HOW TO WRITE STORIES

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HOW TO WRITE STORIES

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PREFACE

Most students of the short story have one of two dominant interests in the art. Either they seek culture or they seek a livelihood. If they seek culture, they strive to learn the principles of art and artistic expression, first and foremost. If they aim at a livelihood from writing stories, they wish chiefly to grasp the technique of building a salable story, and this involves the technique of appealing to large masses of magazine readers. In my previous textbooks I have addressed primarily the cultural group. This new volume is written exclusively for the professional. While the major topics must be the same, their treatment differs widely. Literary comparisons and some discussions of esthetic problems found place in my earlier works but have been omitted here. On the other hand, I have found it necessary to take up, for the professional writer, certain psychological matters, notably the emotions, which would have been somewhat out of place in a cultural study of the short story.

Unfortunately, the full treatment of character analysis could not be included, although it logically belongs here. Midway in my studies along that line, my material became so voluminous and so intricate that it could neither be summarized nor subdivided. It will appear as a separate volume in the near future.

Writers who wish a more detailed explanation of practical plot-making processes following the method set forth here are referred to “Narrative Technique” by Thomas H. Uzzell, Harcourt Brace and Company.

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INTRODUCTION

Writers need vocational training even more than many other toilers do. For one thing, they have much more to learn than the rest of the world has. Then, too, many subjects and techniques which the young author should master are incredibly difficult and can be mastered much more economically through the aid of textbooks, lectures, discussions, and experiments.

Centuries ago printers, sculptors, and playwrights learned the value of vocational training. During the past decade journalists have learned it, and today the untrained young man who joins a newspaper staff must compete with graduates of schools of journalism, who outstrip him in general information as well as in newspaper lore. It is only the literary writer who lags behind, as every editor, every literary agent, and many intelligent readers know to their sorrow. With a few exceptions—perhaps eight or ten—our novelists and short story writers exhibit defective craftsmanship too consistently. They fail most often in their knowledge of psychology and nearly as much in their understanding of the basic conditions of the publishing business. Ninety-five writers out of every hundred would gain much from proper systematic instruction here, and the other five would gain little, or nothing only because they are the lucky few who early in life had discovered their own special aptitudes and have unfalteringly developed them.

All this holds true of the novelist and essayist, but not so universally as of the short story writer, especially in America, Leisurely, somewhat informal, and laboring under few restrictions imposed by extraneous factors, the novelist is free to exercise a looser craftsmanship than his fellow author who earns a living by writing in briefer form for the magazines. These periodicals have come, in the natural course of events, to influence the art of the short story amazingly. On the whole it has been a good influence—of this there can be no reasonable doubt. For one thing, it is assuredly true that the enormous demand for stories, week in, week out, down the years, as well as the unprecedented prices paid even for fair stories of certain popular types, is the fundamental cause of our supremacy in this field.

The short story is the highest form of American art. As to this there is not the slightest dispute among competent critics here or abroad. What painting and sculpture were to the ancient Greeks, the short story is to us. It indubitably expresses something distinctive in our ways of feeling and thinking. Some day perhaps a keen psychologist will tell us just what this

distinctive something is. I hope to live to hear his verdict. For the present it is enough to know that in American life and art this mode of expression has "come to stay."

The interest in the short story among Americans seems to be much greater than that manifested elsewhere. The serious attention given to this form of art in our colleges has no parallel abroad. I am not interested just now in explaining this fact—I am rather wishing to make you realize that the art is neither a passing fancy among us Americans nor a trivial thing, in either the artistic or the commercial sense. It is a deeply rooted taste and habit with us; and the new vogue of the motion picture has only served to intensify it.

This intense interest of ours in the short story has made the American product superior to the stories from any other part of the earth. There is much to admire in some of the Russian writers, and even more to wonder at in the French; but, when all the merits are weighed and due consideration given to the number of competent authors and their volume of high grade output, we must say as the sorrowful chamberlain did to Queen Victoria at the yacht race: "Your Majesty, the Americans are first. And there is no second."

There are, in the United States today, a score of excellent story writers to every one of equal skill in any other country. We have a dozen magazines publishing good stories to every one similar publication abroad. We seem to have a thousand story readers where England, France or Germany has a scant hundred. In no other country on earth has this form of art been taken seriously enough to find its place in the universities. And nowhere else has technical skill advanced to such a degree as here.

Every dispassionate and competent observer agrees, I think, that there are many story writers now living who are immeasurably superior to Poe in every respect. It is not so generally admitted that there are many who outrank or at least equal Maupassant, but I do not hesitate to maintain this. I might name a dozen living authors whose philosophy of life, dramatic sense, skill in swift portrayal, and sheer power of words hold their own easily in comparison with the great French master. I think that three or four Americans could be named who, possessing all of Maupassant's powers, add to them other powers which he never displayed—notably "atmosphere" and elemental human sympathy.

You must realize that these facts make it all the more necessary for you to master story technique. To write for an American audience you have to

compete with more skilled authors than you would if you were trying to reach an English, French or German public.

HOW TO WRITE STORIES

CHAPTER I

HOW TO STUDY THESE LESSONS

I must ask you at the outset to take every point made in the following lessons with the utmost seriousness. The ideas here set forth are not personal notions, drawn from some quack theory about fiction. They are conclusions which have been worked out by many different observers and scientists and editors and authors. Some of them were reached two thousand years ago and have not been shaken by centuries of criticism. Some of them are very recent discoveries of psychologists and have been tested in many ways known to scientific method. Some of them represent the mature conclusion of men who have read thousands of manuscripts for publishers and have dealt with the reading public for many years. Some of them come from writers of high rank who have been blessed with the critical sense that enabled them to see their own efforts and methods of work in a detached way. All of them have been tried out for years in almost every important college and university of the United States where advanced fiction writing and journalism are taught. All of them have been studied closely, even suspiciously, by many prominent editors and authors, and with but few exceptions, these persons have recognized the soundness of the statements, as well as the manner of applying them to story telling.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The final test of the system here set forth must be the success of those learners who follow it conscientiously. On this test we may rest the case. For about ten years my teaching methods have been undergoing this test. I have used them myself, and more than two hundred other teachers have tried them out. Several thousand learners have been trained in this manner, and the benefits they have derived are clear. For a few years I tried to follow up their success. While the number of students was small, this was not hard, but pretty soon the task became impossible. Today these students are writing for practically every magazine of any consequence in the United States, Canada and England. Many of them have written successful novels. A few have written stories for educational purposes; some are doing similar work in the field of publicity; some are seeing their plays staged; a number have made good in the motion picture world; while in the newspaper field there are scores

engaged in general reporting, special correspondence work, and feature story writing.

All this I mention here not by way of boasting but for a better purpose. I want you to rid yourself of that doubting frame of mind which is so common in learners. Don't suspect a statement simply because it sounds strange to you. Don't let skepticism become a cloak for laziness or lack of will, as it often does with some people. When you come to some of the more difficult lessons in this course, lessons which may demand days, if not weeks, for mastering, don't lean back and say to yourself: "What's the use of all this dry stuff anyhow? I'll bet Kipling and Jack London never bothered to learn it. If they can win without it, I can."

If you do this, you will be wrong,—wrong in your surrender and wrong in your assumptions. Kipling and London and all the rest did bother to learn everything that is in these lessons. They picked it all up from many sources and, notably in Jack London's case, lost years of precious time simply because all the facts and rules about story telling had not been brought together concisely in a single book.

You can go pretty far in this art with only moderate application. The average story of the average magazine can be written with a year's training in the principles herein set forth. To go beyond this point requires intense application. You must master the niceties of this technique as thoroughly as a great pianist masters the keyboard. There is no limit to the time and effort you can profitably spend on such progress. In so far as you do not exert yourself thus, you will remain on a lower level of skill.

There are many ways of studying these lessons. Each of you can find the way suited to your particular need. Make sure what your need and your interest is; then study accordingly.

Suppose you are a business man having no intention of becoming a professional writer but simply interested in story telling as it relates to advertising and publicity work in your own line of business. I advise you to read the course through, two or three lessons at a sitting; ignore the exercises but study the examples very carefully. You will find certain sections quite useless and others decidedly illuminating.

If you are engaged in advertising and publicity work, and have no thought of changing to fiction, I recommend that you study much more thoroughly and work out at least one exercise in conjunction with each lesson. The bearing of some of the lessons on your work will not be directly apparent. Never mind! See it through, and you will be agreeably surprised, perhaps months afterward, when the import of such seeming irrelevancies

suddenly flashes on you in connection with some advertising problem. Many advertising and publicity men have followed this course in short form and have found high value in it.

Should you be a teacher of rhetoric or literature, you will probably be familiar with about one-third of the contents at the outset. Skim such sections. But do all the work called for on the remaining sections. The value of the technique as a basis for literary criticism and for teaching young people how to write is widely recognized. The lessons dealing with popular tastes and human interest and market demands will not prove particularly useful for your own teaching work, though you may be glad to know the facts they set forth. If you are as busy as most teachers are, however, I advise you to pass them by, so that you may concentrate on the sections dealing with character drawing and complications.

If you are a college student and want to find whether you can become a writer, there is only one course to pursue. Master every thought in the whole series. Work through every exercise conscientiously. Do not rush! That is the unpardonable sin in this field. If you come upon something you do not understand, go over it several times. If you still do not get it, pass on to the next lesson, and, weeks later, return to the knotty point and hack away at it again. It is absolutely certain that you will miss many of the important features of the course on first reading. These features are subtle. Hard study and much observation of human nature are the price of mastery here.

If you are already engaged in any kind of literary work, be it newspaper reporting or the higher forms of fiction, I cannot lay down any rule of procedure for you. Probably you are chiefly concerned with discovering some special weakness in your own writing methods and the way of overcoming it. Your trouble may lie anywhere in the whole range of technique. What you must do is to run through the lessons till you find what you need.

If you have never done any professional writing and have not studied literature and criticism closely, but want to learn how to write, you should do all the work here *as slowly and as thoroughly as possible*. Spend three years at it. You should carry on considerable outside reading at the same time. You should study the masters of style, men like Stevenson, Hardy, Conrad, Jack London, and others. You should also make a point of reading fiction in the current magazines. You must get rid of the notion that you can leap to fame in a month or a year. Be content with steady progress, however slow it may seem. Let every new idea soak in. And let your writing habits develop apace.

CHAPTER II

FINDING YOURSELF

Before any sensible man enters upon a course of action involving much hard work and perhaps sacrifice, he seeks to assure himself that the enterprise is worth while. He ought to do this if he intends to become a story teller, just as surely as he should and would do it were he to invest his fortune and time in, say, shipbuilding or the grocery business. If he does not, he is pretty sure to find himself writing in haste and repenting at leisure. For his failure to investigate the worth-while-ness of the story teller's art means a failure to study the story market, its nature, its soundness, its changing demands and its permanent needs. And this neglect is quite certain to have the same evil consequences it would lead to with the grocer who opened his store and bought his stock without first taking pains to ascertain how many other grocers there happened to be in the neighborhood, and whether the people roundabout preferred pickles or pomegranates.

So, as a mere matter of prudence and common sense, we must first ask and answer the question: *What's the use of telling stories?*

When I raise this question, I mean to include under it the telling of all kinds of stories. I have in mind the telling of true stories, such as the faithful newspaper reporter sets down when he tells you about the terrible fire in Smith's Furniture Factory last night at 10:30, which destroyed 12,000 golden oak chairs and 1,234 folding beds. I also have in mind here the telling of stories by political speakers and after-dinner orators, the telling of stories about the wonders of nature by the observant scientist watching the belching volcano and the devastating earthquake. Of course, I also am considering the telling of such stories as magazine editors and book publishers would buy, but I wish to warn you at the outset that you ought not to think that the story teller's art is confined to this commercial field; nor should you suppose that this field alone is worth while.

The Truth is that

> **The story teller's art is the art of narrative, and this art deals with the events of history as well as with imaginary affairs. It likewise deals with narrative told for the purposes of education and culture no less than with narrative told for**

simple entertainment. It is the art of reporting men and things in action. Whether these men and things be real or imaginary makes little difference, so far as the art and its technique are concerned. It requires essentially the same skill and the same understanding to describe the actions of a real man as it does to depict those of an imaginary man.

Perhaps your personal interest lies in writing commercially successful fiction. If so, then you will be learning much more than the trick of magazine writing when you master the art of story telling.

Now, this question: What's the use?—divides promptly into two distinct problems:

1. What's the use of story telling—to the *reader*?
2. What's the use of story telling—to the *writer*?

I think we ought to consider the reader first. For, after all, it is he who is the ultimate consumer of your tales. He is the market which you must know and reach, no matter which sort of stories you may wish to send forth. Of course, it may be that you do not care whether your tales please any reader or win the attention of any publisher; but if you are thus disposed, as a few great writers like Stendhal and Henry James have been, you are an extraordinary exception and probably will not benefit by any study of story writing such as here follows. Every normal man who wants to write, whether it be a letter or a novel, naturally wants to write it for somebody to read. Writing is a form of communication; it is a rather meaningless performance if it is not clearly addressed to some particular reader or reading group. And, needless to say, it is, when thus indulged in, a highly unprofitable business, as the balance sheets of Stendhal and Henry James prove only too clearly. So I assume you are willing to agree with me that you ought to think carefully, at the outset, about your prospective reader and the value your writing may have for him.

WHAT'S THE USE TO THE READER?

Story telling serves two tremendous purposes for the reader:

1. Education.
2. Entertainment.

As for its educational value, this may be of any four distinct kinds:

1. Simple information.
2. Interpretation of facts already known, but not understood by the reader.
3. Stimulation of one's imagination.
4. Stimulation of one's will—which I should call moral inspiration.

As for the value of the story by way of entertainment, it is two-fold:

1. It may achieve simple relaxation, the "let-down" of the well-known "Tired Business Man" at the end of a hard day's grind; or
2. It may bring intellectual pleasure through the play of ideas in the form of fantasy.

Very briefly let us look at each of these values. I think most of them will surprise you with their importance. Few story tellers realize, until pretty late in life, what an immense service their art can and does render to mankind in these many ways. If you appreciate its value at the beginning of your career, probably you will go at the drudgery of learning with much stronger and more stubborn enthusiasm.

Story telling is the most universal and the easiest way of teaching people.

The foundation of all education is story telling. The teller of tales is the first and the last teacher of mankind.

This truth was discovered thousands of years ago. It has never been successfully challenged, and probably never will be. For it grows out of some peculiarities of human nature that are essentially unchangeable, as we shall see in a moment. It was story telling that Plato, the great philosopher of Athens, resorted to when, finding the truths of his difficult philosophy too hard for men to grasp in their abstract form, he sought to make himself clear by recasting his beliefs in the form of fables. It was story telling that Christ adopted when, in his efforts to reach the simple folk of the countryside, he invented the wonderful parables. And still today it is story telling that our wisest educators employ whenever they seek to instruct the young or enlighten the old as to subjects that are somewhat difficult.

Nowhere is this art more useful than in the conveying of elementary information to children. For many years French school children have been learning the geography of France chiefly through a remarkable story book

entitled *Le Tour de France*. This book recounts the wanderings, the fortunes and misfortunes of two boys who set out alone from Alsace, after the death of their parents, to find their uncle in Marseilles. The episodes are vivid and most effectively told. The reader's interest in the narrative is well sustained. And at the same time the ingenious author has woven into the adventures accurate accounts of the towns the boys visited, faithful descriptions of mountains, rivers, factories, railroads and the people, with the results that the reader, when he has finished the book, has acquired a very solid understanding of France. In passing, I may remark that such a book written about the United States ought to find a ready market, and it might run through dozens of editions, as the French book has.

Look at the more recent textbooks on geography, hygiene, history and politics published in our own land, and you will find an ever increasing number of them being cast, in part or in whole, into narrative form. This is no fad of the moment. It is a tendency which has been steadily strengthening ever since men began to take education seriously. You will find its beginning far back in the school teaching methods of ancient Greece. You will come upon it again in the class rooms of old Rome, in the cloisters of the church fathers, in the funny old books on moral instruction, which our own forefathers in England and Colonial America used, in the "Rollo Books," in a host of travel books, such as the old "Boy Travellers Series," from which I learned more geography than ever in the schoolroom. And already we see the beginnings of a still further expansion of this same tendency in the field of the motion picture.

The motion picture is a form of story telling. It is narrative no less truly than a chapter from the Arabian Nights. It happens to present its events in the form of photographs, rather than in words; but this is, after all, a slight difference. If anything, the picture is much more nearly pure narrative than the written tale ever can be; for words, in spite of the writer's best intentions, always suggest ideas and interpretations which color and even alter the meaning of the simple events of the story. Now, the motion picture is rapidly becoming one of our greatest educational instruments—and this in spite of the lingering hostility of some conservative educators toward it, and also in spite of the disrepute into which the screen has been brought, thanks to the colossal stupidity and vulgarity of some producers, who should have been jailed long ago by a Vigilance Committee. Today the American people are probably being educated more extensively and more thoroughly in geography, in politics and in modern history during the few minutes which they spend daily in the motion picture theatres than their children are during their long hours in the schools. The travel pictures, the pictorial news, the

recent device of throwing on the screen pungent editorial comments from the daily papers, and the occasional appearance of distinctly educational drama,—all these, I claim, are exerting an immense influence upon the minds of Americans. And more and more the possibilities of teaching by way of the screen are being appreciated; so that, at this moment, we see more progressive instructors using it to teach athletes how to run, jump and box; workmen how to handle their tools; and medical students how to render first aid and operate on patients.

Potent as the motion picture is though, it still lags far behind the press in its educational influence. I think everybody will agree that the modern newspaper and magazine do more in the way of informing the public than either the screen or the school does. And everybody knows that the greater part of every such publication is devoted to story telling. Remember, story telling includes the true stories no less than the imaginary, for the art is one and the same, with but minor technical differences. And the newspaper's first page, filled as it usually is with reports of important current events, is a feat of story telling no less truly than Mrs. Rinehart's mysteries are.

Now, think back over your own experiences and see if you cannot put your finger pretty definitely on the source of some of your strongest opinions. How did you come to believe that the United States ought to go to war against Germany? Did you reason it out? Did you let yourself be persuaded by some argument about the German violations of international law? Or about the undesirability of war? Probably not. The chances are that one day you picked up your newspaper and read on the first page a simple straightforward story about some submarine captain turning his guns on a lifeboat full of helpless women and children. And you threw down the paper and said: "This must stop!"

That's the way men are usually moved to deeds. Not by argument. Not by cool reflection. But by seeing—either in real life or through the testimony of witnesses *who tell the story of men and things in action*.

THE WHY OF IT

You may be interested to know more about the reasons for this curious and universal fact. Why are people influenced more deeply by stories than by argument or exposition, or even moral persuasion? Why is the stump speaker who fills his speech with anecdotes pointing his argument a spell-binder, while the serious and over-solemn scientist or professor who knows a thousand times more about his subject received coldly and perhaps with yawns when he sets forth in strict logical order and with punctilious neatness all the arguments for his thesis?

Well, the deepest reason is quite simple and, I think, understood already by most people who have ever given the matter any thought. It is simply this:

> **Men are what men do. Things are what things do.**
>
> **The world is a world of action and motion.**
>
> **Hence, the most direct and the most convincing way to find out what a man or a thing really is is to find out what that man or thing is doing.**
>
> **No man ever does or ever can make himself known through words and arguments alone. Language, as has been said, is not merely a mode of expression: it is a device for concealing thought. The protestations a man makes, the ideals he claims allegiance to, the arguments he advances on this or that topic, and everything he says is in greater or less degree modified by his interests and desires. He suppresses, he defends, he praises or condemns, he does not state the bald facts either about himself or about the thing he may be talking about. And so**

"By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them."

