makes it so. The secret of plot-construction is finding some way in which the incident affects a human being, makes a difference in somebody's life, as this did in the life of little Ellen. Begin by giving a direct clew to the interesting point. In this case it is the discovery of the spoon, and the way Grandma is affected by the sight of it. Her turning pale makes the reader think there is something interesting to come. The reader's curiosity once aroused, the nicely wrought little descriptions can be worked in to delay the *denouement*, which in this case is that the monkey hid the spoon in the tree. This must be kept for the last. The monkey is spoken of, but the fact that he took the spoon is saved for a surprise at the end.

The work of the imagination is not in inventing pure romance, but in fitting together and filling out facts and incidents which we have already in mind.

V.

DIALOGUE.

One of the most difficult things to learn in the writing of stories is the easy management of dialogue. This is something that should be left until the other and simpler phases of the subject are mastered; and in any case, it will be found that this depends more on natural ability than anything else. Pupils may cultivate their powers of narration and plot construction, even the art of description, with much more hope of success than a command of good dialogue.

THE REAL SECRET OF DIALOGUE.

Dialogue depends on characterization, and characterization is the natural ability of the writer to play the parts of his personages, put on their manners, look at life from their point of view, enter into them sympathetically. Many people are too proud and self-contained to lend themselves easily to any character but their own; and this power of sympathetic adaptation is one of the chief

secrets of success in the realm of story-writing. Especially is it so in dialogue. Every time a speech is uttered by a character, the writer should put himself as much in the position of his personage as an actor does when he dresses for a part on the stage; and then when the reply comes, the writer must be ready to play another part with equal success.

HOW TO CULTIVATE IT.

And yet there are ways in which the art of dialogue may be cultivated, with great interest to teachers and pupils.

The easiest kind of dialogue is that between characters as widely different as possible, and probably the easiest of all is, that between a person who speaks dialect and one who speaks good English. There are two or three kinds of dialect that every one knows something about; for instance, the Irishman's brogue, the New England farmer's way of speaking, and the free and easy slang of a school boy or a street urchin. Each one of these dialects is more or less the embodiment of a distinct character; so is the negro dialect. At the same time they are classic in literature, and the

study of dialogue might begin with them. The simplest way is to put any sort of yarn in the mouth of a person speaking one of these well-known and common dialects. The following will show the method admirably.

THE SIMPLE WAY.

" 'What!' asked a grizzled old miner; 'you never heard how he got them skates?'

" 'I confess I never did, but I shall be glad to learn now,' replied the stranger.

" 'Wal, I 'm just as glad to tell you if ye 'll listen.'

"Then, lighting his old pipe, just as a sailor would before spinning a yarn, he began:

" 'Jest two weeks ago, an' two days afore Christmas, Fred Hardy was a-feelin' awful blue. He was a-wantin' a new pair o' skates for the big Christmas race, but he didn't have no money to get 'em nor neither did his dad.' "

This is, of course, more monologue than dialogue; but one speech comes before two, the part of one character must be played before two can be managed. Moreover, this use of a dialect is one of the best ways in the world of easily

getting into a character for the purpose of constructing the story, quite apart from the matter of dialogue.

THE USE OF DIALECT IN TEACHING CORRECT GRAMMAR.

It may be imagined that this conscious cultivation of dialect would tend to loose habits of grammar, and slang where pure English is to be desired. It is not so, however. To use these ungrammatical expressions with effect, the pupil must understand clearly what is really right. For instance, in the passage quoted above, the phrase "nor neither did his dad" would lose all its force as dialect, if the writer of it did not understand that it is an error to use two negatives, since one of them is redundant, a useless addition. The same is true of "didn't have no money to get 'em;" also of "you never heard how he got them skates." In order to write ungrammatical dialect well, the writer must understand pure English perfectly; and when he is attempting to write pure English, it must be all the purer, for loose and ungrammatical expressions in this part, by the side of the consciously ungrammatical ones in the dialect,

appear highly ridiculous. Dialect is like caricature in drawing. To draw a good caricature, an artist must first be able to draw a figure with perfect truth; then, consciously deviating from the truth, he produces results highly amusing.

A GOOD EXERCISE.

A very amusing and useful exercise is to have the same story written out as if told by two or three different characters in as many dialects. For instance, take the familiar story of a countryman coming to town and being imposed upon by a sharper with a gold brick; the New England farmer would be shrewd, innocent and serious in his narrative; the Irishman would be witty, even at his own expense; the negro would be happy-go-lucky. And all these characteristics would come out in their dialect. In choosing an incident to be told by each of three characters like this, care must be taken to see that it is one that could happen to either alike. Another subject that might be taken is the experience of each in going skating, or in going courting, or in getting into a fight. When written, these exercises could not properly be called stories, only sketches. But being simpler

than stories, they are so much the better adapted to the purposes of practice.

CHARACTERS SHARPLY CONTRASTED.

The next step should be to bring these characters together, perhaps adding a Chinaman, with his pigeon English. Let them come together and have a contention over something, perhaps run into each other on the street, or elbow each other at the Chinaman's laundry. Each speaks his own dialect and ridicules the dialect of the other.

These characters are as different as any characters can be made. Their difference makes their conception easy, whereas the characters of two equal friends in ordinary society would be extremely difficult to make individual, just because they resemble each other so much. They are characterized by subtle differences which the pupil has not yet learned to draw.

CHARACTERS MORE ALIKE.

Our next step should be an exercise in dialogue between two characters a little nearer together, yet with wide differences; for instance, a

dialogue between an old man and a child. The child wants to know how Christmas originated. The old man tries to tell him, and the child asks questions as the storiy goes on. Or the two characters may be a frivolous girl and her father, or such a girl in conversation with a street urchin, or her small brother. The range of exercises is almost unlimited.

PROGRESSIVE EXERCISES.

Next, represent the conversation between two persons of about the same age and in the same position in society, but a position or an age as different as possible from that of the writer's. It is far easier to show how two negroes will talk together, or two little girls or little boys at their play, or two farmers, etc., than two people like ourselves. And the two characters, though alike in their speech, may be as different as possible in their ways of looking at things, their tone of voice, and the like.

Most difficult of all, as I have said, is dialogue between persons of our own social position and age, our familiars, our equals. But even here there is one way easier than another, and the student

must always be made to begin with the easiest, and then proceed to the difficult. It is easier to represent yourself talking to some one of your friends, than two of your friends talking together. The reason is apparent: you know your own character better than that of any one else, and when it comes to contrasting yourself with one of your friends, you understand your friend much better than when you contrast two of your friends.

PROPER SUBJECTS FOR DIALOGUE.

The topics for conversation between two children, or two persons who speak dialect, must always be some practical, everyday affair. But when two friends talk together, it is easier to make them converse on some topic of broad human interest, on which they can exchange their ideas, than to try at the outset to make their conversation help on a story. First one speaks, and then another speaks, giving his ideas on "getting on in the world," or on love, or the pleasures of the imagination. These subjects are not such as characters in stories can or will often discuss; but they serve admirably as preliminary exercises.

HOW TO USE DIALOGUE IN A STORY.

So much for the series of exercises necessary to gain a facility in the use and management of dialogue as one of the elements of a story, taken as a separate element. But when it comes to utilizing dialogue as part of the machinery of a complete story, we should seldom or never introduce it in such large quantities as these exercises would indicate. Two or three sentences are thrown in to lighten or brighten the narative or description. Sometimes these bits of dialogue form part of the simple record of facts, as in this passage from Dicken's "A Child's Dream of a Star:"

"Again the child dreamed of the opened star, and of the company of angels, and the train of people, and the rows of angels with their beaming eyes all turned upon those people's faces.

" Said his sister's angel to the leader,—

" 'Is my brother come?'

"And he said, 'Not that one, but another.'

"As the child beheld his brother's angel in her arms, he cried, 'O sister, I am here! Take me!' And she turned and smiled upon him, and the star was shining."

Again, the dialogue is a little by-play; or the indirect narrative is thrown into the direct for a moment. In general, the chief direction is the warning, never give above twelve lines of dialogue without a descriptive touch, a simple, direct statement, or a break of some other sort. Dialogue is the sauce to the pudding.

VI.

CHARACTERIZATION.

The essential thing in fiction is not the management of narration, description, or dialogue, but characterization, the conception in the imagination of real men and women. Vigorous and original characterization is genius, and we could not face a more complicated subject than this. Yet it is one which repays study by every one.

GENERAL TYPES.

Our first step should be to select the general types of men and women already treated in fiction, or, if you please, that we see ourselves in looking out over the world. The first great division which we see is the rich and poor. The poor man, the poor woman, the poor child is a distinct type; so is the rich man, the rich woman, the rich child. These types are so distinct that we are almost inclined to fancy there is no middle class.

The second type that strikes our attention in fiction is the lover, a young man or young woman

from sixteen to thirty, beautiful or homely, rich or poor, but in any case possessing some noble sentiment. And here we begin to have material for a story. Let us see how it is used for the purposes of fiction.

CONTRAST.

The secret of strength in fiction is contrast. In order to make a story we choose two or three different characters, which come together and in so doing make the story. Let us take two, and let them be the conventional lovers. Now, if both are rich and simply meet and like each other and marry we have no story worth telling. The same is true if both are poor. In coming together they must overcome difficulties, and they must present a sufficient contrast. If a rich young man falls in love with a poor girl, or a poor young man falls in love with a rich girl, we have a story at once. We contrast his rich home with her shabby one, or *vice versa*, his polished manners with her simple, unsophisticated ones, or the reverse. By this contrast we see their differences, and these differences are what we call character.

HOW TO DEVELOP A CHARACTER.

Our spontaneous idea of characterization is a long description of our hero or heroine. We tell the color of his hair, or hers, his or her eyes, complexion, dress; in short, we tell everything about him that we can think of. This is very good practice, but it should not be put in the story. Let the pupil sit down and write out full descriptions of his hero and heroine, in the minutest detail. These descriptions may be brought before the class and criticised. The writer by this means gradually becomes familiar in his own mind with the people he is going to deal with. When he has learned to know them as familiarly as his brothers and sisters or everyday companions he may set to work to write his story about them. Being real and individual, in the story they will act in a way peculiar to themselves. Somehow or other, they will seem to work out their own destiny quite independent of the author. This individual peculiarity is character. We cannot get at it by thinking about it directly. It seems to grow in the mind without our volition.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME IN THINKING OUT CHARACTERS.

The study of characterization must be pursued in the development of characters, and for this *time* must be given. Characters grow in the mind unconsciously. But it is not enough to describe a character and leave it at that. The description must prelude a story, but must not be a part of it. Study the characters for the purpose of making a story, let them mature in the mind, and then, throwing aside the descriptions, write the story about the personalities with whom you have become familiar.

LEADING TYPES. RICH AND POOR.

In the study of characterization the pupil should become acquainted with the leading types in fiction. We have already mentioned the rich man and the poor man, the rich woman and the poor woman, the rich child and the poor child, which may perhaps best be studied in pairs.

OLD AND YOUNG.