It is this very well-known fact, the fact that "actions speak louder than words," that is the source of the story teller's remarkable power over mankind. For

> **The story teller reports actions. And thus he presents the truth or comes more closely to presenting it than does anybody else who presents *arguments* and simply makes *appeals*.**

People listen instinctively to the story teller with deeper attention and more respect because, deep down in all of it, there is the half-formed recognition of this truth. We want to see men and things in action, because we know then that we see them as they are. And if we cannot see them ourselves, we want to listen to a faithful witness of their actions, as the next best thing.

This is why we prefer the news columns of our morning paper to the editorial page. This is why we read the same paper every day and are seldom moved to buy books that deal argumentatively with the very subjects that most keenly interest us. This is why one story, well told, can wreck a shelf

full of books that prove the opposite thesis. This is why a speaker who knows how to use narrative to illustrate his point can overshadow the greatest experts in the world.

One of the most striking instances of this unique power of the story teller over the minds of men is to be found in Lincoln's Gettysburg address. To appreciate it, we may look back to the occasion on which it was delivered. On the awful battlefield there had come together men, women and children whose dearest ones had died somewhere on the fields before their eyes. And there they had come to consecrate the spot. Two great men spoke to them, Lincoln and the brilliant Edward Everett.

Everett arose and spoke for two hours on the relation between the federal and the state governments. In an argument which Lincoln himself later declared to have been both new and unusually effective in favor of national supremacy, Everett surveyed the forces that had led to the Civil War and the moral and political principles which ought to guide men in rebuilding the nation. He proved conclusively that the North was in the right, that the Union must be preserved. And doubtless he impressed many of his hearers. But, let me ask, did you ever read his address? Did you ever meet anybody who mentioned it? Have you ever observed it in a book? Have you ever come upon quotations from it emblazoned on walls and monuments? I suspect you have not. And the chief reason why you have not is that, on this same day and before these same hearers, Lincoln had arisen and had said:

> "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.
>
> "Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. . . ."

Do you see what this master of expression did in these undying lines? Do you see that **he told in less than a hundred words the story of America from the Declaration of Independence down to Gettysburg**? Do you see that he began as a story teller, with supremely simple, swift narrative, presenting men in action? Do you see that this narrative sketched in a masterly fashion the motives, the ideals, and the plans of the men of the Revolution and the men of the Civil War?

This is why the Gettysburg address lives in the memory of America. It *tells the story* of the ideals and the struggles of the men of America with a swift simplicity that matches the finest stories in the Bible. Every schoolboy who reads these opening lines *gets a picture*. And it is a picture of people seeing visions, people striving and contriving, people struggling, people fighting, people grim in their determination to do the things they believe in.

Is it any wonder that Everett himself afterward wrote to Lincoln:

> "I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes."

This remark unwittingly sums up the immense difference between story and argument. The story that is even moderately well told invariably comes to the central idea of the occasion. And the argument that is exceptionally keen must count itself lucky if it comes within two hours. For, insofar as we see with clear eyes, men and things in action, we see them as they are.

WHAT'S THE USE TO THE WRITER?

What's the use of story telling to the story teller?

Well, this question, like the one we have just been considering, is not a single one but a number of problems lumped under one phrase.

There are four possible advantages you may derive from story telling.

And it all depends upon you and your desires in life which of these four are worth seeking.

1. **You may choose to tell stories *simply* to please yourself.**
2. **Or to improve your mind.**
3. **Or to earn a living.**
4. **Or to do some good in the world.**

Before you try to answer the question as to the use of story telling, you ought to make sure which of these four advantages interests you personally. Nobody can do this for you. You must know your own mind. You must settle for yourself what you want to get out of life, and how you prefer to spend your time. Having done this, you may then decide which possible use of story telling appeals to you most strongly.

CHAPTER III

PURPOSES IN WRITING STORIES

1. Telling stories for your own pleasure

There are some people who have the "writing bug." They must be telling stories, or else be unhappy. I know a number of such, and presumably you do too. They are, in the main, delightful people to be with. Their minds are bubbling over with anecdotes. They have "to get these off their minds."

Of course, if you want to tell stories just to get them off your mind, just to express yourself, all is well and good. It is for you to say whether you can afford the time and the effort to do it. There is no money in it, and probably no fame. But if you like it and feel the urge, go to it, and Heaven bless you!

2. Telling stories to improve your mind

Every man with a spark of ambition wants to develop his mind to the utmost. He will never be content to know less or to think less than he is capable of. And to all such I can say with the utmost certainty: *story telling is one of the most useful methods for improving your mind, provided, of course, that you pick and choose your subjects and your narrative methods with this end in view*.

I don't mean to say, of course, that anybody who dashes off the cheapest sort of narrative that the newspaper syndicates buy is going to improve his mind much. This would be nonsense. What I do say is that, *if* you want to improve your mind, you can do so effectively by telling stories about such men and such affairs as compel you to observe and analyze human nature closely.

There are two reasons why this is so:

1. **Story telling requires sustained and conscientious use of one's imagination, and imagination is one-half of all genuine thinking.**
2. **Story telling requires much skill in expressing what one sees and hears and thinks; and as psychologists have shown, nobody truly understands anything whatever until**

and unless he has told and explained it to somebody, or applied his knowledge in some other similar way.

1. In all affairs of life, imagination proves useful to the highest degree. The ability to see "in the mind's eye" situations, problems, possibilities that have not yet arisen and may never arise but must be reckoned with, is the very essence of foresight; and foresight is indispensable to success in business and all the other practical affairs of life. The manager of a factory is always having to think of tomorrow and next year; where he will find workmen for the new wing that will be completed next March; what he will do in case the machines for the new wing are not delivered on schedule time; how the chances run for his being able to land the big contract from Jones & Jones next week; and so on. He is dealing in futures, in things that haven't happened. He is thinking about possible events which may take any one of a dozen shapes, according to the skill with which he anticipates their coming and prepares to shape them in advance.

You have doubtless heard much about the man who "lives from hand to mouth" and about the man who lives "from day to day." Both of these unfortunates are men without well trained imaginations. They are the failures of life, the unskilled toilers, the loafers, the incompetents. They do not speculate about tomorrow, so tomorrow pounces upon them and seizes them unawares.

"I never read fiction. It is a waste of time. Life is too full of serious things to fritter the hours away over unrealities."

These words were uttered not long ago by an American prominent in business and politics. He is a man of unquestionable ability in certain administrative work and he commands a large salary. As all his friends know, however, his success at this work has been due in but slight degree to his own constructive ability. His concern has flourished almost entirely as a result of certain natural advantages which it possesses and incidentally as a result of the labors of his subordinates.

Those who admire this man must admit that he is perilously lacking in imagination. This lack has made him a joke in politics. To be sure, he is blind to the joke; and he will die without ever having suspected the amusement he has caused. He takes himself so seriously that, when he opens his mouth, he feels sure that the entire world stands breathless to catch the momentous utterances.

Every so often he gives an interview to the reporters. All these interviews are alike; a smooth, colorless string of platitudes, without a

striking phrase, destitute of any freshness of expression, or the thinnest trickle of fresh thought. They make his friends writhe, and persuade those that do not know him well that he is a complete ass—which is not at all the case.

His ventures into politics have been numerous and all disastrous. Somehow he got the notion years ago that it would be a fine thing for him to aspire to some high office, but not once in all these years has the poor man had imagination to see what the political situation in his town and state has been. He has stood for measures that have been most repugnant to the majority of voters. He has made many forecasts as to the popularity of candidates and the outcome of elections, and every time he has blundered grotesquely. Now all who know this unfortunate citizen intimately agree that it would have been well if in his youth he had been compelled or coaxed to read fiction and to write stories. Doubtless he suffers from a natural deficiency in imagination which no amount of training could have wholly corrected, but he might at least have softened the violence of his infirmity.

2. I am sure it will surprise you to be told that nobody ever truly knows a thing unless and until he has expressed it. People quite generally assume that they know lots of things which they have never been able to say precisely as they would like to.

This is a curious self-deception. And you can prove it for yourself the next time you find yourself saying or writing something with the expression of which you are dissatisfied.

> **As you search for the right phrase you will find one of two things happening: either you survey the facts you have about the subject and discover them to be incomplete, in which case, you cannot express what you sought to; or else you discover some facts you overlooked at first and by considering them you come upon the correct description of the subject.**

The man who says he knows how an automobile carburetor works "but can't recall exactly how to state it" is deceiving himself. He does not know it. He merely has a number of hazy, confused associations and memories, no genuine knowledge or grasp.

I have heard many school teachers confess that they never really understood geometry or American history or some other subject until they were compelled to teach it. They had supposed they knew it when they studied it at school but they found they did not. The instant that they had to

communicate the facts to somebody else, and make that somebody grasp them, they found great gaps in their supposed knowledge.

The earlier and the oftener you force yourself to express things precisely the more fully you will acquire the habit of studying and understanding those things. This habit of study and understanding is the very soul of culture and education.

3. Telling stories to earn a living

Nine writers out of ten are doubtless more interested in earning a living with their pens than in any other purpose. To these this book is primarily addressed. Before we discuss the commercial advantages of story telling let me recall to you what I said in the beginning, namely, that story telling is much more than the writing of fiction for the popular magazines; it covers the whole field of narrative, the field of history, newspaper reporting, biography, records of adventure, scientific reports of happenings and so on.

When you consider the earning power of the story teller, do not take into account merely the chances of Harold Bell Wright and Mrs. Rinehart. Consider the openings for the reporter, the writer of narrative textbooks in geography, history, politics, hygiene, etc., the special correspondent of the great newspaper and magazine who goes to the ends of the earth to see and recount strange and important events there, the advertising man who has to write booklets largely in narrative form.

You have seen briefly the various advantages of story telling, commercial and otherwise. It remains for you to decide which of these advantages attract you most strongly. I cannot pick and choose for you here. Neither can anybody else. You must reach your own decision, and when you reach it, abide by it! I can, however, add a little advice and information that will probably help you in weighing the advantages.

There are many, many forms and manners of story telling. There is the telling of tales to children in the twilight hour. There is the writing of historical narrative—such as a record of some company of soldiers in the war. There is the setting down of observations of natural events, the earthquake, the tornado, the behavior of a colony of ants or bees, such as Henri Fabre has done so wonderfully. There is a straightforward reporting of current events such as the good newspaper reporter practises daily. There is the writing of novels, the writing of short stories, the writing of plays and the writing of motion pictures. All these and many more too numerous to mention, are story telling. They are aspects of one and the same art, the art

of portraying men in action. Well may the beginner be puzzled as to which of these he should take up first.

The choice cannot be made unless you take into consideration your own age, your financial condition, your education and your ambition in life. To ignore such things as these in making your decision is simply to invite disaster.

If, for instance, you are quite young and have not enjoyed as yet a pretty good education, I must advise you to keep away from magazine stories and plays and motion pictures and to concentrate on the simpler types of narrative, such as newspaper reporting; and if you cannot find opportunity to do this work, then as the next best thing, devote yourself to the writing of a very extensive diary in which you report men and events as fully as possible.

The kind of narrative writing which the cub reporter has to do is the simplest and the surest beginning. Not for all people, but for the vast majority. The reason for this is clear. The reporter is compelled, by the requirements of space and time, to

a. see with his own eyes and hear with his own ears the adventures and misfortunes of all sorts and conditions of men;
b. set down the events he observes in the briefest possible form;
c. describe these same events in language pleasingly understandable to a large audience; and
d. do all this at top speed.

Is it any wonder that almost every story teller who wins a reputation in any of the four best fields of commercial stories, namely the magazines, novel publishing, the stage, and the screen, has begun his career as a newspaper reporter? These four requirements of the journalist are most exacting; they drill one's sense, one's wit, one's vocabulary, and one's fingers, and all in the direction of becoming more and more sensitive to perceiving and appreciating dramatic values.

Newspaper work has the further advantage that you can pay your way through your years of apprenticeship to the art. To be sure, the ordinary reporter does not receive a pay envelope of startling thickness; he may earn anywhere from fifteen to fifty dollars a week, according to his ability and his town. But while he is working, he is learning. This is an advantage not to be despised.

Now let us suppose that you have been a reporter; or, in general, that you are no longer a schoolboy and have a pretty good training in the writing of

simple narrative. Which line of story telling may you wisely specialize in?

There are four fields in which the commercial rewards are high enough to attract any normally ambitious writer who lacks the highly special training of the teacher, the scientist and the business man:

1. The short story of the magazine type.
2. The novel.
3. The motion picture.
4. The play.

I have named these in the order in which it is probably advisable for you to rank them. The short story, such as magazines publish, is your best bet, once you have passed the stage of simple reporting. It is best for several reasons:

1. The market demand for short stories is large and steady; and the chance to sell motion picture rights is today very bright.
2. There is a call for all sorts and all qualities of short stories, from the very finest craftsmanship down to the most inferior pot-boilers, and covering all conceivable topics.
3. The technique of the short story is difficult and hence gives the writer, early in his career, opportunity to practise every intricate and stubborn rule of narrative writing.
4. The time required to write a short story is so short, as compared with the time demanded by a novel or a play or even a good movie, that the beginner loses much less and suffers correspondingly less disappointment over each unsuccessful venture during his apprenticeship.

WRITING FOR THE MOTION PICTURE MARKET

You must get some fundamental facts straight about the motion picture market. Thousands of earnest men and women today are wasting precious time trying to break into the pictures. What is wrong with them? Nothing worse than a little excusable ignorance about the technique and the business side of the movies. They are trying to break in through a locked door, when there is a perfectly good door standing wide open around the front.

When, in the last lesson, I rated the motion picture field as the third best for the writer to tackle, probably you shook your head and said: “I know that’s all wrong. Why, I read in the paper only the other day that the motion picture companies are wild to get good stories, and they are getting eight

thousand scenarios a week at that. And I know a man who got five hundred dollars for a little thing he dashed off one evening."

All this is perfectly true, as you have read it. But it does not alter one iota of my statement.

When I speak of writing for the pictures, I mean what people in the business mean by the remark, namely the business of preparing stories *directly* for motion picture production. This business is of two sorts:

1. The inventing of plots which are submitted in the form of a *synopsis*, usually from 500 to 2,000 words long, in which all the essential events and characterizations are briefly mentioned.
2. The rewriting of novels, short stories, or synopses into what is called "continuities." A continuity is simply the ordering of the story matter, together with necessary explanations, into the actual titles, subtitles, inserts, and scenes which you see on the screen.

Why should both of these businesses be put so far down the scale? Please bear in mind that I am thinking of you always as a story writer, a person with original plots and ideas, a person interested in drawing pictures of life for the entertainment or the mental stimulation of thousands of readers. I am teaching you here nothing but the difficult art of story writing. I am not proposing to show you all the different ways of making a living with a typewriter and a lively imagination. If you want to write and can write stories, long or short, there is no doubt that you should go ahead and write them. For

> *Writing synopses directly for the motion pictures is in the long run a waste of time. Writing continuities is a separate business that has very little to do with story writing and requires high technical skill and absolutely no story telling ability.*

Why is synopsis writing a waste of time? For three reasons:

1. No writer, however ingenious, can ever bring out the dramatic or pictorial values of an idea in a synopsis form. Every author of the slightest consequence knows this by bitter experience, and if you hear somebody denying this fact, you may be sure that he knows nothing about story writing, though he may be very capable in some other field.

2. It is so easy to dash off the incomplete idea of a movie plot in a few hundred words that thousands of inexperienced writers are always doing it. The movie editors receive about eight thousand such contributions every week. *It is humanly impossible to read all these, much less to judge them carefully. It is an admitted fact that not more than one such synopsis out of a hundred ever receives serious attention. This is not anybody's fault. The whole system is ridiculous*.
3. Commercially, it is wasteful to submit synopses. Most editors pay somewhere between fifty and five hundred dollars for synopses, rarely more than two hundred. If a story is good enough to get on the screen, it is good enough to get into a magazine, with the exception of the big spectacular pictures and slap-stick comedy, both of which are unfit to print, for various reasons. Even a poor magazine pays seventy-five dollars for a good story, and the motion picture rights are worth around three hundred dollars at the least. Furthermore, a story sent to a magazine is almost certain to be read and considered; this makes all the difference in the world.

Now, why is scenario writing not to be recommended to the short story writer? The answer is largely indicated above. This is now a distinct business. Scenario writers are employed on a straight salary basis by the motion picture companies. It is their duty to take the novels, stories, or plays which the companies have purchased and to pick out the episodes that can well be photographed, to write explanatory titles, and generally to arrange the material for screen production. It is rare indeed that they ever write stories themselves. For one thing, they are too busy, and for another, they need not be creative writers in order to master the technique of the continuity. What they have to understand thoroughly are the pictorial values. They must know what can and what cannot be done with a camera; how entrances and exits are effective; how to carry the audience from one scene to the next with the utmost smoothness of thought and emotional impression.

If it were important to do so here, I might go on and show you that the same is true of motion picture directors and, of course, ten times truer still of the stars. Cecil de Mille, for instance, has extraordinary instinct when it comes to perceiving and bringing out in picture form the full emotional power of a plot or a character which has been given him for production, but when he attempts to construct a story—or even to tinker with some writer's

story—, the result is ludicrous, as for instance in his handling of "Something To Think About," a movie play whose scenes are often magnificent but whose characterization and plot development are so bad that I have heard audiences titter at the supposedly solemn and inspiring scenes in it. Pretty much the same may be said of David W. Griffith. In him we find amazing sense of the pictorial coupled with mediocre story-telling technique, as in "Intolerance." He is at his best when he finds his story ready made, as in "Broken Blossoms."

This is why all the people who are best informed about motion picture affairs are now coming around to the belief that "*Yesterday was the day of the star. Today is the day of the director. And tomorrow will be the day of the author.*"

This is the inevitable logic of events. It stands to reason that, after all, "the story's the thing." It stands to reason that acting is one thing, and directing is another, and conceiving a good story still another. It stands to reason that in the domain of high art, no man can serve two masters. Life is too short. Many eminent authors today are making a tragic mistake as a result of their overlooking this everlasting rule. They are trying to be their own directors—and it is written on the books that, insofar as they succeed at that, they will fail as authors, while, conversely, success in writing will stand in their way when they take up directing.

All the worst mistakes the movies have made—and they have been many—are traceable chiefly to the fact that the men who first developed them were ignorant of the elements of art and, in their ignorance, supposed that any old delicatessen dealer with a little hustle could dash off a good movie story and even direct it, while his buxom daughter with the hare-lip could become a star. Of course, those who understand these matters have known for generations that a baker might as well suppose that he could design and build the Woolworth Tower.

The moral then is plain. Let him who would be the author on tomorrow's screen concentrate on the laborious mastery of character and plot. Ignore synopses. Pay no heed to scenario writing. Study people and their behavior and the old happenings in this funny, ridiculous, marvelous, bewildering world into which you have been born with eyes, ears, and a lively imagination.

HOW THE PROFESSIONAL PURPOSE DETERMINES STORY TECHNIQUE

Like every other human activity, writing stories must be determined by the specific purpose which moves the author at a given moment to sit down

at his typewriter and compose his narrative. You must realize, at the outset, that this fact puts to rout all those literary critics and lesser would-be experts who maintain that the short story has only one legitimate purpose, or one supreme "form"; and, of course, it makes ridiculous those charlatans who beguile the ignorant with the whispered assurance that the successful story has a cut-and-dried pattern which, once learned, must bring its lucky possessor a fortune.