Another universal type in fiction is the grandmother and grandfather, whose peculiar character-

istics come out when surrounded by children. Granny should have a group of little girls about her, or should live alone on the hill, while the school children go by and mock at her. The old man is sometimes the butt for teasing by the small boys; or else he is the kindly old grand-dad who tells stories and makes kites, and the like. The old man or woman is an easy type to study in its variations, and makes the best means for the study of the opposite type, the child. The study of children is secondary, but none the less important. Beside the value of the contrast, it is much easier to be simple and natural in the description of the old people if the attention is divided between them and the children. If both the old people and the children are well described, the pupil will have caught the essentials of characterization, for they consist in fully realizing contrasting extremes.

SERVANT AND MISTRESS OR MASTER.

Still another universal type which it is essential to study is the servant, the hired girl and the hired man, who must be described in connection with master or mistress. There is the city mistress, and the spruce maid in white cap and apron;

there is the hired girl in the country farmhouse who eats at the same table with her mistress, and with whom the mistress works side by side in the kitchen. There is the city coachman or gardener and his gentleman master, who comes home from business at night to criticise the work, make suggestions, and be respectfully addressed; and again, the hired man who works with the farmer in the same field as a genuine helper, without, however, taking the responsibility and risk, the worry and effort, or sharing in the hope for the future, except as a sympathetic outsider.

THE CRIMINAL AND THE GUILELESS.

Another type that should be studied is the criminal. He may be old or young, but usually he should be middle-aged; he may be rough and vicious-looking, or sleek and oily. And he is best understood when placed in contrast with the sweet and innocent. Place him in the same lodging-house with the guileless old man, or bring him into contrast with a sweet young girl, an innocent, generous child, or a good woman. The criminal may be the son of a good mother, or the daughter of a kind father. The chief type of the criminal is

the man; but woman forms a very interesting variety and one extremely useful to study. There is the young girl who tells lies and gets angry with her mother; and by her side we may place the wayward young woman who runs away from home to seek her fortune. The boy who runs away to seek his fortune is one of the most familiar characters in romance. There is no reason why the girl should not, in these modern days of women's work, do the same. The two may even come together and work out their fortunes side by side.

TOWN AND COUNTRY PEOPLE.

There are two other types which we must not neglect, the country boy and the town boy, or the country girl and the girl of the city, or the farmer and the man of business. These types are as universal and as generally familiar as the others we we have mentioned, and have formed the basis for innumerable novels. The variations are great and the conditions under which the two come together open the field to infinite invention; but there is not a child but knows something of both.

THE HEROIC AND THE COMMONPLACE.

Lastly we may speak of the great and heroic, and the commonplace, the ordinary. The theme of many a novel has been the young man or woman who endeavors to raise himself or his above the surroundings which depress and drag down. Noble sentiments may be found in man or woman, boy or girl alike, in a great variety of personalities and conditions. We may have the practical, hard-headed, patient struggler, or the vague dreamer, constantly misunderstood and thwarted. But the noble person is not clear and real without the conditions or companions which strive against him. These adverse persons or conditions need not necessarily be bad; they are merely blunt, unresponsive, unintelligent, and so very different from the typical criminal, who is evil active not passive. In some form or other, this type is always the hero.

COMBINING TYPES.

After studying these different types in pairs as types, the next step is to combine them. The rich and the poor may be either of the country or of the town. The country poor and the town poor

are very different, and by combining country poor and town poor, or country rich and town rich we have two entirely new sets of contrasting personalities. And any of these may be good or bad, heroic or commonplace. It is even possible, as in many of Dickens's characters, for those born and reared in criminal surroundings to be essentially heroic and good at heart. And to produce variations on the universal types I have pointed out, the types due to locality may be introduced. The rich man may be French, English or American, Negro, Chinese, or Yankee farmer. Not every one is familiar with all these types, however, and it is a mistake to try to describe types or personalities which are only myths.

THE WRITER MUST CLING TO THE CHARACTERS HE KNOWS BEST.

The chief object is to develop the rich stores of knowledge of human nature already in the mind of the pupil, whoever or whatever he may be. The stock of information that each one has is quite enough without going farther afield. Jane Austen, one of the greatest of writers of fiction, was born and brought up in a country village, and very sel-

dom left it, never for any length of time. The types of characters she was familiar with were very few, but they were quite enough to make her fame. The people Miss Mary Wilkins knows thoroughly are confined to a very narrow range of types, but she has made the reputation of a genius by confining herself to them.

VII.

SENTIMENT.

Fiction deals chiefly with sentiment, and to understand and master it is one of the chief objects of the student. Sentiment does not necessarily mean love, however. It is the feelings that are aroused by every incident in human life, and these are as various as life itself, as the range of the human mind.

The study of feeling is one of the most valuable and the most interesting that can be imagined, and one of the most useful practically in life. It gives the habit of self-analysis, for sentiment is something that can be studied only in one's self primarily. Having become a thorough master of one's own moods, one comes to understand the feelings of others by comparison, and this systematic comparison even assists us to develop our knowledge of ourselves.

One thing more must be premised. In describing feeling or sentiment, the only means possible is comparison to material things or to well-known moods.

HOW TO STUDY EMOTIONS.

The most complicated and intricate of all the well-known sentiments is that of love. Perhaps the simplest is fear. To those unaccustomed to self-analysis, the feelings are as unaccountable as the wind which blows; and to get some insight into them we must begin with the simplest and study each in succession carefully.

As we examined the various types of human character in pairs, we should examine the various universal sentiments in contrasting couples. Against fear set courage, against love set hate, against greed set generosity, against the sense of beauty the sense of ugliness, against the sense of admiration the sense of disgust, etc.

FEAR.