The short story is anything which the author manages to make it. It may have any one of a hundred distinct purposes. Its creator may merely strive to amuse himself or he may aim to frighten his children away from the poolrooms, or he may be struggling to impress his family, or he may have to get a tremendous personal experience off his chest, or he may try simply to please an editor who is willing to buy certain kinds of copy, or—but there is no end to the list. Some writers do try to mold public opinion now and then. How many powerful stories of the last decade were produced at the behest of the Anti-Saloon League? How many have been written and published to persuade Congress that our noble ex-soldiers should have a fat bonus? How many to prove that no bonus was best? How many to glorify the American merchant marine, in the hope that the picture of the hero clinging to the rigging of the unsubsidized American ship as she sinks, when edged onto a coral reef by a subsidized Japanese steamer, will stir some statesmen to vote for the ship subsidy bill? It may be that you have never heard of such horrid deeds. But nearly all professional writers know them only too well.

Many delicately attuned souls cry out against this infamy. They call upon high heaven to strike down the evil editor who refuses a story which portrays the whole truth about some harsher aspect of American business life. But I do not side with these angels. I believe that, while some artists may be content merely to stimulate the reader's imagination or arouse his emotions, other artists cannot satisfy themselves unless they drive home some weighty truth about man and his world. Strange as it rings, it is none the less true that the greatest literary artists are more nearly related to the press agent and the "publicity expert" than they are to the popular magazine writers who grind out thrillers. The great artist purveys truths and principles. The advertising agent purveys commodities and services. The author of thrills purveys the most ephemeral of neural reactions. All three have their place in the world, but the last occupies a very humble niche in comparison with the man who presents a terrific truth about the rights of a mismated wife, or in comparison with the man who makes effectively known the merits of milk, washing machines, or an honest patent medicine.

I am not belittling the thriller, of course. I merely want you to see that he who pens one has one purpose, while he who writes a political story has another; and each is driven in a different direction, developing various techniques, and producing widely different effects. It is only when we look away from the profession of writing and the literary market and turn to consider the moral issue that we can fairly rate one purpose above or below another. But this obviously goes beyond our present bounds.

The chief buyers of stories are, as I have shown you, the popular magazines and the motion picture companies. These concerns aim to reach vast circles of patrons, and they have only one way of doing so. They must entertain, above all else. This is the supreme function of all art, so far as the masses are at all interested in it. You may not like it, but it is so, and no human power can change it in less than a millennium.

There are many kinds of entertainment, but the one sort which is most effectively offered through the printed page is *a picture of life which arouses in the reader a strong emotion*. It is the producing of such an emotion which is the professional story writer's primary business. It shapes his entire procedure. All the rest of this book will do little more than set forth the various ways in which this purpose conditions the technique of his art.

In every picture of life, there are present three basic elements which also occur in every human situation in real life. They are:

1. **Characters.**
2. **Complication.**
3. **Setting.**

I. Characters

To arouse emotions through a picture of life, it is necessary to depict at least one character. Not even the now popular animal stories are a true exception, for in all these the author secures his effect by reading into the animal some human trait and then developing that trait as if it were a person who was acting. Probably a genuine animal story will never be written, and if it is written, it will not produce an emotional effect upon any reader, because nobody knows or can even imagine the feelings or reactions of animals.

II. Complications

By complication, I mean all the entanglements of persons and circumstances which give rise to difficulties, misunderstandings, and the like. The villain's foul conspiracy to abduct Maude, the Beautiful Cloak Model; the cruel father's refusal to allow his son Henry to leave the old farm in search of his fortune as a second Charlie Chaplin; the unexpected arrival of the bank president upon the scene, just as the yeggmen are about to blow open the bank vaults; all such are complications. And without them, there can be no emotions developed within the story and hence none awakened in the reader.

III. Setting

The setting is the place and time within which the complication arises and the character action occurs. It is, in a broad sense, the geography of the story. Every story must have some geography, though, as we shall see later, this need not figure largely in the telling. Dramatic action often is rather indifferent to settings. Yet it is perilous to neglect the setting in most instances. The setting almost invariably contributes something to one's understanding of the complication as well as to one's sympathy for the characters.

IV. Theme

Within each story of life, we may find not only these elements but also the presentation of some thought. This may be in reality the author's thought, which he may wish to convey to his readers in the form of dramatic emotion. Or it may be the genuine thought of a character in the story. Out of the contemplation of this thought the reader may get his own emotional reaction.

The emotional effect of a story may be produced by emphasizing any one of these four aspects intensely. Or it may be produced by emphasizing any two or more of them.

Thus within the short story field we find four fundamental varieties:

1. The character story.
2. The complication story.
3. The atmosphere story.
4. The thematic story.

And then all the possible combinations of these, such as:

The character-thematic story.
The character-complication story.
The thematic-atmosphere story, and so on.

In the lessons that follow we shall discuss the problems of character and complication. For the present all I wish you to think about is the way in which your purpose, say in choosing to depict a certain character so as to arouse an emotion, must define and limit the form of your narrative.

CHAPTER IV

HOW TO WORK

In the opening lines of this book, I said that most writers would benefit much by severe technical drill. Now let me add that their richest gain usually comes through a mastery of the methods of collecting and judging their raw material. Rare indeed is the author who knows infallibly where to go for his ideas and what to do with these when in hand. The dismal experiences of Mark Twain are all too typical of the writer.

In a letter to William Dean Howells, Mark confessed thus:

> Speaking of the ill luck of starting a piece of literary work wrong—and again and again; always aware that there is a way, if you could only think it out, which would make the thing slide effortless from the pen—the one right way, the sole form for *you*, the other forms being for men whose line those forms are, or who are capabler than yourself: . . . Last summer I started 16 things wrong—3 books and 13 mag. articles—and could only make 2 little wee things, 1500 words altogether, succeed:—only that out of piles and stacks of diligently wrought MS., the labor of 6 weeks' unremitting effort. I could make all of those things go if I would take the trouble to re-begin each one half a dozen times on a new plan. But none of them was important enough except one. . . .
>
> A week ago I examined the MS.—10,000 words—and saw that the plan was a totally impossible one—for me; but a new plan suggested itself, and straightway the tale began to slide from the pen with ease and confidence. I think I've struck the right one this time. I have already put 12,000 words of it on paper. . . . In the present form I could spin 16 books out of it with comfort and joy; but I shall deny myself and restrict it to one.

Poor old fellow! He guessed wrong in his joy! This new twist which he felt so sure of did not work out. He lugged the beaten and bruised thing around with him for years, spent interminable hours over it, and finally gave it up as a bad job. If we were to assume that his time was worth fifty dollars a day in the heyday of his fame, it would appear that this pottering over an

idea must have cost him thousands of dollars. I am convinced that the whole trouble rooted in a lack of clean-cut mental habits—call it system, if you like the word!

In the telling of stories there are good and bad methods no less than in shipbuilding and masonry. The sooner you learn to go about your work with the right system, the earlier you will strike your pace. I want to give you some hints as to how you ought to proceed, but in giving them I do not intend to lay down hard and fast rules. There are many good systems of work, and some people find one better suited to their own habits of life than the method you or I might prefer. All these systems, however, have something in common. They all bring a certain elementary order into your efforts. They all enable you to get material, to record it in such a way that you can draw on it whenever you need it, and to manipulate it so as to get new plots. It is of these common characteristics that I am going to speak.

1. Do not trust to your unaided imagination for story material. Get the habit early of gathering matter from the world about you.

It is a common mistake of the beginner to suppose that every story must be utterly original. He thinks he must conjure the whole thing up out of the depths of his private fancy. This is a disastrous mistake. Not one story in a thousand is thus written, and if it is so written, its chances of success are slim indeed. Rare is the mind that is imaginative enough to supply the pen with the entire setting, the complication, the characters, and the action of a well rounded story. And almost as rare is the reader who is interested in such purely fantastic creations. The wide world of ordinary men and women would much prefer tales built around facts and around real types. The tales of Hofman and Poe, marvelous as they are, fail to hold humanity through the years with the spell that realistic stories by any of a thousand good writers do.

The one solid and enduring basis of fiction is fact. Fact comes from the world you see and hear and smell and bump up against. Fact comes from men and things in action around you. Hence the rule of work:

2. Read newspapers regularly and clip striking and suggestive incidents from them for use in stories. File these clippings in convenient heads so that you can find them when you wish.

It would amaze you to know to what extent professional story tellers, in the fields of the short story, the novel, the drama, and the motion picture, draw upon newspapers for their plots. They do it too much, as a matter of fact; or perhaps I should say that they do it with too little discretion and reflection. A motion picture producer tells me that whenever he finds an unusual news story full of thrills on the first page of his morning paper, he groans and makes ready for a week of woe, for he knows that, by the afternoon of the next day, his mail will be flooded with hastily sketched scenarios built around the episode—and, alas, often accompanied by a letter from the fevered author stating that, "incredible as the tale is, it is absolutely true." The same happens to dramatic producers and publishers.

This is killing the goose that lays the golden egg. I must warn you against the practise in the same breath that I urge you to follow the underlying methods of these hurry-up authors. They are wrong, of course, in their mad endeavors to convert a news story directly into a story without the most thoughtful reconstruction of its elements. They are on the right trail, though, insofar as they draw on the news story for some suggestion out of which a story may be built.

You should gather news items but not with the notion of translating them literally into tales. Not once in a hundred times can this be done, because, as we shall see later, the relation of events and persons in a dramatic situation is a rare occurrence. It is this rarity, in some measure, which makes the genuine dramatic tale so much more absorbing and commercially more valuable than the common news story. It is a fortunate thing that this is so, for if every important human event recorded by the scribes of the press were a good short story, you authors would find your occupation gone.

News items generally contain only one or two of the elements that enter into a dramatic narrative of the first class. One report will give you a glimpse of a brutal sea captain; another will tell a little about the wit of a little girl when placed in a perilous crisis; a third may reveal a unique situation in a happy household. As you chance upon each such item, you may sense its possibilities for fiction, but you are not likely to see the complete plot. If you had time, you might spend a day or two working the plot out, but probably you cannot stop thus over each interesting item that you come upon. Neither can you trust yourself to carry all these clippings in memory until you are ready to use them. So you have only one sensible course to pursue; you must classify the items and then file them away.

3. Classify news items under the heads of the chief story elements and also under such special heads as you are

I recommend that you begin with a very simple and short classification and expand as you feel the need of more detailed grouping. Procure a dozen large envelops and start with the following topics:

COMPLICATIONS

Envelop 1,—Comic complications;
Envelop 2,—Tragic complications;

CHARACTERS

Envelop 3,—Men;
Envelop 4,—Women;
Envelop 5,—Children;

SETTINGS

Envelop 6,—City;
Envelop 7,—Country;
Envelop 8,—Foreign;

DRAMATIC ACTS (SOLUTIONS OF COMPLICATIONS)

Envelop 9,—Acts of violence;
Envelop 10,—Acts of ingenuity;

THEMES

Envelop 11,—Ideas about Human Nature;
Envelop 12,—Ideas about the World.

Please bear in mind that these twelve envelops are merely a beginning. They are the roughest possible classification of the material you will have to collect and file. Each of the topics I have given ought eventually to be subdivided by you into many more special ones. What these subdivisions should be, I cannot say; *it will all depend upon the sort of people and stories you are particularly interested in*. Thus, if you have a natural leaning toward the psychological character story, you will find yourself drawing finer and ever finer distinctions between the clippings in Envelops 3, 4 and 5; finally

you may have twenty envelops on character types. If you go in for detective and mystery tales, the same will happen with Envelops 1 and 2.

4. As you study your clippings more minutely, take each one that suggests some definite plot development out of the envelop and transfer it to a cross-indexed card file of plot germs.

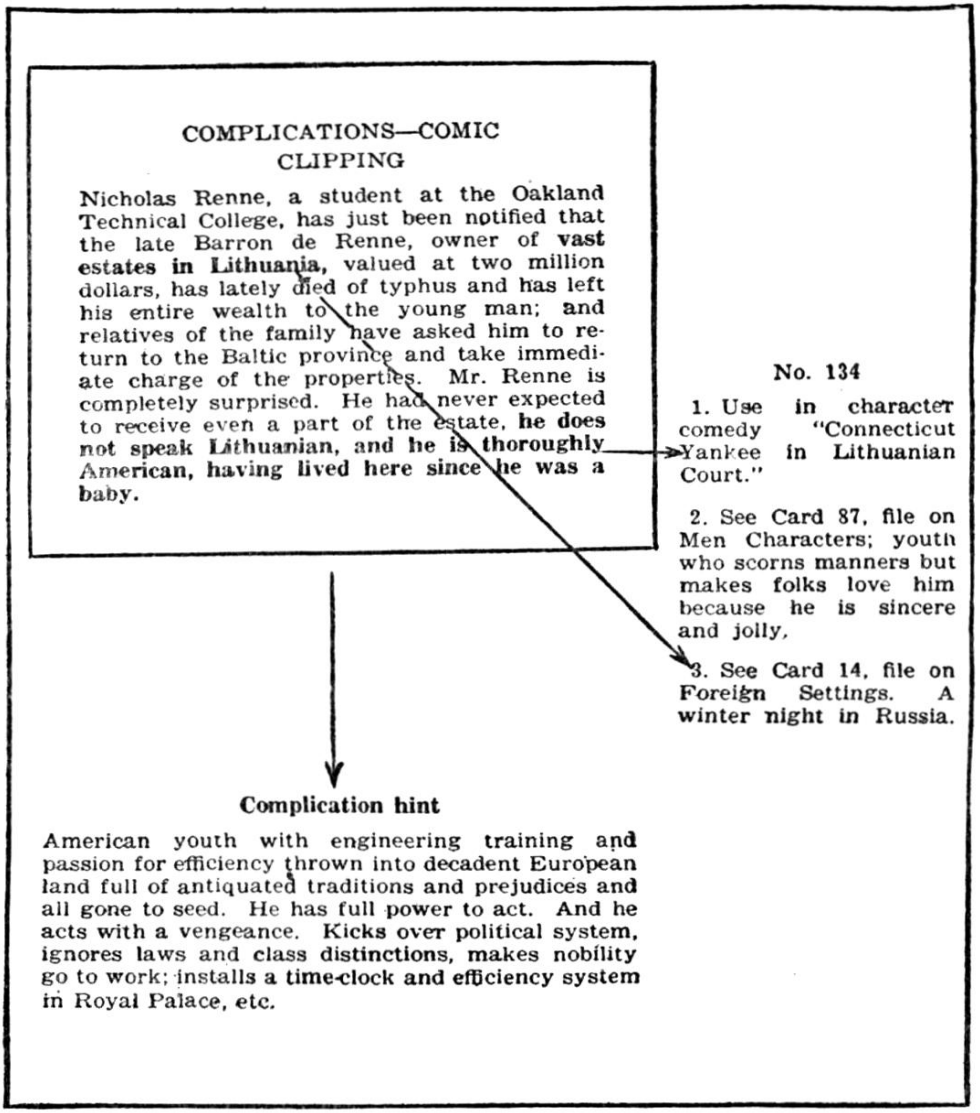
This can best be explained by a simple illustration. On the following page you will see a sample card. In the upper left-hand corner is a newspaper clipping—either copied or pasted on. Certain lines have been set in heavy type—or underlined. These contain the hint of story development opposite them.

The hint is jotted down with some detail, and a reference is made to another item about a situation that might be worked up together with this one. The whole memorandum is then ticketed under a special class of plots in which, we must assume, the writer happens to be interested.

The value of your files depends mostly upon the care and detail with which you work up your cross references.

As you will later learn, every story contains three kinds of matter: facts about *character*, about *complication*, and about *setting*. Each of these topics ought to be followed up in connection with each clipping. If you will refer to the sample file card again, you will see that it contains a suggestion touching each of these.

This means *at least three cross references for each card*. And the more, the better!



5. Collect pictures of men and scenes especially such as deal with topics and places you happen to be interested in.

It is surprising how useful such pictures can sometimes be in aiding your imagination. Seldom can anybody recall all the wealth of detail in the appearance of a man or a scene. Many vital aspects get lost or at least blurred. The picture brings such back vividly.

I know several authors who regularly study pictures before they even draw up their final plots, and refer to them again as they are about to write the stories around these plots.

6. Write experimental sketches of men and events and scenes suggested by the best of your clippings. Let them run to any length you choose. File these with cross references to the clippings that suggested them.

Few writers, early in their careers, do enough work of this sort. They usually wait until an inspiration smites them, then sit down and write a finished story, over which they tinker a long time. Now, I believe thoroughly in the writing of such finished stories, too, even as experiments. You must get used to constructing them. But you should also acquire the habit of picking out some salient aspect of a story germ or plot and elaborating it, quite apart from the other elements.

When you first attempt to use such sketches, you will be disappointed. You will find that few of them can be carried over bodily into any story. You will have to change them so much that you virtually write them all over. None the less, the sketching is valuable, because

1. It makes you more facile in expression and more keen in delineation; and
2. It usually yields many touches that suggest rich character and plot developments.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING IN GREAT QUANTITY

You must realize that, during your first few years of training, your first and greatest problem is *To become so facile in the manipulation of your story material and the English language that you do not have to give thought to the choice of words and phrasing nor to the technicalities of ordering events and the like, but solely to the study of your characters and your plot*.

Take the pianist as your model, and you will see what this means. No man becomes proficient at the piano until he has so mastered his finger exercises and sight reading that he forgets both of them and focuses attention on expression. The successful player, when at the keyboard, thinks only of *the effect he desires to produce*.

So with you. Not until you can think only of this effect, can you attain mastery of fiction. And this is why you ought to regard nine-tenths of your

early writing as finger exercises. This is why you should write much solely for the writing's sake, and with no thought of creating a fine story.

REWRITE AND REWRITE!

One of the hardest things to teach a beginner in fiction is the imperative necessity of revising his copy, so powerful is the spell of his first "happy thought," which he thinks is "inspiration." Not one story in a thousand ever comes to an author in its best dramatic or literary form at the first flash. But unfortunately it is this first flash that, because of its newness, excites and delights the author most of all. Hence his difficulty in chopping it up, criticising it, and even discarding some of its bright passages, for the sake of a greater and more deliberate effect.

You must take as one hundred per cent true the following comment of Mary Roberts Rinehart. She speaks out of a wealth of experience and literary insight when she says:

> Young writers are too hasty. They are usually entirely satisfied with their first efforts and this viewpoint is fatal to success. They write a story in one sitting and fire it off to a magazine. Occasionally, tales written in this slap-dash manner land, but that type of worker never does sterling work. I find that the majority of young workers won't take advice after it is freely given. With my own stories, I have to do several drafts before my people become real to me. Rewriting with that in view often makes all the difference between amateur and professional work.

7. Carry on regularly some "field work."

"Field work" is the very soul of sound methods of literary work. Woe to the would-be writer who avoids it! It is his one and only sure method of keeping in touch with the real world and incidentally with the trend of taste and thought of his prospective readers.

Field work is the collecting of significant events, scenes, and characters by direct observation of men and affairs. It is news reporting carried on, not with an eye to printing the day's occurrences but rather with a view to gathering story material.

Every author of consequence is relentlessly engaged in such field work. The note books of men like Stevenson reveal the energy devoted to it, as well as the richness of its yield.

No matter where you are living, and no matter what you may be doing, you can always carry on some amount of field work. Wherever you find people, there you can observe them. Your observations cannot fail to have some worth for later writing. Suppose you spend your day working in a department store. You see clerks and customers, idle shoppers and shoplifters, store detectives and floorwalkers, and you hear all sorts of things from them. Get the habit of jotting down the cream of this gossip. Get the habit of studying some of the people who strike you as being comic or tragic or mysterious or original.

Whenever you come across something that suggests a story, copy it on a filing card and insert it in your index or plot suggestions, with such cross references as you can add. It will not be long before you will discover a wealth of accumulated hints tucked away on these cards. After some months of persistent field work, you will see your own powers of observation growing stronger and more acute. Practice makes perfect, here as everywhere else. To perfect your skill in spotting story possibilities in real life is to advance you a very long way on the road to success.

8. Study current stories critically

I am repeatedly amazed at students who tell me without the least shame, that they do not read the current magazines often. Some of them say they haven't the time. To which I reply: "Then you haven't time to become a professional writer." Others declare that they dislike the run of popular stuff and much prefer to re-read the great classics. To which I make answer thus: "If you want to cater only to your own private tastes, you stand a slim chance of pleasing many readers, especially if you are fond of tales about men and affairs dead and gone."

To write stories for a living audience, you simply must understand what appeals to its members. You must also know its language. In later lessons we shall explain the why and how of this necessity. For the present, you must take it as a bald fact from which there is no escape. One of the surest ways of finding out what men and women today are interested in and how their thoughts are shaping is through a close study of current periodicals. The editors of these have built up large and highly trained organizations for the purpose of keeping in touch with current affairs and public opinion. They are continually sending out reporters. They are interviewing all sorts of people great and small on all sorts of subjects. The fiction they publish represents an attempt to reflect the ideas and the desires and the conflicts that grip people *here and now*.

You must, in your own stories, deal with these same ideas and desires and conflicts, *if you wish to reach these readers*. You cannot hope, for example, to write about the things Maupassant wrote about, or Stevenson portrayed. Maupassant's masterpiece, "A Piece of String,"[1] if it had been written in the year of our Lord 1923 and submitted to any New York magazine editor, would have been turned down hard. I doubt whether it would have drawn even a personal letter from the editor. It would have come trailing back to the old homestead with a printed rejection slip. Why? For the best of all reasons. The old miserly French peasant is a type unknown to the American. His mental processes involve no ideas, no desires, no conflicts that are prominent in modern American life. We Yankees are not in the habit of picking up tag ends of old string in the street. We have no streak of miserliness and little even of that thrift in our make-up. We are so prosperous and so prodigal that Maitre Hauchecorne is further from our interests than the man in the moon. So, too, with the village and its malicious gossip which brought the old man to grief. It does not figure in our everyday life. Hence it cannot grip the ordinary man.

You must forget your personal preferences in literature and you must study your readers minutely. You must read current periodicals, noting the themes, the character types, the sentiments portrayed, and the manner of language used. *But this does not mean that you ought to imitate the manners of successful contemporary authors*.

To imitate thus is to foredoom yourself to failure. Only the cheapest periodicals will accept slavish imitations of big writers. What you should do, though, is to **get interested in the same subject matter and in the same problems of modern life which the successful writers are dealing with. And then form your own impressions and opinions about these and write what pleases you in the popular language of the day.**

One of the most pernicious pieces of advice ever given to young writers was that famous utterance of O. Henry: "There is only one rule to success in literature. Write what pleases you." It was one of his own worst stumbling blocks. The correct rule is

> **Write what you please about the affairs in which your readers are acutely interested.**
>
> **Write what you please of these affairs in a manner and language readily appreciated by these readers.**

In other words, let your reader pick your subject matter. You may do the rest; so long as you speak your readers' language.

[1] In “Little French Masterpieces.” Vol. on Guy de Maupassant. (Putnam’s 1903.) p. 149.

EXERCISES

1. Write, for your own eyes only, an honest statement of the exact way you have been working at fiction (or whatever other form of writing you may have tried your hand at).

Check off the number of habits you have fallen into which happen to be right. Check off those which are wrong.

2. Make a list of the ten men, women, or children in your neighborhood who do the oddest, most entertaining things.

During the next year, when the occasion arises, talk with them and observe their manners and words minutely. Take notes about them and file these away.

3. What is the chief industry in your neighborhood? Has it any “local color?” Take notes on this “local color.”

4. About once every month, for a year or longer, analyze a story in the current magazines which appeals to you very strongly. Do the same with a story which you dislike intensely for any reason whatever. Find out exactly *what* it is that you like or dislike and how the author has produced this effect. File both the story and your analysis of it.

CHAPTER V

YOUR FIRST STORY

HOW TO GET IT AND GO AT IT

You want to write stories. You live in a neighborhood where every day you see all sorts of odd, pathetic, mysterious, and comic men, women, and children. You have probably tried your hand at sketching some of them, perhaps you have even written narratives about them. You are sure there is "story stuff" in the things these people do. But how dig it out? And when you have dug it out, how go at the telling of it so that an editor, reading your manuscript, will promptly send you a check?

I am going to tell you at once the motions you must go through. Before you have put this book down, you will have the complete plot of the story. I hope you will also have learned two things:

1. How extremely simple the plot and structure of a good story is; and
2. How much cunning is required in picking and choosing every little item in such a simple tale.

What you will do in this first lesson is what every successful writer, save the purely imaginative authors like Poe, always does.

All that you will study in the following lessons is nothing but a careful analysis of each little step you take right here and now. Some of these steps you take so quickly that you don't know you take them. Some others are so slight that you think you haven't moved at all.

You live in some town, or else out in the country. Around you are neighbors. Most of them are "plain folks." Smith is a carpenter. Gubbs is a mason. Dibble runs the grocery. McMush owns the local bank and rents the most expensive pew in the First Methodist Church.

Run over the whole list of these neighbors. Don't overlook one of them. Start with old Grandpa Dibble, who fought in the Civil War and is still retreating from Bull Run. End up with Mrs. Gubbs' new baby. Perhaps you ought even to include the dogs and cats. Sometimes they are well worth attention.

Jot these names all down in a long column, at the extreme left-hand side of a large sheet of paper, thus:

Elmer Gubbs
Mrs. Olive Gubbs
Susan Gubbs
Amanda Gubbs
Hezekiah McMush
Mrs. Grace McMush
Reginald McMush

and so on, leaving an inch or so of space between names.

When this list is finished, go back to the first name and ask yourself: "Did Elmer Gubbs ever do anything funny, exciting, mysterious, silly, or tragic? Or did anything of the sort ever happen to him?"

Run over all your memories of Elmer. If uncertain about them, ask somebody in the house. Don't pass Elmer by until you have noted in brief form everything at all striking. It might be something like this:

> Awful braggart. Ten years ago, he was fired for incompetence. Got job up-State. Said he had been appointed superintendent of construction on a ten-million-dollar job. Got married on strength of it. Went with wife, who was Serena Meggs, daughter of Meggs, the wall paper man, up to Boomisville. Big send-off in town paper, etc. Three months later, Elmer came back to town and said the company was engaged in a dishonest contract and he couldn't demean himself to work for it. Everybody knew he had been fired for all-around uselessness. Meggs wild. Tried to make daughter get divorce.

This is, as it stands, "no story." But it has "makings." It is as good as the general run of your notes need be. *It is out of simple human situations like this one that the big stories of life grow.*

Now, after you have finished your list and have, let us say, fifteen or more episodes like the one I have just made up, go back over all these and ask yourself: "What's the worst sort of trouble that this person might have gotten into, in this situation?"

Be careful at this point. *You are no longer recording local history. You are now drawing upon your imagination and are free to add or subtract anything you like to the item you are studying.*

Let me illustrate with Elmer Gubbs again.

Elmer's bragging in this real affair might have gotten him, and lots of other people too, into a terrible mess. For instance, maybe Serena had inherited nine thousand dollars from an aunt lately deceased, and maybe her pa had intended to "borrow" four thousand of it, to go into business on a larger scale. Maybe Elmer was one of those confirmed braggarts who has lied so early and often about his own titanic ability and greatness that he has come to believe half of what he says. (Haven't you ever met this pathetic species?) Very well, Elmer has completely persuaded the lovely Serena that he is altogether too big for your town, and that he really is called to a superintendency of high degree. Serena sees visions of Mrs. Elmer Gubbs lolling in a lavender limousine, Mrs. Elmer Gubbs munching three-dollar-a-pound chocolates, Mrs. Elmer Gubbs holding a reception in a white silk dream and rather condescendingly shaking hands with Mrs. McMush, who, as the banker's wife, has always snubbed the wall paper man's humble but lovely daughter, when they met at the grocer's and the annual strawberry festival at the Baptist Church. These fair fancies are reinforced by Elmer, the day the great news of his rise is published in the local paper. Elmer buys a forty-eight-dollar suit of clothes and a new hat. The snowball of brag begins rolling. By the third day of this glorious publicity, Elmer says in an offhand manner that it would be nice to motor up to his new job. Serena sighs: "Oh, deary, can you buy a car already?" Elmer coughs delicately and admits certain financial difficulties. But—it would make a mighty good impression on the ten-million-dollar company, wouldn't it?—if maybe they rolled up in their own car? They'd be somebody then, you bet. Now if Serena wanted to help matters along—grease the tracks, you understand—why couldn't she buy a neat little sedan—or let hubby do it, just for look's sake, you know; and of course hubby'd pay for it later, when the coin began stampeding in. And so on. After which Serena turns over two thousand dollars of her precious legacy, and Elmer rolls up with a bright new car. They knocked the town's eye out, they did. And then—

When Elmer reaches Boomisville in his glory, the boss on the job gives him, his wife, and the car one granite glance, then grunts: "We don't need your kind in our business. Had enough of these scrub masons who blow all they've got on silk socks and manicures. This is a real man's job. It needs a bird with callouses and a mattress full of thrift stamps. Good-bye."

And then—

But this is more than enough to give you the idea. Don't be alarmed if you find you cannot build up some of your items as easily as this one seems

to be constructed. Manipulating fragments as I have just done is pure technique. It does not come natural to anybody. *O. Henry spent years on this very problem, and so must every other writer.* And one of the chief purposes of the following lessons is to teach you how to develop even the most trivial item with the utmost ease, up to the point at which all its values become apparent, so that you can then select the most striking features and discard the dull or insignificant.

Now, let us suppose that you have developed in imagination all the troubles, griefs, distresses, and embarrassments which might grow out of one of the real persons and their real acts which you have set down in your list. Your next task is to find out *how your hero or heroine can get out of the trouble in such a manner that happy accident plays no part in the solution and character plays the greatest possible part*.

To illustrate with my hypothetical Elmer Gubbs again: Your problem is: "Elmer has spent Serena's nine thousand dollars. He has no fine job. Serena knows it. They dare not go back home dead broke. Now how on earth will Elmer extricate self and wife from the wreckage?"

The wrong solution is the happy accident. Elmer might, of course, find a bag of hundred-dollar-bills dropped by some gunmen who were being pursued. And he and Serena would live happily forever after. But your reader wouldn't. He would want to shoot you for such a finish, and it would be justifiable homicide if he did.

The right kind of solution would be one in which Elmer's brag got busy on the job as usual and cleared the skies for him. Thus, Elmer might motor away from the scene of his discomfiture and, seeking work, be referred to a big undertaking five miles away. His story about his own importance has become a fixed habit. He cannot shake it off, not even after his humiliation. So, instead of striking the boss of this second job for five-dollar-a-day work as a humble mason, Elmer breathes fire and brimstone against the man who had fired him on sight unseen; he gives the impression that the company had retained him at a—er—well, mighty fat salary for—mm—several years; and the Man Higher Up was jealous of Elmer's rare ability and made a nasty frame-up and got him in bad and now, by George, he'd like nothing better than to tie up with a rival concern and throw all his intellectual, technical, and generally superhuman resources into the fight against those scoundrels. Result: They give him a chance at a ten-dollar-a-day job as assistant superintendent, which has gone begging. Serena hops on his collar and tells him he's got to make good now. And he does.

This certainly would not be the final form the plot would take. *But it is near enough to the good dramatic pattern to be set down in your first draft.*

Now, find a similar solution for the complication that you have picked.

When you get this, you have the outline plot of a story. There may be a dozen items in it which make it unsalable. Or it may have all the elements of a big success. What all these are, you will learn in the following lessons. For the present, I suggest that you write this story up in brief form, introducing two things:

1. All the good descriptive touches of your leading character, drawn from life; and
2. The greatest detail you can give of the town and other surroundings.

In a finished story, much of this would be thrown out. But in your first draft of it, you should include as much as possible. For it is infinitely easier to sort over everything and discard needless matter than it is to invent just the right touch and turn from moment to moment. You will learn much about this rule later. It was one of the main secrets of O. Henry's success.

When you have finished your story, put it away. No matter how well satisfied you may be with it, do not think of sending it to a publisher until you have studied further. The odds are a thousand to one that somewhere in the course you will come upon something that gives you a big new idea as to how to turn your story, or at least something that reveals how to correct something that you vaguely felt wasn't quite right.

Finally, save all the notes you have written down about folks in your neighborhood. This is precious raw material.

What sort of story to look for

Before you set out to find stories to write, you should apply to this problem what you have already learned about the things people are interested in. Let me put this matter of "human interest" in a simple form which will make it easier for you to pick and choose.

The Man in a Hole

Ninety-nine readers out of every hundred are genuinely interested in just one sort of story fundamentally. That kind is the story of

A Man in a Hole and How He Got Out (Or Didn't)

Of these ninety-nine, a majority is more interested in the **Man**. The rest are interested chiefly in the **Hole**.

Every popular story has, accordingly, three phases:

1. A description of the **Man** and the **Hole** he falls into;

2. An account of the struggles the **Man** goes through while trying to get out of the **Hole**; and

3. An account of the way the **Man** finally manages to get out of the **Hole**.

What I mean is that the public is interested in **Men in action**. There are various kinds of action and acts. When a man sneezes, he is performing one sort of action. When he takes a trip around the world, he is performing another kind. When he tells what he thinks about the League of Nations, he is indulging in still another kind.

But none of these sorts of action are the kind in which the public is very deeply interested—at least when the public picks up its magazine and turns to the fiction pages.

In fiction our interest is most keenly aroused by those very situations which, in real life, would stir us most sharply to strong emotions, to hard thinking and to decisive action. These situations are those which *get us into trouble*. They are the situations which upset and disturb us; which break in upon our smooth and established ways of living; which destroy friendships, ruin business, turn us from our cherished plans, separate us from loved ones. When we find ourselves in such unpleasant affairs, we are profoundly stirred.

The more prudence and foresight we possess, the more keenly do we imagine such actions before they have arisen, and the more eagerly do we think about hypothetical situations. For, as I have already told you, it is in the imagination that all normal men first live through the problems of real life—the business man no less than the poet.

The importance of finding the right story

The old rule, "Well begun, half done" applies in full earnest to story telling. Your first task is that of finding a story to tell. Do that skilfully, and you will succeed even though you are quite deficient in some points of story telling technique. When all is said and done, people are much more interested in what you have to tell them than they are in the manner of your telling it. This is why many a badly written story has achieved tremendous

success, while scores of beautifully written tales lie neglected on dusty shelves.

Things to be considered in picking your story

Every day you probably come upon several story possibilities in the newspaper. How can you decide which of these is the right one for you to toil over?

To answer this question, you must take into account

1. The story form you prefer to use;
2. The readers you wish to reach;
3. Your own purpose and interests in telling the story.

CHAPTER VI

PLOT BUILDING

If we classify writers as to their aptitudes, we find most of them falling into one of three groups. There are men who instinctively perceive and vividly describe scenes and natural events. These are descriptive or "atmosphere" or "local color" writers. Then there are other men blessed with the special knack of analyzing people and describing their traits and their mannerisms. These are the authors of character stories. Finally we find a third group having quick perceptions of complications and crises and intense dramatic acts. These are the plotters, the writers of complication stories, such as tales of detectives, mysteries, comic surprises, and the like.

It is seldom that a person with high native ability in any one of these directions is equally gifted in either of the other. Thus it happens that at least two-thirds of our writers admit the difficulty of plot building, and my experience indicates that the proportion is even larger. A large number of writers will always be found capable of excellent descriptive narrative, such as our better newspaper reporters are continually producing in their big first-page stories. A much smaller group shows skill in character analysis. But by far the smallest group is that of the natural born plotters. Out of every hundred beginners I do not find more than five or six with a thorough instinct for seeing and constructing dramatic complications.

I suspect there is a connection between this fact and the one which I must impress upon you at once, namely that

> *Plot building is the most nearly mechanical technique in all story writing. It requires less native ability to learn it, and it is capable of more precise and formal statement than any other feature of fictional technique.*

If you have trouble with your plots and have perhaps become discouraged, take heart! This is the easiest of all problems to master.

PLOT

> **A plot is a climactic series of events each of which both determines and is determined by the characters involved.**

Notice carefully that the determination of events and characters is *reciprocal*!

Insofar as this reciprocity of effect is incomplete, the plot lacks dramatic intensity.

Naturally there are many entertaining plots in which this complete reciprocity of action is not to be found. This is not evidence that we have wrongly defined the ideal plot. It merely goes to show how hard it is to attain the ideal, and how passable much work is which falls short of perfection.

THE TWO WEAK FORMS OF CLIMACTIC SERIES

You will probably appreciate, without anybody's telling you, that a series of events, however strongly it may lead to some climax, would be no plot at all if the characters neither determined nor were determined by the events. Such a loose and formless piece of writing would cause only a laugh of ridicule. As Poe has well said:

> A mere succession of incidents, even the most spirited, will no more constitute a plot than a multiplication of zeros, even the most infinite, will result in the production of a unit. This all will admit, —but few trouble themselves to think further. The common notion seems to be in favor of mere complexity; but a plot, properly understood, is perfect only inasmuch as we shall find ourselves unable to detach from it or disarrange any single incident involved, without destruction to the mass. This we say is the point of perfection,—a point never yet attained, but not on that account unattainable. Practically, we may consider a plot as of high excellence when no one of its component parts shall be susceptible of removal without detriment to the whole.
>
> —Poe's Essay on American Drama.

I have never seen such a "mere succession of incidents," except in the writings of some insane patients which I have read as a psychologist. I have, however, often come upon two varieties of narratives in which the relation of episodes and character was not that of the ideal plot. They are:

1. Stories in which the events almost completely determine the characters; and
2. Stories in which the characters almost completely determine the events.

A clear case of the first type is almost any one of the famous tales in *The Arabian Nights*. Note, if you will, Sinbad the Sailor. On his first voyage he sets forth to make a fortune. As he sets sail, we see him in the throes of repentance over previous follies and animated by a burning desire to join the ranks of those who pay the excess profits tax. All of which suggests character action. But none such follows.

This resolve—and the traits that lay behind it—had nothing to do with the shaping of subsequent proceedings. His ship ran into a calm near a small island—thanks not at all to Sinbad's character. Sinbad went ashore, just for a change of scene—not as a result of his desire to better his fortune. Unhappily the island proved to be the back of the original Leviathan, and Leviathan took it into his behemothic head to visit the ocean bottom while our adventurer sojourned upon his back—again through no character act. By pure chance Sinbad lay hold of a piece of wreckage. By pure chance a gale arose and propelled our hopeless hero to a really-truly island where—through no virtue or deed of his own—the grooms of the maharajah conveniently rescued him—not because they were moved by his efforts to make a fortune but simply because they were in the vicinity and had nothing better to do. And so on and on, to the end.

Such a tale may be quite readable. But it owes all its strength to the romantic or tragic or comic flavor of its constituent episodes. While these may be exciting and produce a definite impression, they do not produce the dramatic effect. Thus such writing is of a lower order. It is much easier to create, and it is also easier to forget, just because it lacks the tremendous cohesion of a true plot.