To begin our exercise with the study of fear, let us describe carefully various situations. How would you feel if a burglar should hold you up and place a revolver at your head? As you have never undergone the experience you do not know; but you can make a shrewd guess at it. How did you feel when father or mother was about to chas-

tise you? How did you feel when standing on the top of a high building from which you might fall? How did you feel when in the street a rapidly driven team of horses came near running over you? How did you feel when a falling stick or stone or other missile came near falling on your head? Thinking of all these things, would you (looking on yourself purely as an outsider) be willing to advance to the mouth of a cannon in battle?

COURAGE.

To answer this last question a new element must enter in. Frequently two sentiments oppose each other, and the strongest of course controls. Fear is a perfectly natural, but at the same time a low, passion. Courage is the balancing of some nobler passion against it that outweighs it. The natural love of life makes us all desirous of preserving ourselves, and a willingness to die without cause is a sign of weakness. No healthy, sane man would walk to the cannon's mouth without a sufficient reason. This reason may be a patriotic devotion to country. If patriotism is stronger than a natural love of life, a soldier will walk up to the

cannon's mouth without shrinking. A mother loves her child more than her own life, and dashes under the horses' hoofs to rescue the infant about to be crushed; the sentiment of love of admiration and glory is stronger than the love of life when a tight-rope walker will endanger his existence; etc.

GENEROSITY AND ITS REVERSE.

Let us examine the sentiment of generosity and the contrasting sentiment of economy. If generosity is dominant, we have an instinctive impulse to give something to a poor child on the street, to help a poor woman who has fallen down, to yield to a companion the coveted apple, to give and do at every opportunity offered. But against that may be set the reflection that if we give we shall not have for ourselves, we would starve, die, waste our substance and our energy. The fast young man who throws his money broadcast, to every one who asks him for a loan, or accepts his hospitality, is criminally generous. Against him we have the miser. In order to understand the sentiment we must examine our own feelings under such circumstances as those named, or others like them, and especially watch the conflict of emotions,

which we may describe by figures of speech and comparisons to material things.

THE SENSE OF BEAUTY.

We must now examine feeling from a different point of view, namely the sentiments that arise in the presence or at the thought of beautiful or ugly objects. To all intents and purposes beauty and ugliness are sentiments. Certain feelings, certain unconscious impulses, rise within us when we behold a beautiful woman or a beautiful sunset or a beautiful vase. Certain opposite feelings appear unconsciously when we behold a hideous old man, or a dull, murky sky. In the case of beauty and ugliness, the practical question is, What is it that gives rise to the sentiment of pleasure which we call beauty? What goes to make up a beautiful girl, for instance? Shape and mould of feature and of figure, color of hair and eyes, grace, dignity, and, more than all, certain qualities which we find it very difficult to analyze. No more interesting exercise can be imagined than a series of papers on what constitutes a beautiful woman or a pretty girl, that is, a description of such a person in all the minute details which make it possible for those who listen

to realize the conception. The same exercise may be repeated in the description of a handsome man. In contrast with this an interesting question arises when we ask, What is it that is positively fascinating and attractive in a man or woman who by every rule of perfection should be hideously ugly? Compare also the effect of certain sculptured faces that appear to be hideous, but nevertheless are attractive. Try to describe such a beautiful though ugly face so that others may realize and understand it.

Most interesting sentiments to study, — in others if not in ourselves,—are the sentiments of vanity and pride. What is the difference between them? Is vanity mere love of admiration? Is pride mere haughty reserve? We associate vanity especially with women. What would constitute a vain man? Personal appearance is not everything. Vanity may exist in our record in scholarship, in our superiority in sports, in anything and everything which excites admiration in others. But this admiration may be excited and yet no feeling of vanity will arise in the person who excites. Consider those persons who are indifferent to praise and blame. Is not this studied indifference pride? We

speak of cold pride and empty vanity, and a popular phrase is "light as vanity." In studying these sentiments we must remember that both pride and vanity in their proper places are not faults but virtues: A due regard for the opinion of others is decency, is an incentive to work, etc.; and pride prevents men and women from sinking to ignoble lives, or unbending because of hardships.

THESE SENTIMENTS SHOULD BE EXPLAINED.

The subject may seem complicated to a certain extent. It may become very complicated; but also it may be treated simply. The sentiments mentioned are so common that they should be explained even to children, who from every day observation may comprehend something of their meaning.

THE RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT.

Another sentiment which must not be omitted, but except in special cases is too difficult to be studied in this connection, is the religious sentiment. One phase of it, however, is perfectly open to general study, and that is self-sacrifice for the principle of right, wherever, however it may be found. Stories of self-sacrifice cover the whole

range of characters which we have examined, and involve in one way or another all other sentiments. And yet it is a sentiment by itself, and has been the theme of some of the best stories in the language. The sense of duty is also a sentiment. It compels people to do a great variety of things which their reason does not insist on, and for which they are naturally disinclined except for the insistence of this sense.

LOVE.

The sentiment which has come to be called pre-eminently " sentiment " is that of love, or personal affection in one form or another. A sentiment of any kind carrying the whole nature away against the dictates of all other sentiments, and against reason and every restraining force (at least for a time) is called a passion. And *the* passion is the passion of love. But there may be a religious passion, a passion of generosity, a passion for beauty (that is, a passion for art), a passion of pride. The well known passion between men and women we may pass over for the time, and regard the personal sentiment in its various other relations. A woman's love for her child is a sentiment, and

one capable of very wide study. We may take a mother from any class or condition of society, and watch the manifestation of her regard for her child. Of course in the normal state it is not perceptible. To exhibit it, we must take the child away, for instance. Maternal love comes out especially in fighting for the life or welfare of the child, and the subject is one full of dramatic possibilities. Another interesting phase of it is seen when the mother must choose between the welfare of two children. Which shall she sacrifice? There is also such a thing as paternal love, and paternal and maternal love may sometimes be at variance. Likewise, love of life, pride of the world, etc., may be found to conflict with the sentiment of parental affection. There is also the sentiment of friendship, the test of which, so often exhibited in fiction, is most plainly seen when two friends love the same man or the same woman.