A specimen of the second type of story is a character picture in which we see a human being with some special trait merely exhibiting it in a situation which does not modify the character but is itself modified by the latter. The psychological sketches of Henry James frequently approach this type and manner, and in the field of brief narrative so do the interesting little portraits which Coppée has given us. Recall, if you will, Coppée's vignette of the fierce looking young giant, Achille Meurtrier, who came every morning to the office with a fresh tale of some deviltry or wild adventure which he had been through the night before.[1] This ferocious bookkeeping buccaneer fascinated his fellow clerks, until one of them chanced to see him at his mother's home caring most tenderly for the old lady, after which he showed up at the office with a new yarn of desperate deeds, all of which he alleged had transpired the evening before, at the very hour when he was engaged in the most tranquil of domestic occupations. The sketch, ending thus, is merely a humorous account of how this youth, with his

superabundance of energy and imagination, escaped from his humdrum life by way of the imagination. Now you must notice here that *all that happens flows directly from this trait of bubbling imagination. The young man is not changed by any event. He shapes all the events by his own character, which shows two sides: his devotion to his mother and his yearning for excitement and the admiration of his fellows.*

There is a sense in which such a story gets nowhere, as the critics have frequently remarked of Henry James' efforts. And this lack of progress or movement is caused by the fact that, while events may come and go through the story, *the character itself remains changeless*.

It would be foolish to deny that many readers are genuinely interested in such static glimpses of human nature. I, for one, like such sketches, and I know many others who do. But there is no doubt that a mere cross-section of character revealing nothing more than its natural and regular outworking in everyday life is not particularly thrilling. It is much less fascinating than a ride on a scenic railway or ten minutes of pictorial news at the movies. It has the further defect, too, of requiring considerable knowledge of and interest in character types. Hence it appeals to a select class, not to the wider public.

Summing up the peculiarities of these two weak story patterns, then, I would say that

> **The first type of weak climactic series "Gets Somewhere" but means nothing. And the second type "Gets Nowhere" but means something. The ideal pattern "Gets Somewhere and Means Something."**

We now consider two of the most important problems in plotting, **Suspense** and **Coincidence**.

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[1] "My Friend Meurtrier." In *Ten Tales by François Coppée*. Harpers, p. 203.

TRUE AND FALSE SUSPENSE

One of the easiest mistakes to fall into is the misuse of suspense. You observe that almost every gripping story employs this well-known device to good effect, so you may come to think that you may use it anywhere and everywhere in your tales, the oftener the better. This is erroneous. Suspense is downright injurious more often than not.

When the writer conceals something from you, the reader, he sets you to thinking. Your curiosity is piqued. You wonder what has really happened. The more you wonder, the more important the whole business becomes in your mind. It takes possession of you and in the measure that it does this, it distracts you from the main story. Here, in a nutshell, is the peril of misused suspense.

Let me give you a very simple illustration of it, drawn from a manuscript I recently analyzed.

Two prospectors have struck out across the Arizona deserts in search of a lost mine which at the same time is being sought by a very rich mine owner who has been for years the deadly rival of these adventurers. When the story begins, it seems pretty clear that the author intends to interest us in the race of these two parties for the discovery and possession of the treasure. Thus we read along for some fifteen hundred words. Then troubles fall fast and furious upon the two prospectors. One mule perishes in a quicksand. They lose their main water supply. Next their pack animals get loose and wander away to graze. At this juncture, the story is told as follows:

> On a sudden, dipping into a hollow, we saw the horses. The depression in the sand and rock formation showed, in strong contrast to the siennas and umbers of the desert waste, grayed over with sagebrush and ashen cacti, a patch of light green—a growth Farraday recognized at a glance.
>
> He stood ankle-deep in the sand, as motionless as if he had taken root.
>
> "What next?" he asked himself.
>
> Luck was dead against them. Without water, without horses, how were they to get to the mine?—which they certainly must do or go back. And that would mean the giving up of their plans, their hopes. It would put the whole business of relocating the mine out of their reach.
>
> "I'll bet there isn't another patch of that weed growing within a day's hike of here," he muttered.
>
> The horses were feeding quietly. A gleam of white in the midst of the green caught Farraday's eye. He went forward, moving slowly, fearing he knew not what. The scattered bones, sun-bleached, sun-dried, hinted tragedy. Another horse had eaten of the deadly loco weed, leaving, it might be, some poor devil to go

on afoot, with the blistering sunshine cracking his skin and the blistering sand creeping after him.

Please study this passage minutely. Notice, that at the close of the first paragraph, Farraday recognized the growth at a glance. But the reader, who presumably has not lived in Arizona long enough to recognize it when told merely that it is light green, naturally wonders whether it is grass or rhubarb or geraniums. In the next line he is told that Farraday is stricken motionless at the sight of this light green. Plainly it cannot be grass nor rhubarb nor even geraniums, then. What then? You wonder on and on, more perplexed than ever. Another line or so and Farraday is thinking that he is going to be left without a horse very soon, thus failing of his gilded quest. Now you are, for one brief second, bewildered. Can't he capture the horses? Or—and then it dawns upon you that maybe the light green growth is going to cause his failure. But how? Unless you are familiar with the appearance and nature of the "loco" you will puzzle over this minor point until the young prospector walks up to the spot, sees the bones, and finally relieves your suspense by letting the author mention the deadly weed.

Now, the only part this entire episode plays in the story is to make the predicament of the prospectors more and more dire. The loco weed accomplishes no more and no less than did the quicksand which swallowed up a mule earlier in the tale. *For the purpose of the main story, then, all that we need to know is that Farraday's horses wandered into a patch of loco weed and did eat thereof, thereby coming to an untimely end.*

We should have been told in the very first paragraph of the passage just quoted that it was this weed the animals were eating; and, as most of us do not know the great Southwest intimately, the story teller should have instantly enlightened us as to the poisonous nature of the weed. In failing to do this the author *attracts our attention unduly to the mystery of the weed and thereby gives to the weed itself an interest and importance which it does not properly possess in this particular story. By causing us to wonder about it, he turns us away from the story itself.*

This particular instance I have cited is by no means a flagrant one. On the contrary, many readers might overlook it altogether. None the less, the psychological effect of it is bound to be just as I have described it. It may be just enough to break down what interest you have developed in the tale. Remember, these little defects are, in story telling, quite as fatal as David Belasco holds them to be in playwriting. They can ruin a perfectly good story in precisely the same way that the effect of a beautiful symphony may be grossly marred by your chancing to observe the second violinist doing his

best to suppress a sneeze. Once allow your mind to be sidetracked by such an irrelevant detail and the whole intricate structure of the work of art is likely to tumble.

False suspense is sometimes the result of choosing the wrong angle from which to tell the story. In a certain story, for instance, a man, the narrator, is asked to take part in a test by which a police official hopes to determine the guilt of a man accused of murder. The reader follows the various steps of the test, all the time from the point of view of the narrator, who is taking an objective view of the whole performance. At the end he learns to his amazement that the narrator was himself the guilty man. By telling the story from the angle of the actual criminal, the author produces an inaccurate impression of the character. The reader naturally assumes that he is allowed to know all that is in the narrator's mind, so far as it relates to the story; at the end, however, he learns that the author has held out on him the most important fact of all. The impression created by the first of the story is inevitably destroyed by this revelation.

All of these comments may be summed up in a few simple rules:

1. **There are two kinds of suspense which are proper**:

    A. That suspense which lies in the actual order of events, such as we find in a mystery story.
    B. That suspense which, while not lying in the actual order of events, is contrived by the story teller for the purpose of intensifying the reader's curiosity and interest in the central idea or action of the story.

2. **There are two kinds of suspense which are improper**:

    A. That suspense which grows out of a simple failure on the part of the story teller to depict a character or a situation clearly enough for the reader to aim his interest in the correct direction.
    B. That suspense which by intensifying the reader's interest in a minor feature or an irrelevancy distracts him from the main story and, at the end of the suspense, leaves him substantially where he was at the beginning of it, so far as this main story is concerned.

One of the most definite and most invariable of all rules in story structure has to do with the placing of coincidences in your plot. This rule has been known, in part at least, for a long time, and has been carefully tested out. The ancient Greeks recognized one feature of it when they condemned the employment of the old device of the *deus ex machina*. This, as you know, was the employment of a god or some other supernatural character at the end of a tragedy to solve the situation that had been developed. Today, we know the rule in its more general form.

It is this:

> **It is dramatically permissible to employ coincidences freely in the complication that gives rise to the story action but wrong to employ any in the solving of the situation and the acts which arise from that complication and constitute the movement, climax and denouement.**

In other words, you may use coincidence to get your man into a hole but you may not use it to get him out of it.

There is a profound psychological reason for this. It is no mere arbitrary dictum of some schoolteacher. The reason is that

> *Your reader is interested in seeing a picture of men in action. He wants to watch the men you draw struggle to get out of the hole you put them in. Hence he feels cheated if you begin by showing him a man in a hole and his struggles to get out and then, instead of finding a way by which he can escape from his trouble by the use of his own wit, ingenuity or moral integrity, deliver him by some stroke of hick. Such deliverance does not show what sort of man your hero is, for the action is not truly dramatic and characteristic.*

Here is an illustration of the violation of this rule. Follow it minutely, for you must grasp every little step in the movement of the narrative in order to catch the point. The author of the story found great difficulty in seeing that he had violated the rule of coincidence, and you will encounter the same difficulty in your own writing if you do not early develop the habit of close analysis.

> John was an energetic young clergyman in a small Minnesota town. His moral courage was of high order and his energy and desire to help his people were intense. For several years he toiled

on a small salary and paid no heed to improving his own lot, giving all his best efforts to the parish. While thus engaged in self-sacrificing toil, he fell in love with Lucy, a girl of normal ambitions and interests. Lucy wanted him to rise in the world. She hoped he would become prosperous and more or less famous. She urged him to work for more material success. She told him she could not marry a small-town minister who did not exert himself to get ahead. They quarreled. Lucy left town. John stuck moodily at his church work. Some years later the war came.

Lucy went to France as nurse, John went as a "Y" worker. They did not meet on the other side but each learned what the other was doing. And each secretly admired the other in the new endeavor.

The war over, John returned to his home town and resumed his parish work. But he had been changed by what he had seen and learned in France; the old routine of church activities and his conventional duties as clergyman now seemed paltry and futile. He was keyed up to a much higher level of social service. He saw a hundred better things which he and his people ought to be engaged in. (The author here details these prospective changes). He brooded over the narrowness of his work and finally decided that he must escape from it.

Two courses were open; he might go to another town where the opportunities were broader or he might fight to persuade his trustees to allow him to reorganize the home church along the new line. *He decides to tender his resignation at once and accompany it with a statement of his new convictions.* (Note this carefully, in view of the fact that the author tells us explicitly that she intended to draw a picture of a man of *the highest moral courage*.)

He calls a meeting of the trustees, and tenders his resignation. Two of the trustees protest. They say they want to make things right. At this junction the fire siren whistles and the party hears the engines rushing past. Word comes that a bad conflagration is raging through the poorer part of the town, and trustees and clergyman hasten to the rescue. While aiding the sufferers, John is seriously injured. And then—wonder of wonders—from the midst of the many workers, Lucy appears! She comes to the unconscious John, carries him all alone into an automobile and takes him home where she nurses him back to health.

> The young people are now reconciled. Lucy realizes that John has displayed great valor and sincerity and so she gladly consents to marry him. The happy couple go away on their honeymoon, and when they return the trustees are so favorably disposed toward both of them as a result of all that has transpired, that they grant all of John's requests for church reform. Thus it comes to pass that John wins out in his campaign for a better humanity.

This was the plot. The author, when asked what picture she was trying to draw, states that she was primarily interested in showing us how a man of high moral courage can win out in the face of opposition. After having said this, she felt the need of further qualification; so she said that she had also wanted to show how people who cannot agree under ordinary circumstances can be brought together by a great calamity.

You will find—if you analyze the facts closely—that the two coincidences that are dragged in to solve this tale, namely the fire at the very moment John is resigning and the presence of Lucy when John is hurt, *completely destroy the very picture which the author has set out to draw: the picture of a man of high moral courage*.

To be sure, there are some imperfections in the drawing prior to the coincidences; notably, John's decision to resign before he has fought for his ideas in the open and to the last ditch. Certainly a man who has some beliefs that he holds very dear and wishes to put into practice, is not a very great moral hero if he leaves his church and town without such a fight. But we will overlook this point.

John is on the point of *doing something decisive*. He is telling the trustees what he stands for, what he must be doing if he is to be intellectually honest. He is, it would seem, all keyed up to exhibit his moral courage in some unmistakable deed. And then the fire siren blows! He, with all the rest, runs out to help. What do his acts from this point on show him to be? A man of *normal physical courage*. This physical courage is not extraordinary. What he does in helping the sufferers is neither more nor less than what millions of others have been doing, not once in their lives but hundreds of times—especially during the war. Physical courage of this degree is one of the commonest of all human traits. Lately it has been shown to be so very common that we no longer are stirred by it as we used to be. But be it rare or be it common, be it admirable or not, the essential fact, so far as we are now concerned with it, is that *Physical courage is totally different from moral courage, and behavior that reveals to us the presence of the former does not persuade us that the latter is also present*.

I cannot take the time here to prove this truth with much detail. I want you to find the proof for yourself by actual observation. What is moral courage? In what deeds do you recognize its presence? In what sort of a situation might a man prove, past all doubt, that he was a moral hero? On the other hand, what is the peculiar mark of most physical courage? It has a mark and an unmistakable one which, once observed, makes it impossible for you ever to mistake it for intellectual or moral courage.

To return to this story. John displays physical courage at the fire. Lucy, seeing this physical courage, comes to love him again. They marry and then the church members give in to John's ideas. Now I ask you, does the action prove—or even suggest very clearly—that it was John's moral courage which won the community?

To me it does not even hint it. On the contrary, it quite clearly shows us that John won out by a wild stroke of luck and nothing more. It shows that he never had to draw on any of his moral courage, which, as I have remarked, was not unusually strong so far as his behavior discloses it.

Where, then, was the author's mistake in technique? Simply in this: she allowed herself to introduce an extraneous event—the fire and its consequences—at the very point in the narrative where John should have demonstrated, by his conduct with the trustees, the strength of his convictions. The coincidence of the fire broke this dramatic development completely and so we never get the picture which the writer intended to give.

How to develop a story plot from an episode

I want to give you an idea as to how you should go to work building up plots. This is half the trick of successful story writing. Many who manage to sell stories find the devising of plots their greatest difficulty. The man who has mastered the use of English enjoys this narrative power more or less continuously. He does not have to learn it anew each time he writes; but with plotting it is different. There is a sense in which it is correct to say that every writer has to learn plotting all over again with each fresh story. What I mean, of course, is that each plot must be, in some respect—possibly a slight one—a new plot. There is no simple and clear formula, no mere mechanical manipulation of puppets and scenery. You must turn to life with fresh curiosity and a new imagination.

This is, by the way, why so many excellent writers "run dry" and cease turning out bright stories after a few years of dazzling success. They have

mastered the art of writing but not the science of plotting. Even Kipling, you will remember, fell into this misfortune.

While there is no mechanical formula that will keep the plots flowing steadily from your pen, there are some *habits of mind* which you can train more or less, and which, once trained, will make plotting amazingly easier. The two chief habits are

1. *Curiosity as to motives which lead men to do various things; and*
2. *The imaginative construction of many hypothetical situations in which your characters are placed and forced to act.*

You can cultivate both of these precisely as you can cultivate strong arm muscles. There is no mystery about it. *All you have to do is to use these traits early and often.* That is how any human ability is developed, be it a muscle or a part of your brain.

Get the habit of wondering why men do this or that.

Get the habit of inventing imaginary difficulties, imaginary complications in which you place your heroes and heroines and villains, and of watching them behave or misbehave.

Let me show you how you are to practise. Here is an amusing episode that occurred in San Francisco recently.

James Hass, wearing a new straw hat, passed the corner of Austin Avenue on his way home last Sunday night. A well-dressed youth stepped out of a doorway and thrust a revolver in his face. “Gimme that ‘bale of hay’ yer wearin’, brother,” said the youth, “I hate to do this but I gotta have a straw hat.”

The youthful highwayman tried on Hass’ hat. “Ah, it fits perfect,” he smiled. “You’re the third bird I tackled and I was beginning to think I couldn’t get a straw ‘Kelly’ to fit me.” And the highwayman departed, leaving Hass hatless.

Here is a peculiar situation. It may in reality be the result of some odd *complication*, or it may equally well be the expression of an odd *character trait*. It is for you to practise at giving it as many different interpretations as you can, and then thinking each of these interpretations through and “seeing in your mind’s eye” where each one leads.

1. Proceed in an orderly manner. Ask yourself first: “What sort of a *complication* could have led a well-dressed and, let us assume, normal youth

to take a grave risk of holding up three men in succession, trying on their hats and making off with the first one that fit him?"

2. The news item fails to state whether the highwayman had a hat of his own. If he did, that gives a very different "slant" to the whole situation. Suppose that he was wearing a straw hat, but one that plainly did not fit him. What might the real complication be? Suppose again that he was wearing a straw hat that fit him, but that it was sadly battered and befouled. What might the real trouble be? Why should he need a new hat badly enough to take the risk of going to jail for years?

3. At this point, tax your imagination to its utmost, and do not stop until you have thought up *at least three* complications that might, in real life, force a young man to such desperate measures.

4. Study the three or more complications carefully. Ask yourself how the youth might have gotten himself embroiled in these three ways; how he might get out of each one; and what the whole line of action and climax would probably be.

I advise you to write out a summary report of each complication. About 300 words ought to suffice for each one.

5. Next suppose that the youth has not been forced to hold up strangers as the result of some complication into which he fell, but rather that he deliberately undertook hat robbery as a result of some idea or hobby or odd twist of mind. In short, suppose him to be a "character." What trait or what idea might have prompted him to this course of action? And in what other manner would such a trait show itself?

6. Here again, do not be content with a mere fleeting impression. Think your idea through to the finish. Set it down in black and white. Put it aside for a day or so, and then come back to it, try to expand it, add details, correct it in the light of more careful reflection.

7. Write a description of each trait you imagine.

EXERCISES IN MANIPULATING MATERIAL

Almost every beginner is inclined to love his first-born idea too well. He feels that a story germ which has flashed upon him in an instant of warm inspiration is a precious thing, not to be roughly handled or operated upon. Now there are visions so perfect and so vivid that they must be written down precisely as they come, but such are few. Usually something has to be done to the idea, to make it measure up to the possibilities which you suspect are latent in it. After these have been realized, there is sometimes need for a

slight turn or twist that enhances its market value without injuring its dramatic qualities.

To get into the habit of making such changes and finishing touches is of the utmost importance, if you expect to write much. It is a hard habit for most of us to master. So I am going to give you several exercises which, if faithfully performed, will aid you in limbering up your imagination and becoming accustomed to juggling all the objects of fancy which enter into stories.

Before you begin these exercises, be sure you do not misconceive their aim.

> *This juggling of story elements is not recommended as a method of building plots. It is simply a gymnastic drill that will make you more nimble in manipulating story stuff.*

Unfortunately some young writers who learned this drill from me several years ago got the wrong impression; and a few of them managed to write stories by simple juggling, with the result that a number of teachers who heard about it adopted it as an easy method of attaining literary fame. As a method of writing finished tales, it is absurd; precisely as absurd as a dumbbell exercise would be, if performed as the one true method of winning a boxing match. As an exercise to develop one special facility, however, it is most useful.

Exercise I

I am going to suggest a setting familiar to you. You are to recall it vividly, then put into the setting three characters each showing the trait I indicate. Your problem is to invent a complication involving all three characters in this setting in such a manner that each must use the designated trait in facing the difficulties that arise.

> *Do not try to solve the complication you invent. That takes too much effort and is not worth while in most cases. Simply get the people of the story into a serious predicament (comic or tragic).*

Exercise I

1. The setting:
   Saturday night in the main street of your home town.
2. The characters:

Any hero whose trait is courage.
Any heroine whose trait is loyalty.
Any villain whose trait is cowardice.

3. Problem: to find a complication in this setting involving all three persons and these traits.

Exercise II

1. The setting:
   Same as in Exercise 1.
2. The characters:
   Any hero whose trait is loyalty.
   Any heroine whose trait is courage.
   Same villain as in Exercise 1.
3. Problem: Same as above.

Exercise III

1. The setting:
   Same as above.
2. The characters:
   Any hero whose trait is suspicion.
   Same heroine as in Exercise 2.
   Same villain as in Exercise 1.
3. Problem: Same as above.

Exercise IV

1. The setting:
   Same as above.
2. The characters:
   Same hero as in Exercise 2.
   Any heroine whose trait is suspicion.
   Same villain as in Exercise 1.
3. Problem: Same as above.

Exercise V

1. The setting:
   Same as above.
2. The characters:

Any hero whose trait is conceit.
Any heroine whose trait is credulity.
Any villain whose trait is deceitfulness.
3. Problem: Same as above.

Exercise VI

1. The setting:
Same as above.
2. The characters:
Any hero whose trait is credulity.
Any heroine whose trait is conceit.
Same villain as in Exercise V.
3. Problem: Same as above.

Exercise VII

1. The setting:
Same as above.
2. The characters:
Any hero whose trait is boastfulness.
Any heroine whose trait is shyness.
Any villain whose trait is greed.
3. Problem: Same as above.

Exercise VIII

1. The setting:
Same as above.
2. The characters:
Any hero whose trait is shyness.
Any heroine whose trait is boastfulness.
Same villain as in Exercise VII.
3. Problem: Same as above.

Exercise IX

1. The setting:
Same as above.
2. The characters:
Any hero whose trait is greed.

Any heroine whose trait is prodigality.
Any villain whose trait is boastfulness.

3. Problem: Same as above.

Exercise X

1. The setting:
   Same as above.
2. The characters:
   Any hero whose trait is self-pity.
   Any heroine whose trait is stubbornness.
   Same villain as in Exercise V.
3. Problem: Same as above.

Exercises XI to XX

For the next ten exercises, take as the setting any tremendously dramatic event which you have either witnessed or heard a great deal about. The Baltimore fire, the San Francisco earthquake, the East St. Louis race riot, a railroad wreck, or something of that sort would be best, but a lesser disaster or tumult will serve, provided you truly know its details.

Take in turn the characters and the traits indicated in Exercises I to X. Place them in this situation and develop the complication as before.

Distribute the work of these twenty exercises over three months or more. Go ahead with the following lessons meanwhile. Come back to this work in manipulation at odd intervals. If you try to do it without interruption, you will overtax your imagination and go stale.

As I have pointed out, one of the richest sources of the story teller's material lies in the incidents recounted in the daily papers. Not the least suggestive of these are the Personals, which appear nowadays less frequently in the American papers outside of the Pacific Coast but are still numerous in Europe.

Here are some specimens from the London *Times* which Dr. E. E. Slosson, of the *Independent Magazine*, recently collected and printed. Read them carefully, choose three which suggest some intriguing situation to you. Then invent the details of the situation for each of the three.

PERSONAL

Friday:—So it was only a wonderful dream after all. Goodbye, dear.—B.

G. W.—Foiled again; we will yet make the welkin ring with a joyous madrigal—

Sumatra.....

Escurial.—Does the muleteer approve of the proposed proceedings—Grandee of Aragon.....

ARKANSAS.—Poor Dear. Don't understand, but we're one always—now and evermore. A.

PLINY.—Your quips and jests may seem harmless enough to you but recollect there are some to whom they are as a poisoned dart.

It seems to me 'tis only noble to be good.—Laughing Eyes.

FRED.—Any soap, any candles—Sausage.

SAUSAGE.—No thanks but a box of matches.—Fred.

"Any pencils, Corporal?"

NEWT.—Drop a few crumbs into the bowl.—J.

IF lady lunching Midland, Birmingham, 23rd afterwards 2.55 P. M. Paddington in Black Musquash, Opossum collar, single pearl third finger right hand, mentioned name Adkins and Wilson, communicate Box V. 608, The Times, will receive something to her advantage.

LITTLE WOMEN:—Meet me Holborn Empire any afternoon, 2.15 to see Twins.—Meg and John.

NITA.—Full many a flower is born to blush unseen and waste its fragrance on the desert air.—Mooltan.

LINDA.—Now haughty, then coy, what's a poor fellow to do-o-o.—Jack-in-the Green.

JOSEPHINE.—Your suggestion is most unkind for I asked you most politely.—Francois.

TULIP.—Don't get cold feet.—Nicholas.

FAIR DAZZLING SNOW QUEEN of New Year's Eve, will you be my partner—King Cole.

JANE.—Oi do loike oo.

7932.—May we meet in eternity, where the truth alone will be known and believed and calumnies and false judgments cease.

LADDIE.—Please come back to us all. We are broken-hearted. Otherwise all available cash will be spent in search for you.—Fluffy.

DARK LADY, Persian Lamb Coat, Pulborough.—Waited two hours at Ritz's sad; no one with such charm.

MELIA.—Play a little music in the band.—Dryad.

I never heard such musical a discord. Such sweet thunder.—ECHO.

DOUBLE.—S. Kensington, Morning of sixth, much regrets his honesty. Box V. 98, Times.

NYANZA.—You will have to be fitted up with a 106 fuse unless you buck up.—

LADY, old (but young in spirit) wishes to find a man or woman to SHARE her beautiful Sussex COTTAGE with fine garden. Beautiful country. Artist or writer could have use of studio. Box A. 13, The Times.

NINA.—Bah!—Y.

BELLE.—You have floored me flat.—Raymond.

Would any one POSSESSING SKELETON, and having no use for same, kindly LEND IT TO TWO STUDENTS who are unable to buy.—Elford, 142, Cambridge St., S. W. 1.

WHADDON CHASE.—"Stack the Lot," President "Anti Poke Your Nose into other People's Business Association."

You have just been trying your wits at the game of imagining the details of a situation which have been most vaguely hinted at, such as those scraps of comedy and tragedy in the Personal Columns of the London *Times*.

You are now called upon to attempt something which requires much less imagination but more understanding and sympathy.

You will be given a real complication, one which has troubled somebody. These have appeared in that interesting page of the *New York Evening Sun*, "What Do You Think?" where all readers are invited to air their opinions and submit their worries for advice and help, or have been drawn from court records, from the experiences of clergymen, policemen, social workers and others.

Each and every one of these real complications contains the germ of a marketable story.

1. Here is a real situation, a genuine problem, involving deep desires and grave difficulties. Suppose that these two women set out to do what they wish to do. What dramatic complications, serious or comic, might arise? And how might the women deal with them? Add a definite character trait, and develop a plot.

> Is it possible for two girls to go adventuring and not become adventuresses? If so, why?
>
> We are thirty years old, teachers of music and tired of the job. We want to go to the Pacific Coast and stay there. But without drawing on our bank account.[1]

Amplify this situation so that it contains all the elements of a story plot.

2. A woman went through a most unfortunate love affair with a man years ago. Now she learns that her dearest friend is deeply in love with the man who threw her over in a very cruel and unfair manner.

Should she tell her friend the history of this affair?

3. A man said to be an ex-soldier and to have served about two years in Siberia was arrested here yesterday on a charge of passing two fictitious checks. His alleged failure to spell the name on the check correctly led to his arrest. He worked for the Rosa Dairy. It is alleged that after passing one check for $70.00 purported to have been drawn by his employer, J. R. Rosa, he tried to cash another for $80.00 but that when it was found he spelled the name “Rose” instead of “Rosa,” an investigation followed that led to his arrest.

4. One evening I went to a theatre. The show was a good one, full of breathless situations. Next to me sat a solid citizen in the typical clothes of a prosperous small business man, and beyond him a woman somewhat older and better dressed. Through all the most thrilling scenes these two sat and whispered about the money each had spent during the past year for clothes. The woman confessed that she had spent only ten dollars in seven months for her wardrobe. The man admitted that was “going some” and he stated that he had dropped all of sixty dollars during the same period.

Both their statement and their degree of interest in the subject struck me as mysterious.

Can you build up their characters and the complications in such a form as to make the conversation both natural and dramatic?

5. Show pigeons valued at $1,500 each found their way into pigeon stew which was sold on the East Side for 30 cents a portion, according to charges

by Thomas F. Murray, a pigeon fancier of East 86th Street, who told the police yesterday that his loft had been raided several times in the last month.

Detective Harry Marks of the East Eighty-eighth Street Police Station took Harry Newman, 16 years old, to the Police Headquarters on suspicion that he had knowledge of the course followed by the pigeons on their way from loft to stew.

Murray declared that "you couldn't taste a pigeon's pedigree in a stew" and that a loss of $1,500 to him meant a gain of only 30 cents or so to the alleged thieves.

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[1] From the *New York Evening Sun*, "What Do You Think?"

CHAPTER VII

WHAT TO TELL

We have been considering the various kinds of situations which make a good story. We must now ask how you ought to go about the telling of the tale, once you have chosen a suitable situation.

Tell the story!

This sounds foolish, I know. But, alas, it must be the first and the last advice that you take to heart. It is one of the hardest of all lessons to learn, for reasons which we shall consider later.

What the advice means is this:

> **Study the plot action first of all and, in the first writing of your story, report only those items which make that plot action clear and complete.**

Like many other rules, this one becomes more trenchant when cast in the form of "Thou Shalt Not." Thus phrased, it would run something like this:

> **Thou shalt NOT**
>
> 1. **Describe a scene that is merely beautiful or interesting and not vital to our understanding of the situation in which the action develops.**
> 2. **Draw a picture of a character that has little or no connection with the main complication.**
> 3. **Express any ideas of your own, either directly or through the mouths of your characters, which are not relevant to the central thought of your story.**
> 4. **Pay attention to stylistic effects before you have presented, in a full but perhaps rough sketch, the plot.**

There are three sorts of writers who find these rules irksome.

1. Those who conceive a brilliant idea in a flash and, in fine frenzy, sit down and dash off the story in an hour or two.
2. Those who begin with a fragmentary idea, say about some character or some complication, and endeavor to build it up

into a complete story by starting to write and letting each sentence suggest what the next one should be.

3. Those who have been so thoroughly trained in rhetoric and stylistics that their attention invariably focuses on the words and phrasing instead of the acts and people of the plot.

THE PERIL OF THE BRILLIANT IDEA SWIFTLY TOLD

I am not going to maintain that no story has ever been conjured up in a jiffy and written in three or four. That would be grossly contrary to facts. Some writers have on some rare occasions accomplished this stunt—for it is a stunt and nothing else. Could we know all the facts we should almost certainly discover that the brilliant idea was one of extraordinary simplicity and intensity; one, in brief, which headed so strongly in one direction that the author was at no point in danger of swerving from the goal.

Few are the plots in which such simplicity and intensity occur. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the form in which a plot comes to you is decidedly loose, even foggy. The setting is not sure and sharp; you may think of it as a Cape Cod fishing village, and yet, as you reflect, you see no reason why it shouldn't be perhaps a summer resort on Lake Michigan, or maybe an oyster town on Pamlico Sound. I have in mind one story (which was finally sold to a popular magazine at top price) in which the author began with a Russian setting of the "dark-and-stormy-night" variety, changed it to the East Side of New York, and ended up triumphantly with a voluptuous moonlight eve on Palm Beach. All that happened was that the first setting, while it was connected with one of the chief characters in the plot and helped to bring his nature out, was so remote from the sequence of events in which the action came to a crisis that the story would have been sadly cluttered, if the scene had been developed at all. In a novel it might well have been drawn; in a short story never.

Far from being the odd exception, this is the common rule, not only as to settings, but likewise as to characters and details of complications. You see a burly policeman rescue a child from beneath the wheels of a flying motor truck, and something in the man's act and manner seizes your fancy. You feel instinctively that he is a worthy hero of a story. Then a situation occurs to you in which his heroism might be brought out dramatically. You set to work to integrate the man and the events. And now a host of distracting suggestions flock in upon you. Your attention is drawn now to this twist, now to that; the temptation is to yield, and you are lost. The effect gets lost in a mist of conflicting values. The only safe way is to work through your plot to the bitter end, find precisely what effect in it is the strongest and then

go back to the beginning and choose incidents and details that develop that effect. This is bound to be a slow operation, and often tedious to a degree. But it is the pain of great art.

THE PERIL OF BUILDING AS YOU GO

There is a sense in which the writer who dashes off a brilliant idea in the manner just described "builds as he goes." He builds his details as he lays down his main action, which is preconceived. But there is another manner of building as you go which is quite different. It is the building of the very plot itself. This method presents new dangers, which are peculiarly difficult to explain. In fact, I fear that some authors who suffer under those dangers can never grasp the nature of them. Not a few of them with whom I have talked on this point insist quite sincerely that they never, never do what I declare they are doing all the time. All of which is merely another mournful scrap of evidence going to show what every critic and every psychologist knows, namely that most persons cannot get outside of themselves and watch their own wheels go around.

PLOT BUILDING IS NOT STORY WRITING

In order to tell a good story, you must first build a plot. But the building of that plot is not the telling of the story. It isn't that any more than the drawing of the plans for a church is the building of the church. But unhappily it gives the illusion of being the same thing simply because many writers have the habit of using the narrative form while they are building their plots, and this narrative form is the same one which they later use in telling the finished story. Having built in this form a plot which they feel to be a good one, they are misled by its having all the earmarks of a story. It opens with a scene, people enter, talk, do things, and pass along. Emotions arise and are sketched in. Crises develop. And the end comes. Why isn't it a finished story? The plot is there, they protest, and its narrative reveals it step by step. What more should the accursed critic and reader want anyhow?

Well, the bluntest possible answer is that *what the reader wants is a certain emotional effect*.

Your plot may contain immense possibilities of emotion. But if you narrate it in a form that fails to arouse emotion in the reader, he will turn away from you in wrath and scorn. Now, the task of *bringing out the emotional values of a plot is totally different from the prior task of finding the elements of that plot*.

To build the plot, you have only to analyze the forces and factors in the situation or character with which you begin; to select the more significant of these and then trace their various possible outworkings through successive situations. This done, you have—if you have worked wisely—the *material* of your plot complete. But probably not the effect at all.

To bring out the emotional effect of this finished plot, you must arrange the order of the events in a special manner; you must emphasize certain features of your characters and gloss over other features; and you must give expression to certain ideas, either directly or else through your characters, which clarify or reinforce the emotional effect desired.

All the selected story elements must focus on the effect, and other minor episodes and details must be added to heighten this effect "in line with" the story elements. At the same time the story action indicated in the plot must run on uninterrupted. To accomplish this last, a change in the main development is sometimes needed.

To produce dramatic climax and at the same time maintain the single emotional effect, the active solution (or denouement) must "come closer" to the emotion than the earlier elements do.

This double development is the secret of the complete dramatic-emotional effect, and the technique of attaining it is what I call integration.

INTEGRATION

This process of integration is realized, not by building a plot and then inserting between the plot paragraphs emotional passages, but rather by developing both drama and emotion as equally as possible in each and every part of the story.

Thus, when you describe the initial situation, you must do two things with each sentence, *if you can*:

1. You must bring out the first dramatic hints of the complication and action that follow; and

2. You must report these dramatic hints and the rest of the situation in a manner that sets the emotional tone of the story.

Illustration of the Integrative Process

Suppose a painter, strolling along the highway one bright morning, came upon a very droll individual whose manner and mien instantly suggested an excellent picture. The artist notes the man's size, peculiar form and motions, and his relation to the whole landscape. He sets up his easel and prepares to

sketch. If he is a very ignorant artist, we may imagine him to draw without further ado the whole scene just as it lies before him. You know that there isn't a chance in a thousand that the result will be a finished picture. Why not? Simply because the arrangement of details, as we come upon these in Nature, is almost uniformly helter-skelter and confusing, to some degree. Usually, when we come upon a lovely view of a gorgeous mountain valley, we find either an ugly chimney thrusting its sooty snout up somewhere in the view, or else we are pained to observe a lot of crumbs and greasy papers in the foreground, the remains of some picnickers' lunch. To extract the beauty from this ugliness that intruded, we must either shift to another vantage point or, as is often the case, deliberately omit the disturbing elements from our consideration.

This trick of shifting the point of view and dropping out elements from the scene is precisely what the writer must learn to do. But in order to do it, is it not plain that he must first of all make up his mind *what it is in the whole scene that he wants to depict most strikingly*? If he does not do this, he can not know what to look at and what to omit.

As with the scene we come upon in Nature, so too with those scenes we build up in imagination. These latter are also full of things which simply happen to bob up as we ruminate. They have little or no connection with any of the valuable ideas to which they adhere like so many burrs. Sometimes they have a beauty or interest of their own, even as a burr has for one who inspects it closely and with a predilection for botany. This value tends to make the thinker feel that the scene has a right to live in his final story. Many a time have I asked the writer: "Why, in Heaven's sweet name, did you give us these five hundred words of description about the village where the hero grew up? I don't see what connection it all has with the plot that follows." To which the author bravely makes answer: "Don't you think it's a good piece of descriptive writing?" To which I have to say: "Excellent! You make me see the old town and its elms and the village blacksmith and all the rest." Whereupon the author rejoins with triumph: "Well, that's what I wanted to do. It helps give the reader the background of my hero. And it's mighty pretty, I think."

I then remark that, when I had finished the story, I supposed that the one central feature of it was the way the hero, having fallen into the bad habit of stealing when a small boy, got into a terrible scrape when he was engaged to the mayor's daughter and came out all right in the end, thanks to the deep love the girl felt toward him and her courage in defying her parents and town sentiment by sticking by the young man and reforming him. If this is the story, then five hundred words describing the elms and the village

blacksmith and all the rest certainly are so many thistles among the figs. On the other hand, a description of the morality of the town, of the way small boys stole apples and grocers cheated at the scales and the mayor's best friend skinned the city by using cheap brick where he was supposed to use fine stone in erecting the county jail might well have been to the point—for reasons which I leave to you to guess.

Why do writers make this mistake so commonly? I think it is because *while building a plot one naturally concentrates his attention upon the inner development of the situations and the characters and simply tries to work out the details consistently with these latter. But the reader is never satisfied with a merely consistent development. He wants something more. He wants a consistent development which fills him with a clear and intense emotion, and the problem of creating such an emotion is quite distinct from the problem of consistent development.*

This latter problem is one to which we shall give much time in later lessons. It is the two-fold problem of "the uniquely characteristic act" and "intensification." What I must impress upon you right here is the advisability of your building plots in such manner that you will not be likely to confuse the result with the finished narrative. You must come to realize that,

Ordinarily there are two stages in telling a story. The first stage is that of finding or inventing a sequence of episodes leading up to a climax and a solution which is capable of arousing a clear and intense emotion in the reader. The second stage is that of reordering and emphasizing details so as to heighten the intended emotional effect.

You will probably come to grasp the profound difference between these two stages more readily if you get the habit of following a different work method in each. So I recommend that,

In the first stage do not use connected narrative at all. Reserve that form for the second stage.

Build the plot in schematic outline form somewhat after the fashion of a newspaper story.

When this is done to your satisfaction, analyze the material with reference to the emotional effects its various elements can bring out.

Then write the first full narrative form with the effect in mind.