VIII.

THE LOVE STORY.

The study of fiction in schools and elsewhere should be primarily the study of life. There is large opportunity for touching on necessary though delicate questions not found in any other field of study, and this opportunity should not be ignored. The relations between men and women are a delicate subject, yet they form the basis of the great mass of fiction, the chief topic for reading and secret thought during the formative years of early manhood and womanhood. There would be no reason, therefore, why through the medium of a study of love stories, these questions may not be examined.

THE UTILITY OF LOVE IN FICTION.

The treatment of love in fiction is rarely understood by beginners in writing. Few skillful novelists direct their attention specifically at love, but make love the excuse and means for studying life in all its length and breadth. And this is the reason for it: Under the influence of a powerful

passion the whole nature of a man or woman becomes clear and apparent. In his passive state a human being is more or less colorless, indistinct, like a photographic negative that has not yet been developed. The picture lies in the dark film, but it is undeveloped. Passion is like a powerful developer. It rouses the blood, strains the nerves, calls out all the other sentiments, good and evil, attractive and repugnant. The novelist who desires to study life finds this universal developer of the utmost service to him, not because of his interest in love itself, but because of the startling relief into which it throws all other elements. The love story is primarily the study of a man or woman under the influence of passion, when every characteristic of his nature has been brought out clearly and definitely. We all know how under such stress some people will become thieves, murderers, slanderers, while others will manifest a sublime heroism, undergo all manner of suffering, or perhaps change from a life of thriftlessness to one of hard work and patient endeavor. The contrast between the life before the passion is applied, and the life after, has its marked advantages. However, if the opening picture is unattractive, the

writer will find it difficult to get sympathy for his heroic character.

DANGER IN LOVE STORIES AND THE REMEDY.

There are two dangers in love stories, mawkish sentimentality and exaggerated romance. To avoid these the student should write love stories of persons as far removed from his own condition in life as possible. The love story of Greenlanders will involve all the phases of sentiment manifest in affairs of the heart nearer home; but the distance and the strange conditions will occupy the attention to a certain degree and prevent exaggeration of sentimentality. So the study of a love affair between two old country people would be too full of humors for sentimentality. As a variation upon this we may study the love between two poor children, a little bootblack and a little newsgirl.

A GOOD EXERCISE.

One of the most useful exercises that can be devised, and a very interesting and satisfactory one, is to study characters in the manner detailed in the chapter on "Characterization," and when we have realized the characters and become familiar

with them, to describe the love affair of the life of each. Grandfather had a love affair, so did grandmother; that cross old maid had a love affair, that lovely little girl has not had one yet, but she will some day. Let the child be gifted with second sight, and looking into her future describe her own coming experience as it might seem to her childish mind.

LOVE IN HISTORY.

Another method of great value, for the study of character as well as of the love story, is to become familiar with the great personages of history, and then tell the story of their loves. Washington had a love story; so did Lincoln. Queen Elizabeth had several, and those of Mary Queen of Scots are famous. Did Joan of Arc have one, or Charlotte Corday? If history does not give the trivial details they should be invented, and all the variations of feelings described.

HOW TO WRITE ABOUT LOVE.

The greatest difficulty which the student meets in the study of sentiment is in describing it. To tell the main outline of the story is dry and in-

effective; to enlarge upon the passion by direct description is equally vain. Sentiment is betrayed by scores of little nameless acts, words, gestures, expressions. One of the most valuable studies in human nature would be the details of a love story in which no words of affection are spoken and in which no overt acts take place. All is conveyed by the manner of speaking, the implications of expression of face—eyes, mouth, brows, cheeks—showing how the unnamed feeling grows in casual daily intercourse, until the slightest act precipitates an explosion. Or the love may be an impossible one, that can never be expressed; or the lovers may be separated for years just at the critical moment.

QUEER CHARACTERS IN LOVE.

Another most interesting phase of the subject deals with those who fall in love with each other. It is not difficult to make a collection of strange cases of utterly unlike persons finding a mutual attraction. The cats' meat-man falls in love with the washer-woman: how does he manage it? Colored old Aunt Susan is going to be married, and to a shiftless young nigger: why did she decide on such a course?

THE CAUSE OF LOVE.

The explanation of attraction and repulsion has always been a closed mystery; but the best illustrations of the probable subtle causes which lead to union or disunion which has come in my way was given by an astrologer, who said that at the moment of birth the sun and moon and various planets whose light reached the earth, fixed in the brain of each person certain definite and various vibrations, like the vibrations of heat or light, or let us say like the various notes on a violin string. One person had a combination of vibrations of different notes which made a chord, and another had another combination that made a different chord. Now if the combination of vibrations in one person harmonized with those in another, love ensued. The astrologer claimed that he could always predict love or hate, for if the sun or moon in one nativity were on the place of the moon or sun in another, there would be two vibrations alike, and hence so much harmony. But if they were at variance there would be clashing. Now, quite apart from the truth of the astrologer's theory, any one may come to the conclusion that love is like some subtle harmony. We know that a variety of com-

binations of notes may produce a chord; and we know that a variety of human characteristics will seem to fit into each other. At the same time, certain characteristics may produce harmony, while certain others produce discord. The harmony is the first to be perceived,—or it may be the discord, and the other develops after a time.