The newspaper reporter's method of handling an ordinary episode is one which you may well follow in the first stage. On the scene of the story, the reporter sets down the barest essentials of the event, in memorandum form. Back at the office, he writes these up in a few paragraphs in narrative form so that the average reader may take in the gist of the story at a flash. If you will notice almost any first-page story in your morning newspaper, you will find this in the opening. It seldom exceeds a third of a column. Having done with the gist, the reporter then writes a more detailed account, in case the story is at all important, and this amplification develops the less significant items. It generally occupies the rest of the column devoted to the story. If there happens to be some striking aspect of the affair that has an interest far beyond the simple news story, the editor will request that the whole story be rewritten *around this feature*. Now the entire form of the story is changed. Compare, if you will, the news story of the death of some prominent citizen with the feature article on the same subject which you will find in the Sunday supplement. You will have no difficulty in observing how the reporter has dropped some items and expanded others to the end of bringing out with great sharpness some one fact or impression about the eminent deceased.

These three handlings of the same matter correspond closely to the correct logical development of story material in general.

Applying this technique to story telling, you should proceed as follows:

First Stage. Plot Building

Before resorting to any narrative, fill in the following form:

1. The theme of this story (if it has one) is. . . . . .
2. The main complication is. . . . . .
3. The dominant character is. . . . . .
4. The decisive character trait of this dominant character is. . . . . .
5. The crucial situation is. . . . . .
6. The outcome is. . . . . .

Do not try to fill out this outline in the given order. First of all report the item which has suggested a story to you. Then develop that in any direction that occurs to you and as you come upon suggestions for the other items, set down your report on each.

For example, you may have seen a family of poor slum dwellers being evicted on a sleety day; and it strikes you that this is a good complication. At first no theme occurs to you. So you merely record the details of this event under No. 2, in the above form. On the other hand this very same happening may be recorded opposite No. 5, building now backward to the characters and forward to the outcome.

In the case of the redoubtable Gubbs in Chapter V you began with a character, Elmer, and a hint at a complication. All the work that we did with Gubbs can be related to this schematic outline. Under heading 3 you would note all the facts about Elmer. Since the story is made to grow out of Elmer's bragging, you would enter under heading 4 **bragging** as his decisive trait. The complication is evidently Elmer's lie to Serena about his job. This complication taken from the actual facts you intensified by adding more brag material from your own invention—the clothes and the new car. In seeking "the worst possible thing" for Gubbs you were actually trying to invent a crucial situation for the story of a braggart. The result of your invention therefore belongs under heading **5**. The outcome is the result of Elmer's bragging himself out of his fix.

The story, which we planned so informally in Chapter V, should then be shaped up into schematic outline form, somewhat as follows:

1. This story has no theme.
2. The main complication is: Gubbs has bragged that he has been appointed superintendent of a big job at Boomisville. On the strength of this he invests most of his wife's capital in a snappy car in which to drive to the scene of his future activities.
3. The dominant character is Elmer Gubbs.
4. His decisive trait is his bragging. He has lied so much about his greatness that he actually believes it.
5. The crucial situation: Elmer on arriving in Boomisville is promptly turned down because of the car and other evidences of extravagance which he had indulged in as part of his bragging. He turns around and offers himself to a rival firm, bragging more than ever of his powers.
6. Outcome: The other concern takes him on and Serena lets him understand that he must make good.

Use complete sentences in filling out the form. Do not set down broken hints in the form of single catch-words or the like. All such are hazy and equivocal.

Having filled in the complete form, check through your items and see if they are consistent with one another. Correct any inconsistency. Then proceed to the second stage.

Second Stage. Filling in Plot Details

Draw up a bald report of the plot, stripped of all fine description and characterization. Let it read like a plain newspaper report, if possible. In this report be sure to include the following:

1. The circumstances giving rise to the main complication.
2. The persons actively involved in this complication.
3. The main complication itself.
4. The character traits of every person who figures at all in the action.
5. The outworking of those character traits which bring on the crucial situation.
6. The crucial situation itself (or climax) in which the events growing out of the complication reach their highest intensity.
7. The solution of this crucial situation (or denouement).
8. The import or lesson or theme of the whole plot, if it happens to have any clear one (which is not always the case).

While doing this be sure to experiment freely. Do not make the mistake, so common with beginners, of trying to build up all such details around some one first happy thought, drawing on your imagination for suggestions growing out of the factor you have begun with. *Here is the place and now is the time to use your classified notes and your news clippings. Use these exactly as the seasoned playwright and stage director uses a toy stage and puppets in devising novel scenes and situations.*

Suppose you have started with the eviction of the slum family. Suppose you see this event as a complication around which characters in dramatic action may be built. Very well! Having shaped up the main structure of the story in Stage 1, you should now take down your files and go through each topic that is even remotely related to the elements of the plot you have crudely sketched. For instance, there are many character types which might figure in such a complication. You might build around a cruel landlord, or around a lustful landlord with wolfish eye on the tenant's daughter, or around a weakminded landlord or half a hundred other sorts. Or you might build around the tenant himself; and there are many species of tenants in this

world. Search carefully through your files of human types. You may find half a dozen worth testing out in this complication. Test each one conscientiously. See what would happen in the outworking of each such trait, even under the given complication.

If you have built up your files abundantly, you will be agreeably surprised at the results of this method. I have never yet known it to fail as a source of genuine novelty and striking turns.

All this takes time and patience. Do not fancy that you can romp through the work. Try that, and you will get no results.

Third Stage. Rebuilding Around the Striking Effect

You have found all the details of a consistently developed story. Each event follows naturally upon its predecessor. Each act of character is natural and plausible. But, as I said, this is not enough. Readers demand much more than a consistently developed story of men in action. Consistency, in fiction as in real life, is a jewel; but it is neither diamond, emerald, nor pearl. It ranks well down the lines, somewhere near the humble turquoise. Yet a host of writers and critics have remained curiously blind to this fact.

Simple consistency is the aim of exposition and argument, or at least it often is. But the aim of dramatic narrative is the awakening of emotion and thoughts with respect to a particular person in action.

Sometimes the action reveals profound inconsistencies of a certain sort: and we are interested in them as a revelation of human nature or of the world itself, which is full of inconsistencies.

PRINCIPLE OF SELECTION

There are many acts which consistently express any given character trait in any given set of situations (plot). But among these many acts there are some which not only express the particular character trait but completely reveal and identify it in such a striking manner that the observer cannot mistake it.

The art of discovering and presenting such uniquely characteristic acts and of weaving them into the chosen emotional effect will be the subject of most of the lessons that follow. It is the most intricate, subtle, and difficult chapter in all fictional technique.

Which Story Development Shall You Choose?

Every story plot—or perhaps I should say every story germ—is capable of being developed in several different ways. Thus, if there are two important characters, the story may be written with either of these in the middle of the limelight. If each character has two important traits, you have four possible foci around which to develop your single effect. And, as almost every story has some distinctive setting, you have the further possibility of one or two scenic effects, or kinds of "atmosphere."

Which shall you choose?

This is sometimes a hard question to answer. But there are two rules that apply quite consistently.

1. If your own personal tastes and sensitivities are such that you do not prefer one of the lines of development markedly, then choose that line which yields the most striking (novel or intense) single effect.

2. If you have a marked preference for one line of development, choose that by all means. For your preference is a good indication that you sense the possibilities and the underlying values of that story. And if you sense these, you will find it easiest to bring out the values.

In nine cases out of ten, this second rule will suffice. Most writers have strong preferences, one for negro character stories, another for sea tales, another for minute psychological analysis, and still another for swift and savage drama. If you have such a preference, give way freely to it.

EXERCISES IN PLOT BUILDING

It is always best to practise plot building with some personal experience or fancy as a basis. Strange material may fail to arouse a lively chain of memories and associations. Nevertheless, I give you the three following cases from real life on which you may profitably work if you have nothing better to experiment with.

Each case contains the *germs* of a dozen plots but nothing more. Use your imagination freely as you apply all that you have learned to these unusual episodes.

> I. I was waiting on a lonely corner, long after midnight. There were few wayfarers in that deserted business section, and those who came and went were quickly lost in a chill sea fog. Across the street stood a shabby citizen, his eye on something attached to a telegraph pole. At intervals he walked up a side street, whistling; then back again. It dawned upon me that he was praying that I

would kindly move on. Whereupon I did so—but in the direction of the telegraph pole, while he was piping up the side street.

On a bracket against the pole stood a milk bottle bearing the inscription: "Help the Babies of Armenia." And through its transparent side I plainly descried a substantial roll of twenty-dollar bills.

Probably my neighbor was a plain bum with no loftier intentions than cracking the bottle and making off with that roll, which would swiftly go the way of gin, Jennies, and jazz. But again, you can't tell.

Maybe the fellow had put the money in there himself, in a fit of charity or remorse. And after it got there, it occurred to him that his wife and children needed the cash more than the Armenians did, or at any rate had a higher right to it. Maybe he knew his worthy spouse would listen to his tale of philanthropy, and reply with the rolling pin. Maybe he just had to get that money back, but at the same time couldn't take any chances on winding up before the night court. What to do?

Naturally, it will all depend upon his character. And, as he may be conceived to have any one of a thousand characters, here is the beginning of a thousand stories.

Or again,—maybe somebody else put the money in the bottle. Maybe that somebody had stolen it, and maybe the shabby citizen knew all about the theft and figured on being the victim's good Samaritan. Maybe the loss of that money meant disaster to the victim; and maybe the thief had dropped the money in the bottle, to throw the police off the scent when he feared he was being trailed. Maybe—

But you see that there is no end to these maybe's. Hit the trail as far as you like!

II. The son of a prosperous banker in a New England town married a woman of the best social connections. Three years later, his wife sued for divorce; and in the hearings she made scandalous charges against him. Nobody in town could quite believe them, for the young man had been all his life both exemplary and lovable. Nevertheless he made no defense. His wife won. Then people began to say among themselves that there must have been something to her accusations; else why should he not at least have defended himself privately to his own parents and intimates?

Soon afterward, it became apparent that the man had no future in his home town. He had been in line for an important promotion, the opening had come, and the directors of his company gave the opportunity to another man. The unhappy fellow packed up and disappeared.

Now, here is a powerful situation with a strong flavor of mystery. It can be solved in a hundred ways—has been in several, as a matter of fact. The character traits are missing from my brief report, and so too are the specific motives in both man and wife. Now how should one go about building up the plot?

III. Several years ago a bomb exploded in Police Headquarters. The bombers were never caught. The police ever since have kept a considerable garrison on duty at Police Headquarters on May Days to watch for trouble.

Last May Day one of the plainclothes men on duty observed a little man, with a package under his arm. He stopped and peered through one of the windows at the Headquarters Building.

Policeman R. trailed him. The man walked on to another window and put on a pair of spectacles and squinted hard at it. He was a small, inoffensive, soberly dressed man with slow gait, but he was as closely observed as if he wore a red blanket and left a trail of communist manifestos behind him. He scrutinized window after window, occasionally shifting his bundle from one arm to another in a blood-curdling manner. He attained the height of terrorism when he pulled out a red note-book and scribbled in it. After a sinister switch of his bundle he slipped the book with the incriminating binding into his vest pocket. Raising the index finger of his right hand he pointed from window to window and said something which sounded like: “One, two, three, four, five.”

Policeman R. kept right at his heels, so that he could leap on the man if he made a single false move with the package, but the suspect kept on staring into the windows and making mental calculations. Finally the man again whipped out the note-book and sharply swapped the bundle from one arm to another. “Stop him, grab him,” shouted Policeman R.

Policeman N. in plainclothes pounced on him and whisked the bundle away from him. Policeman R., assisted by two other plainclothes men, soon reduced the little man to a maximum of helplessness.

“Who are you?” shouted R. Shaking his head, the man pointed to his throat, where the twisting of his collar had cut off his air supply. “Speak up,” repeated R. “What makes you so evasive?”

Again indicating his throat the man reached into his pocket and drew out a card which read: “Elias Schwartz, Painter and Decorator, 14 Avenue A.”

One of the detectives, opening the bundle, found that it contained a ledger and an order book. The man’s collar was released, and he was allowed to gasp the following explanation:

“The city has advertised for bids for painting the windows. I came here to look them over and see how hard they would be to paint before I bid on them.”

CHAPTER VIII

PRODUCING YOUR EFFECTS

THE DOUBLE IDEAL

The American short story, as it is written to meet present-day requirements, has two ideals.

One ideal is that of *subject matter*. It is dramatic action.

The other ideal is that of *impression*. It is the single effect.

The ideal of dramatic action is a natural consequence of the nature of *human interest*.

The ideal of single effect is a natural consequence of the nature of *human suggestibility*.

Just as every picture has a frame so does every good story have a beginning and an end and boundaries within which a single and complete impression must be produced.

Hence only those situations in real life *to which clear beginnings and ends and bounds can be set without serious distortion* are suited as material for fiction.

Thus too it comes about that every good short story must fulfill two conditions. It must in the first case depict men in action that arouse genuine interest. And in the second case both the action and the interest aroused must be complete within the movement of the story and thus produce a single impression.

It is, of course, beyond controversy that many stories fail to attain this double ideal. It is also true that many writers in many times have not striven toward it, and others even today are opposed to it. All of which does not alter the main fact that the tendency of the progressive and growing mind of civilized man is in just this direction; and that the story which travels this road is the one that wins the best class of readers today and the class which will some day be the largest.

There are many classes of readers who are too immature and too uncultured to appreciate this type of story. Most Russians, for example, are mentally incapable of appreciating and liking it; because, as those who know

Russia best agree, the average Russian reader is mentally where our forefathers were in Queen Elizabeth's day.

WHY SHOULD A SHORT STORY PRODUCE A SINGLE EFFECT?

This is a natural question in the minds of most beginners. It seems to be an arbitrary rule. Why might not a perfectly good story create several emotions in the reader at the same time? Why, for example, might I not write about a man who was greedy, vain, cowardly, and amorous and who gave vent to all these traits in a series of complications? Why might I not depict the way these four traits of his character came into conflict, combined, fought and eventuated in some comedy or tragedy? Or again, why might I not write a story about four people, each exhibiting a trait, and all in some conflict? Or why not a story which sought to prove two or three ideas, say one about the evils of the liquor traffic, one about the desirability of the United States joining the League of Nations, and one about the ouija board?

There is just one answer to all this. And it comes from human nature itself, not from some theorist's head.

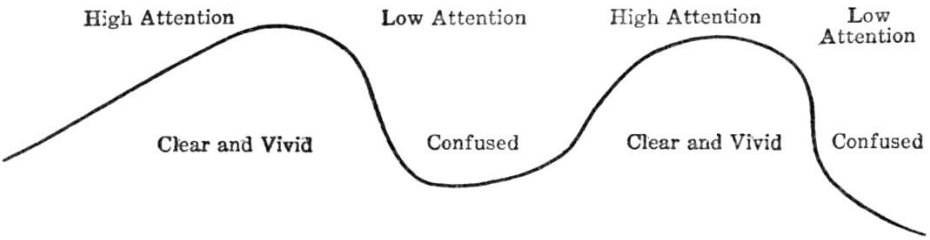
The short story, as published in the American periodicals, is limited definitely as to length and is meant to be read at one sitting.

And the ordinary reader finds it as difficult to receive more than one clear impression in that space and time as the story teller finds it difficult to produce more than one effect in so few words.

We begin with the hard fact that most editors will not accept stories that run beyond eight thousand words, and many restrict the length to six thousand or even fewer. Given this hard and fast rule of the game, the author's problem is to get the best results he can under the limitation.

This best result comes by doing a little very well. Every time you try to convey either two meanings or two effects in from fifteen to thirty minutes, you are running hard against the laws of attention and impression.

Psychologists have investigated the laws of attention and impression at great length. They find that both these processes move in pulses. No matter what you may be attending to, you hold the object clearly before you for only a few seconds at a time. Then swiftly it slips out of focus, so to speak; and you struggle to regain it. Thus:



Whatever you concentrate upon, you cannot hold fast to it for more than a few minutes. You fatigue quickly. Your mind insists upon wandering, even though the topic is absorbing and important. In some practical affair bound up with your personal success or happiness, you can attend much longer. To a story, which seldom touches you so intimately, you are held only by great effort—sometimes on your part, and sometimes on the author's.

So too with the definiteness of impression which you receive. This is a matter of suggestibility. And it follows the same general laws that *suggestibility* in hypnotism does. In fact, there is a sense in which we can truthfully say that *every author is a hypnotist*. He strives to force you to believe his story; he breaks down your own life and beliefs for the nonce and puts you in another world. He coaxes you. He cajoles you. He fills you with hints and glimpses of this other world. If he is skilful, he actually lifts you out of yourself for a little while and makes you live the lives of his characters, accept their feelings, see with their eyes.

Seldom, however, is your surrender complete. All your habits of thought and action are steadfastly driving you back into your own ways. The mere laying down of the book or paper you are reading is enough to break the mesmeric spell. The same fatal result follows the slightest irrelevant suggestion within the story, especially any suggestion that the whole thing is make-believe. (Anthony Trollope, by the way, ruined many a page of his writings by deliberately committing this absurdity.)

Do you not see now that the task of conveying one meaning and one effect is quite vast enough and certain to tax your skill to the utmost?

To Poe belongs the credit for first clearly grasping and stating this ideal of the single effect. He writes thus:

> A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thought to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be brought out, he then invents such incidents—he then

> combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tends not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. As by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed: and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem, but undue length is yet more to be avoided.

It is clear that, when Poe speaks here of "the preconceived effect," he really has in mind the effect *upon the reader*. For he speaks further along of "the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art." Thus our first master of the short story grasped this "problem of three bodies," of which I am now speaking. What he did not grasp was the peculiar problem of communicating a picture or thought to minds who *cannot* contemplate it with kindred art. In most cases, unfortunately for the artist, he must address readers whose perceptions are much less keen than his own. It is his task to supply imagination and stimulus to imaginations that are lacking in the public. Henry James and a few others have escaped this difficulty. They have written for literary folk. And they have paid dearly for the attempt.

Because the average reader is much less imaginative and less sensitive than even the third-rate writer, the single effect becomes doubly necessary to any author who wishes to attain even a limited popular success.

It is safe to declare that *all other story ideals are less important than the single effect, provided you are trying to reach a large public*.

Even the dramatic effect may, if absolutely necessary, be sacrificed largely to the single effect. There are many famous stories whose dramatic values are quite slight, indeed almost trivial. Such stories, you will find on analysis, have played up some sentiment or some thought with great vividness and consistency, leaving a most distinct impression upon you.

I had twelve writers read Wilbur Daniel Steele's story entitled "For They Know Not What They Do" (*Pictorial Review.*) The day after they had read it, I asked them, without previous warning, "Where is the scene of this story laid?"

Without hesitation seven of the twelve said, “In England.” Four said, “On the Maine Coast.” The other did not know.

The fact is that the scene is not specified but is hinted at as being somewhere in the United States; the tombstone inscription of Maynard Kain, Second, states that he died for the preservation of the Union.

Now why did seven out of the twelve think it was England, especially when they knew in advance that Steele was an American? It is because Steele has much of Thomas Hardy’s technique and manner—though not his ideas and philosophy. The flavor is unmistakably that of Hardy. What this group recognized was the *effect*, an effect identical with that of Hardy’s stories in English settings.

CONVEYING THE MEANING AND CONVEYING THE EFFECT

You have just seen how the meaning of your story may be fatally injured by your leaving too much to your reader’s imagination. You must now study another danger much more perplexing, a danger that grows out of the false doctrine of compression which we have already mentioned.

It is quite possible that you have told everything that is necessary for our understanding what kind of a man your hero is, what the outstanding trait of your heroine is, where the happenings take place, and what the whole affair is about. Every essential detail about people and action may have been set down faithfully. And yet the story may miss fire.

If you have been reading the advice of those who urge the utmost compression, holding up the parables of the Bible and the sketches of Maupassant as models, you will never be able to discover why the editors keep returning the MS. to you. For all who hold to this fallacy believe that a story is completely told when its meaning is made clear. There was never a greater error in all the arts than this one.

The aim of the writer should not be merely to convey a clear meaning. It is his particular business to convey a strong emotional effect.