LOVERS' QUARRELS.

The phases of love, and the human nature that is brought out by it, should be studied in their discord as well as in their concord. Lovers' quarrels are a prolific topic for fiction. Given your living, human characters, if they fall into love they are almost certain to fall out again on some occasion or for some reason. How did it happen? If the repulsion was stronger than the attraction, the falling out was permanent; if the attraction were the stronger, nothing would prevent a reconciliation. Lovers' quarrels are notoriously for trivial reasons. The explanation is found in the subtle discord of natures. The irritation is spontaneous, due to over-association, and an excuse is found in anything. Besides, love excites all sorts of fears and suspicions, which operate to the same end.

THE OPPOSITES OF LOVE.

Jealousy and hatred must be studied in the same connection, for they are the opposites. The fiercest love is frequently followed by the fiercest hatred. Jealousy is in a way the measure of love. If the affection of love is intense, and anything threatens it, or seems to threaten, the whole nature is roused to defend the affection.

STUDY OF CHARACTER, ONLY TRUE BASIS FOR STORY-WRITING.

The only safe and satisfactory way of writing stories of love or passion in any way is to base all such effort on a primary study of character. Get your characters. Study them in their habits at home, their relations with friends, their thoughts, ambitions, inclinations. Take time to make yourself thoroughly familiar with them. Know absolutely everything about them, as you know everything about your most intimate friend, or yourself. Then you can put them through the whole gamut of love, hate, jealousy, suspicion, pride, vanity, waywardness, generosity, self-sacrifice, with great precision. In fiction everything is based on charac-

ter, and without that all such studies as that of the present chapter must be vain and profitless. Moreover, only a great character is capable of great passions. To write an intense and dramatic love story, a preliminary study of at least one great character must be made. And against every great character, great difficulties, or other great characters, must be set. The greatest animal shows none of its strength until it comes into action, until it has something to oppose it and bring out its force.

ADJUSTMENT OF MOTIVE.

Moreover, the strong forces brought together in a story must be so well understood that their strength is nicely measured, and the hero is not made to lift a thousand pounds when a hundred is all that the circumstances require. When the force of motive is really mastered no one will do anything without a good reason for doing it, as is the case in actual life. And this is more than ever necessary when strong passions are brought into play. Then weak strings snap, and inadequate motive produces absurdity. Every effort must be nicely adjusted to the resistance offered.

IX.

FANCY AND INVENTION.

The faculty of invention in fiction, or fancy, or imagination, as it is variously denominated, has by long association been considered the leading essential. Modern tendences have, however, let imaginative invention fall into decay in the pursuit of faithful realism. Romance, as it is more commonly denominated now, stubbornly holds its ground nevertheless. The truth is that effective romantic invention must be based, in a way, on hard and fast realism. We must have our thorough knowledge of real conditions and characters in order to apply to them the yeast of invention. For instance, to try to write of the planet Mars even in the most fanciful and romantic way, without any basis of scientific knowledge, would be a failure. Chivalrous knights and the historic pageantry of Dumas's novels likewise must have their hard and vigorous knowledge of human character and motive, if not of medieval conditions.

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

The simplest and most practical study in invention is the reproduction of a modern Robinson Crusoe. The actual experiences of a man cast on a desert island are, by force of the ancient example of Defoe, bound to be thorougly practical and within the knowledge of every one. Every day life must be reproduced under novel and fascinating conditions. Of course the real story of greatest interest is that told in answer to the question, What would you do if cast on a lonely island? An infinite number of details are called for, and a patient, painstaking observation of passing habits and resources is developed.

NOVELS OF IMAGINATION.

As a means of stimulating the imagination in this direction it is worth while reading some of the masterpieces of fiction, in which we may find a great variety of strange conditions. Captain Marryatt's "Pacha of Many Tales" is a mine of wonderful invention. "Frankenstein" is a book of invention on quite different lines. Modern science is brought into service in the work of H. D. Wells, author of

"The Time-Machine," "Dr. Moreau," etc., and we all know Jules Verne with his "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea."

SUPPOSE!

But pleasant fiction can be made for ourselves by the introduction of some supposition into our everyday life. Suppose one morning the sun did not rise. The strange confusion into which the world would be thrown might be described in a thousand different ways, and not one of us but would have as good a knowledge of the facts and conditions as any other. Again, suppose that the earth were struck by a comet and driven rapidly toward the sun. The increasing heat would drive every one toward the north and south poles. Arctic exploration would then no longer be surrounded by difficulty, and perhaps the polar regions would become a new America. Then if the earth returned to its original distance, or a greater distance, we can imagine the freezing out of the arctic settlements, which would become embedded in ice, as Pompeii was in the ashes of Vesuvius; and perhaps hardy discoverers of the future would unearth them.

In modern times science furnished the best

field for inventive imagination. We may describe the experiences also of a man under the sea, supposing that he could live under water like a fish; we may imagine the experiences of a man who was of microscopic size and lived on a tiny bubble of water. An interesting story has been told of a man who stole a diamond and by shaping it into a lens so that he could observe microscopic beings in a small hole in the center of it, beheld there a beautiful woman with whom he fell in love. In spite of all his frantic desire, he was obliged to watch the water drop dry up and the beautiful creature perish under his eyes without any power to assist her. Gulliver's Lilliputians were merely men and women of a small size. This one change of size produced a most fascinating effect on his satirical studies of life.

But there are other methods of invention which involve the application only of actual and acknowledged principles. Suppose that you or I should invent an actual flying-machine; or suppose we took the traditional journey on the back of a condor: the narrative of the trip would be, or could be made, of intense interest. Suppose you were to fall heir to immense wealth: what would

you do with it? Suppose a cipher locating a treasure were put in your hands, like that which William Legrand found, in Poe's tale of "The Gold-bug": how would you set to work to find the treasure? Suppose you were gifted with a magic tongue, a power of oratory: how, considering your present conditions, would you make it lead you to fame? If you are a boy, what would you do if you were a girl? If you are a girl, what would you do if you were a boy? Supposition of this sort might go on indefinitely.

A FAMILIAR CHARACTER UNDER STRANGE CONDITIONS.

In all these romances the essential thing is that we should have a very clear notion of the character that is to act under the strange conditions. If we do not understand human nature, but merely invent at random, our imaginings will be vain and utterly uninteresting. To be interesting, half of our picture must be real in some way.

It is not necessary that the character be normal or merely commonplace, however. Our invention may be applied to suppositions in character

itself. Suppose a person who has such a passion for giving away that he gives everything that he possesses or ever comes to possess: his dilemmas might make an extremely interesting story; and if you wanted a real example of such improvidence you might turn to the biography of Oliver Goldsmith. Exaggerate the love of money and you have the greedy miser, whose experiences and sufferings would be an admirable study in invention as well as in characterization. Suppose a man with an inveterate hatred of women: to what conduct would it lead him? Suppose a child with a heart of steel: what would happen if all the tender feelings were absent in a human being? The narrative of a life of that sort would be worth writing.

FANCY.

There is another form of invention which deserves special study though it cannot very well be applied to the construction of a whole story. It is called fancy, and is the strange forms in which thoughts seem to crystalize. The fancies in smoke wreathes have been admirably developed in such books as Ik Marvel's "Reveries of a Bachelor" and J. M. Barrie's "My Lady Nicotine."

But the subject is still prolific. A little more universal are the fancies suggested by the open fire, by the glow of sunset or sunrise, by the smooth, blue lake or the ocean, by the clouds in all their multiform shapes, by the stars. These objects rouse vague feelings which we endeavor to describe by figures of speech, fanciful inventions, a liberal use of expressive adjectives. There is much meaningless fine writing on topics of this sort, and these fanciful studies may also be looked on as a lesson in sentiment. To get something real, original, really interesting out of such topics should be the aim of the student, and he should go about it, not in an exalted mood, but quite in cold blood; or, if he must indulge the exalted mood, let the resulting work be revised the next morning quite away from the glow and glitter, or the soft haze that conceals defects of hard and fast drawing. The same subject may be done over a number of times until it is done with spirit, and yet without sentimental weakness.

TO CULTIVATE THE IMAGINATION.

Nothing so well repays systematic cultivation as the imagination. Natural endowment may be

something; but it is of far more value to learn by careful study the way to unite a cold observation of facts with the inventive faculty. The hard and cold half of the mixture is the more important, for, as a matter of fact, imaginary suppositions are chiefly intended to illustrate or bring out more clearly certain actual characteristics. In light fancy, no doubt, a certain side of our nature finds direct expression; but this expression is often more effective in its repression than in its expansion.

VALUE OF REPRESSION.

Here perhaps is the place to point out the value of repression and restraint, and where it is most needed. Exaggeration, exuberant fancy, prolific inventive imagination, are the proper means to make the commonplace and trivial interesting. But suppose we have for subjects great tragedies, terrific deeds, any of the large and fearful phases of nature or human nature: to make them effective we must employ the severest phraseology. Describe a murder in all its details: here enlargement, figures of speech, fancy and sentiment, though so often used, weaken the effect.

Simple, cold, restrained statement is infinitely stronger. The whole effort should be turned toward leading the mind in middle courses, heightening that which is low and common, toning down that which is originally cast in high lights.

KNOW WHEN TO STOP.

Moreover, at all times in order to use fancy and imaginative invention with effect, the writer must know when to stop, when to finish it and return to simple truth. This need is found in every figure of speech, every short paragraph illustrating some sentiment, every description of beauty. Experience and practice alone will give this wide mastery. Fancy and imagination are the most effective weapons of the novelist, they are the element which makes his art so widely popular; but for this very reason they deserve most study and exercise, both in their expansive enlargement and their restraint.

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X.

THE COMPLETE STORY.

The long and assiduous practice on the various elements of story-writing is like the finger exercises for the piano. At the great European conservatories pupils are closely confined to simple finger exercises for two or more years, after which they are quickly put on to difficult classical music; the transition is easy. So in the training for writing fiction: the elements once mastered by long and careful practice, the final results come inevitably. A genius at the piano is not made at a conservatory any more than a genius at novel-writing can be made by a course of training; but application in music or in writing will yield a certain proficiency in the expression of whatever of value the pupil may have. If his possession is little, the result will be accordingly little; if it is much it may not need training of this sort to bring it out. But every master goes through a course of training of some sort, usually a sort of blind hitting away until he strikes the successful note.

FICTION AS A UNIVERSAL EXERCISE IN COMPOSITION.

It is not expected that pupils with whom these exercises are used will in any considerable number of cases become professional writers. This work has not been undertaken for this class. But a command of language for the practical purposes of life is of the utmost use to every man or woman, whether he be lawyer, minister or society woman, or in fact anything bringing him in contact with his fellow men. The various classes of ideas developed in fiction are such as we have occasion oftenest to express, and to command them is to command everything.

But the scope and usefulness of the study is still broader. In this study we are trained to close observation of those features of life in general which we find of the greatest use in dealing practically with our fellow men, with ourselves, and with the children we have to educate. The whole side of life of which fiction treats is represented only in fiction, and fiction alone affords a possible method of examining and studying it with any practical results.

PUTTING THE PARTS OF A STORY TOGETHER.

Having finished our finger exercises, we have yet one matter to consider, the drawing of a complete picture. It does not consist in deliberately putting together all the elements we have considered so far. In fact, the first requisite is that we put out of our minds completely all the rules and principles we have ever learned, forget them, lose ourselves in our subject, and write by instinct, just as we dance by instinct without the help of the directions of the dancing-master, or play the piano by instinct, without thinking specifically of every note and the scientific phraseology connected with it. Moreover, we will find that description, narration, dialogue, character-drawing, fancy, invention, etc., do not come in so many successive paragraphs, but all are inextricably blended, like the multiple colors in a painting, that produce new and quite unknown tints, tints such as no mixer of colors could ever produce.

CHARACTER AND MOTIVE AT THE BASE OF ALL.

And yet there is a certain method of procedure. At the basis and bottom of everything is a clear

conception of human beings, of all that goes to make up a man or woman. Character mastered, two thirds of the work of producing good fiction is accomplished. What is it that goes to make a man or woman? Features, color, manner, expression, characteristics of mental action, of feeling, of passion. But these are not the essential things, the key. At the bottom of everything is the motive that controls the actions of each one of us. What makes a man do so and so? To know that gives the clew to all the subsidiary details. We know how to arrange the perspective of the story, the plot develops its thread, we are never in doubt how we shall proceed with our narrative. We have in our mind first of all certain events or strange facts. The direct object of the story is either to state them clearly so that the reader can form his own conclusion as to the explanation, or in some way to give the explanation, or to exhibit some knowledge of the actions of the human mind or feeling which we have learned. But we must in the whole construction of our story keep clearly in mind the real controlling motive. Was reason at the bottom of the case as stated? Here is a real story, a collection of curious facts. Some reasons

made them what they are. The facts are so stated that the reader may form his own conclusion; or else a theory is developed at the end. Or perhaps we wish to exhibit the controlling motive of caprice, as in a wayward woman; or passion, as in a desperate man; or the compelling force of poverty, or of greed, or perhaps the overshadowing effect of fate. But whatever we do, *the power which makes the action*, *the fundamental cause of everything*, *is the essential thing*, whether we state it, or imply it, or illustrate it by the development of the story.

CONTRAST THE SECRET OF STRENGTH IN A STORY.

Having mastered this element of essential motive, the next thing of importance is to make a vivid impression on the mind of the reader. The bare statement of the case is not enough; we want to drive it home to the reader's consciousness, so that he will see it all without the necessity of applying his mind too hard, for the average reader of fiction is at best but open-minded and indifferent. The great secret of strength is contrast. If we bring the two sides of the question into close contact, the effect is always strong. It shows that we know both sides of the subject, that we are masters

alike of day and night. To pass rapidly from one thing to another is no easy feat. The reader, in transferring his mind from one topic to exactly the opposite, comes to the second one something as a child would, for the sudden development of a new line of action finds his mind in a very receptive mood. Besides, in bold contrasts there is something that always appeals powerfully to the mind; yet in the contrast there must also be somewhere a connecting link. For instance, black ink on white paper is a perfect contrast; but it is not so effective as ink slightly brown, on paper of a softer tint than blue-white. The little brown in the paper forms a natural bridge with the little brown in the ink, and the eye is better satisfied. However sharp the contrast in story-writing, it must not be meaninglessly abrupt. The sweeps and curves of rapid movement must bind the two sides together.

THE BRIGHT SIDE OF LIFE.

The young and uninitiated always incline to the dark and tragic side of life; but the public prefers bright and open pictures. Comedy is certainly easier to master than tragedy; but it is doubtful if the dark and terrible side of life has ever been

dealt with by an author who devoted himself exclusively to that. The best, almost the inevitably necessary, preparation for tragedy is comedy. Otherwise we have morbidity instead of strong, healthy analysis of the diseases of life. Darkness is disease; light is health. Disease may need its analyses, but they must be healthy, whatever their subject is. Certainly preparatory exercises such as we are here studying should be invariably of the light and bright order, and tragedy and morbidity should be striven against with all the force at the teacher's command; for the object to be attained is always health and light, and the young are not adapted to the task of gaining these ends by dealing with darkness and disease.

There are, however, the neutral tints of history, of simple narration of facts. Plain record is at the same time the easiest and most natural, and the most difficult in its possibilities. To get strength and vigor out of everyday statements requires a genius, though anybody can deal with the common and plain without difficulty. But a mastery of the simple and direct should be the invariable preparation for the tragic and dark. Both require a profound knowledge of life.

CONCLUSION.

The author of these exercises believes that the systematic study of fiction from the point of view of actually writing it is the best preparation for handling the English language effectively in whatever direction the public has occasion for it, and that it is likewise the open door to thoughtful observation of those phases of life which are nearest and most important to us, and at the same time least understood. Moreover, it should be the best possible preparation for an intelligent understanding of all great literature. In reading great books we must create after the author his thoughts and conceptions. Why should we depend for this purely on our intuitions, and neglect all systematic study of those principles of creation which we must apply? A beautiful picture is fully appreciated only by a connoisseur, and great music is followed with far greater intelligence by one who is at least an amateur performer himself, who understands an infinite number of details which the untrained listener misses altogether.

But to be effective, all study must be sympathetic and systematic. To take up a study like

this for a few brief lessons, and in a skeptical mood at that, can by no possibility yield favorable results. The subject is too great. It certainly is as great as, if not greater than, the other arts, and we know what time is yearly given in all manner of schools to the piano, the voice, the violin, painting, sculpture, acting; and most of these receive some degree of attention even in our public schools: why not the universal literature of this age, fiction?

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