A meaning may be conveyed in a highly condensed form, such as a summary. But the emotional effect can be produced only through the repetition of details that drive it home.

Let me give you a very simple illustration of this truth. If, in the midst of an account of a mine disaster, I say: “The woman wept bitterly when the miners brought home her husband’s mutilated body. But only a week later, she married the Slovak foreman of the works,”—doubtless I make clear the woman’s action and give a strong suggestion as to her fickleness or perhaps

her lack of love for her first husband. But surely these brief sentences do not convey anything like the full emotional possibilities of the situation. And, if I am writing a story in which these figure at all, I must ask myself this question:

To what extent does the effect I am aiming at depend upon the detailing of the wife's behavior here?

When I try to find the answer to this, I discover a peculiar fact. I discover that

An idea may be conveyed by one brief statement, so far as its meaning is concerned. But most dramatic effects can be conveyed only through repetition of statements converging upon one and the same impression.

The amount of repetition required to produce a given effect will depend upon two factors:

1. *The subtlety of the particular effect: and*
2. *The intensity of the effect most compatible with the readers' probable intelligence and susceptibility.*

That is to say,

1. The more subtle, the more unusual, or the more intricate the particular emotion which you seek to arouse in your readers, the more often must you introduce episodes, descriptions, or character touches which induce it. And,

2. The more readily your readers react to emotional suggestions, the less necessary does extensive repetition become; and the more they tend to suspect a character, an emotion, or a situation as improbable, the more must you resort to repetition in order to break down this intellectual resistance.

These are fundamental laws of psychology applied to the art of narrative. They are the laws of suggestion. I am now going to show you how they are applied to a famous story.

First I shall give you the opening lines of the story as revised by me in order to bring out clearly the meaning *and nothing else*.

> During a whole dull autumn day I had been traveling alone on horseback through a dreary country; and toward evening came to the House of Usher. The first glimpse of the building depressed me. My mood was insufferable. The bleak walls and vacant windows and decayed trees round about depressed my spirit so that I felt like an opium eater after his dreams have passed and he

has lapsed into everyday life. I could not understand what it was that affected me so. The mystery was insoluble.

I assumed that objects do combine mysteriously in patterns that impress us, and that the analysis of these patterns is too hard for us. With this thought in mind, I halted on the precipitous brink of a tarn and gazed at the image of the dwelling in the water.

In this unpleasant house I was planning to visit for some weeks. Its proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been one of my boon companions in boyhood; but many years had elapsed since our last meeting. He had recently written me, begging me in an importunate manner to come and see him. And his letter gave evidence of nervous agitation. He had spoken of an acute illness and a mental disorder which he hoped might be relieved by my presence. It was the earnestness of his request that had led me to accept his invitation.

Compare this passage, line by line and word by word, with the original quoted below. Count the words and phrases which repeat and intensify the effect of *gloom*. Count those which repeat and intensify the effect of *mystery*. Count those which repeat and intensify the effect of *impending horror*. Having done this, notice in great detail how Poe has woven these emotional effects into the initial movement of the plot.

During the whole of a dull, dark and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I knew not how it was; but with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment, with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural image of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house and the simple landscape features of the domain, upon the bleak walls, upon the vacant eye-like windows, upon a few rank sedges, and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into everyday life, the hideous dropping of the

veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart,—an unredeemed dreariness of thought, which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadow fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there *are* combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate, its capacity of sorrowful impression; and, acting upon the idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder more thrilling than before—upon the remodelled and inverted images of the grey sedge, and the ghostly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.

Nevertheless, in this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks. Its proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been one of my boon companions in boyhood; but many years had elapsed since our last meeting. A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant part of the country—a letter from him—which, in its wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply. The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness, of a mental disorder which oppressed him, and of earnest desire to see me, as his best, and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady. It was the manner in which all this, and much more, was said, it was the apparent *heart* that went with this request, which allowed me no room for hesitation, and I accordingly obeyed forthwith what I still considered a very singular summons.

LAW OF INTENSIFICATION

When you have made the above analysis, you will be ready to understand the following law of intensification without further explanation.

1. **Intensity is the amount of a given quality per impression.**

2. **The more the suggestions and associations of a given "Flavor" presented to your reader in a single sentence or passage, the stronger his emotional reaction and the weaker his tendency to think of irrelevant and conflicting matters at the time.**
3. **Hence the rule of technique:**
   Having chosen the emotional effect you are to aim at, select and report only those features of setting, character, and complication which produce that effect. If some features needed for the plot do not produce that effect (which often happens) you are to report them as colorlessly as possible so that they set up no antagonistic impression.

THE TWO LAWS OF STORY TELLING

TO CONVEY YOUR MEANING, BE CONCISE AND PRECISE!

TO CONVEY YOUR EFFECT, REPEAT AND REPEAT!

"Saying a Thing Three Times Makes It True"

You have doubtless heard this cynical remark. It sums up a great psychological truth which underlies most of the ordinary man's thinking. On it there has been built up many a marvelous success in advertising, in politics, and in literature.

What the saying means precisely is that

Repetition breaks down incredulity.

Belief is induced by the mere habit of hearing or seeing.

Every morning you walk to your office, you pass a billboard on which, out of the corner of your eye, you half-consciously observe a large picture of a small boy holding a bottle above which there runs the legend

PERKIN'S PICKLES ARE THE PUREST

The exhibit does not specially interest you. You never eat pickles. In fact, you detest them. And your mind, at that hour of day, is always busy with the day's business problems.

You have been passing this sign three months, when one day your wife drags you off to a picnic. She tells you to trot down to the grocers and pick up some rye bread, some cheese, some potted veal, and some pickles for the picnic lunch. You toddle along. You line up at the counter, and very much to your surprise, you find your mouth engaged in saying: "Give me a large bottle of Perkin's. They are the best on earth."

The grocer, crafty profiteer that he is, slyly slips you a bottle of his own pickling and says confidentially that it is much better than Perkin's polluted preparation. And thereupon, to your still deeper bewilderment, your mouth speaks up and says: "No thanks, Sluggenheim. I want Perkin's. They are the best on earth."

Don't let this frailty distress you. You are no worse off than the rest of your contemporaries. Everybody is doing it all the time. Nine out of ten opinions which most men honestly entertain and act upon are shot through with just such suggestions, picked up Heaven knows where. Most Democrats vote the Democratic ticket because they have been reading or hearing good things about Democrats for a long time. The same with Republicans, Socialists, Bolsheviki, and all the others. So too with the clothes, the watches, the fountain pens, the suburbs, the theologies, the shoes, and even the wives men choose and praise.

Of course, in practical matters, where things are put to test, their intrinsic merits come out eventually. No matter how cleverly a make of clothes is foisted on the public through suggestion, in the long run it must win or lose by the merit of the cloth and tailoring. And so with all other things that can be and are experimented with.

But in fiction almost nobody puts anything to the test in this manner. A story is ordinarily judged by the impression it creates at first reading. Hence suggestion figures largely in the producing of effects here. And the method of suggestion is *the subtle reiteration of words and allusions that call the reader back again and again to the central fact or scene out of which your desired effect naturally arises*.

The tremendous importance of slight effect is, fortunately, much less common in the written story than in the drama, where impressions of sight and sound mingle inextricably with one's emotions toward the character and situations. Nevertheless, it is well to quote here David Belasco's recent remark on the unbelievable subtlety of seemingly trivial elements.

> I have found, too, that not only can the effect exercised on an audience by a given speech be either modified entirely or

> strikingly enforced by changing the quality and quantity of light shed upon the scene wherein it is spoken, but also that with actors of finely strung, highly sensitized organizations I can, by changing the lights upon them, get from them feelings and tones not to be obtained to anything like the same degree under ordinary lighting. I have many times succeeded in getting what I wanted from actors by that means when every other has failed. And, what I think is rather comic, I have found that I am myself so sensitive to light changes that at times after arranging and adjusting a scene I have turned my back on the stage and closed my eyes tight, and so listened to the players, in order to judge of what actually they were saying without having my judgment colored and interfered with by my own contrived methods of accentuating susceptibility.
>
> I first had my attention directed to the importance of this, among other devices of judging effect, by Henry Irving's telling me that he had entirely altered a reading of his in his great impersonation of Shylock on the suggestion of a deaf man who had detected a blemish no other spectator had noticed.

In the short story we are not exposed to light effects. But we are influenced much more than we generally realize by the elusive implications of words and even by their sounds. Some of us are so sensitive in this respect that we tend to think of a writer's style as being chiefly just this special power to stir up vague "background memories" and sentiments. A number of cultivated readers have assured me that it is this power in Thomas Hardy that makes his style unique and potent; and I have heard the same regarding Poe. Personally I do not agree with this sweeping statement; but it is beyond dispute that the mere choice of words and the phrasing exercises a deep influence and goes far to qualify the total effect of a tale.

The negative side of this technique of hypnotizing is quite as important as the positive. By the negative side I mean the skilful avoidance of every word and allusion that might call the reader's attention to some feature of the story that suggests doubts or even a different train of thought from those desired. It is not enough merely to repeat and repeat the right touch. It is no less vital to suppress the wrong one. The disturbance it may cause, if introduced, may ruin the entire narrative.

An excellent illustration of this negative technique ingeniously coupled with good positive development is to be found in the short serial by Ben Ames Williams, "Toujours l'Audace," which ran in the *Saturday Evening Post* through December 1919 and January 1920. This seasoned writer there

performed a legitimate and highly artistic hoodwinking that few men can hope to rival.

Using one of the most threadbare of all antiquated plots, Mr. Williams achieved a highly readable story by sheer technique. A forger just out of prison finds himself mistaken for a rich young Bostonian by the name of Perry Danton. This gives him the happy thought of putting himself in Danton's place. Planning with consummate skill and deliberation, the ex-convict finally delivers his stroke. He has the real Danton shanghaied, beaten up, and dumped in a British port clothed as a common seaman. The schemer, having practised every gesture and manner of his victim, garbs himself in typical Dantonesque clothes, walks into Danton's fine home, completely fools even Danton's servants, and takes possession.

When the real Danton returns from abroad, badly bruised, tanned, hardened, and penniless, the imposter manages to hold his own in a long contest of wits. The real Danton has appealed to the newspapers and has naturally gone at once to his old family lawyer, who has been in the family confidence for many years. So skillfully though, has the impostor wormed himself into the faith of the attorney that the real Danton is rejected. In a meeting at the law office, where the two men have a show-down before a newspaper reporter and the attorney, the impostor displays a more accurate knowledge of some confidential family matters than the real Danton does. It is only afterward that the girl whom the real Danton loves saves the situation; and it then appears that she had spotted the impostor from the first. The usual happy ending follows.

Now, were this story to be subjected to the test of cold-blooded realistic analysis, it would fall to pieces like an old rag at the first harsh touch. Almost every situation in it is, strictly speaking, absurd. A forger fresh from prison simply could not learn the intimate details of a Boston society man's affairs well enough to talk about them with the society man's intimates. He might, of course, look like the latter and shape his manners cleverly enough to be mistaken for him in casual meetings. There are many thousands of trifles which every man has experienced and knows and of which nobody else is in possession, in their aggregate. And there are many hundreds of contacts with people and affairs that have never been recorded and cannot even be guessed by a stranger. In real life, when an impostor steps into the shoes of somebody else, he is always compelled to fight shy of all such intimacies. He may feign illness and hide himself in his victim's home. He may pretend to have suffered a disfiguring accident that alters his manner and makes him avoid society. Or, best of all, he may go away on a long trip. But, if his victim still lives and the impostor knows that he lives, the

impostor would never dare to make love to his victim's sweetheart and confer daily with his attorney. Were he smart enough to put across such an imposition, he would be smart enough to keep his head out of such traps.

If the impostor's acts are wildly impossible, the moves of the real Danton are, when soberly reviewed, downright grotesque. Take only one instance, the great test in the lawyer's office when Danton is trying his utmost to prove that he is the rightful owner of his estates and the forger a crook. He agrees to let the test turn upon a few questions suggested by the impostor and by the attorney. Would any sane man whose all was at stake agree to such a plan? Certainly not. Danton is superhumanly stupid in this scene. Why does he not hurl question after question at the forger? Why does he not multiply instances drawn from his own early childhood, the lives of his parents and grandparents, and a thousand other sources all well known to the lawyer, but by their very nature inaccessible to the impostor? Why does he not recall scores of trifling episodes at college in which old acquaintances were involved who might be appealed to?

Such queries arise, however, only as after-thoughts. For Mr. Williams has used both positive and negative hypnotism so well that they cannot easily bob up, as you read the story. He understands that there are hundreds of things which a clever impostor might really do, to pose as another man; and that, for every hundred of such there are only five or six other things which, in a severe test, would surely spoil the whole plan. So he cunningly mentions the former and suppresses every hint of the latter. It will repay you to study with much care the minute handling of all the ticklish points in the story, just to see how Mr. Williams has mastered this technical trick and thereby converted an intrinsically impossible series of events into a highly probable one. All of which is in strict accord with the ancient rule, first laid down by Aristotle, that impossible things which seem probable are fit subjects for a story, whereas possible things which seem improbable never are.

After you have studied Mr. Williams, then turn to almost any of Harold McGrath's stories to see the other side of this rule. You will find that this writer, though gifted with a wonderfully rich romantic imagination and a fluency of expression that has unmistakable charm and power, has never mastered this fundamental technique of literary hypnosis. He is constantly relating things which might really have happened, yet with a manner that leaves us doubting to the end. And he even more often tells about impossible things with such carelessness as to detail that their impossibility screeches at you from every line. He has ruined as many good stories as Mr. Williams has salvaged bad ones.

It is the psychological law behind all this art of intensification that explains the old saying that genius is the capacity for taking infinite pains. To build up a mass of suggestions throughout a story, all tending to thwart conflicting lines of thought and feeling and all converging upon the one chosen impression requires a degree of concentration and toil which few writers seem inclined to assume until repeated failures have knocked the truth into their heads with painful violence. At one and the same time you have to reckon with the tale you are telling, with the probable reader, and with the English language and the acquired suggestiveness of its words and idioms. No mean feat, let me assure you!

It was this fact that David Belasco had in mind when, speaking of failures in the theatre recently, he said:

> *More plays potentially excellent and valuable are ruined and lost because of the superficiality and flurry-hurry of contemporary authors and producers than by any—or, indeed, all—other causes.* It may be a platitude to say that great things are made up of little things—but it certainly is a platitude that needs enforcement in the theatre. There are scores—yes, and hundreds—of little things in every example of adequate play producing which not one person in five hundred consciously sees and estimates, but which every person in an audience feels and responds to. After all, the block of concrete which will outwear time is made up of countless impalpable grains of dust. We must assuredly be fleet to catch success; the alluring but fugacious dollar is difficult to pocket. Nevertheless, play producing is, *facile princeps*, the business in which to make speed slowly. Goethe, I think it was, who admonished us to *work in art without haste and without rest*. That certainly should be the law of every actor, still more of every manager engaging in the tempting of fortune by the producing of plays. Well might that terrible old buccaneer, Long John Silver, bewail as fatal "this same hurry and hurry and hurry." Many's the honest manager it has wrecked as well as pirates bold. I witnessed, only a few nights ago, the final performance in New York, after a deplorably short run, of a drama which I am confident could have been presented there to capacity houses—if only a little more time and care had been bestowed on its preparation and rehearsals. "Do not hurry, gentlemen," remarked one of the greatest surgeons to his assistants as he was about to begin a desperate operation to

save life, “do not hurry; I have no time to lose.” In the matter of play producing, which has been my business now for close on half a century, I say—and I’d like to say it through a megaphone—“Do not hurry, gentlemen, unless you are prepared to lose not only much money but also that immortal part of the poor showman, his artistic reputation.”

EXERCISES IN INTENSIFICATION

Here is a description of a young woman and part of her character and history. Study every line well until you have all clearly in mind. Then rewrite with one aim, namely that of intensifying to the utmost her physical charms and her nature. *If you do this well, you may laugh at the final impression; it will be so exaggerated. But never mind! This is an exercise in consistent exaggeration*:

Miss Fanny had black eyes and was rather below medium stature. She was a belle. She had mind enough to appreciate fully the romance and enthusiasm of her cousin and lover, Philip, and she knew precisely the phenomena which a tall blonde would have exhibited. While the fire of her love glowed, therefore, she opposed little resistance to Philip’s proposal. She seemed soft and yielding, but her purpose remained unaltered. She would not wed him unless he forsook art and joined her brother in his very profitable business. She rang out “No” to him the next morning in a tone as little changed as a convent bell from matins to vespers.

She was not a designing girl. She might have found a wealthier customer for her heart than Philip. But she loved her cousin as well as her nature admitted. There were two things which conspired to give her the unmalleable quality just described—a natural disposition to confide in her own sagacity, and a vivid impression made upon her mind by a childhood of poverty. Seeing no reason to give her cousin credit for any knowledge of the world beyond his own experience, she decided to think for him as well as love him. He must become rich first and marry her afterward.

FALSE COMPRESSION

Scores of good stories have been ruined by the misleading advice of teachers to compress the narrative into the smallest possible space. Many self-styled authorities on fiction writing have commanded the author to strike from his story everything which is not indispensable to conveying his idea. You probably have heard it said that the parables of the New Testament are model short stories, and that genius reveals itself in the ability to take first draft of five thousand words and trimming it down to three thousand.

This is nonsense. It is the result of a confusion. Those who advocate it have not grasped the immense difficulty between rhetorical abbreviation and suppression of irrelevant matter. Nor have they grasped the even greater difference between conveying the *meaning* of a story and conveying the full *effect* of a story.

The first difference is easy to make clear. The second difference is rather subtle.

RHETORICAL ABBREVIATION AND SUPPRESSION OF IRRELEVANCIES

There are two legitimate ways in which a story may be shortened. One is by true compression, which is *packing the entire story precisely as you have constructed it into fewer words but without the slightest change of subject matter or effect*. This is done simply by using shorter words and shorter phrases for precisely the same ideas as you have originally chosen to express. Thus if in your first draft you have used the phrase "the golden orb of day," you change this to "the sun." Or you drop a string of relative pronouns and definite articles. All of which generally improves the narrative. On the other hand, you may shorten the story by dropping from it a minor character, a scene, a long conversation between hero and villain, or something like that. *This is not compression at all.* It is alteration of plot, or else alteration of the presentation. You are not focussing a given story down to a smaller diameter. You are trimming away some of it. The two operations are profoundly different. One leads to one result, the other to a very different one. And you must not think of the second as simple compression.

DANGERS IN THE SUPPRESSION OF STORY MATTER

In trying to keep a story within a given length, never make the mistake of omitting anything which, in the slightest degree, is essential to the reader's grasping the nature of the plot action or understanding of your characters.

This sounds like obvious advice; you may think it is foolish to state it, but it is not. I have often observed even seasoned writers to commit this mistake. Sometimes it is done merely in haste, again it is done with deliberation. Frequently the author seems to be too close to his story to realize how great a difference to the reader a small omission makes. This, in fact, is the source of the peril in all save the beginner.

Having labored minutely through all the details of building up your characters and mapping your plot action, you are, of course, most intimate with every necessary fact. You still continue to know it all, even if you do

strike out a sentence here and there for brevity's sake. And thus you have difficulty in sensing the effect of the omission.

It is this fact that makes it so necessary for you to cultivate the habit of *postponing the final revision of your story as long as possible after the first writing of it*.

Do your utmost to come back to your story for the last revision with the uninformed mind which the ordinary reader brings to the story when he first sees it in print.

I am asking you to develop a mental habit that is not at all easy to acquire. It is the habit of forgetting, of becoming—so to speak—a child again with respect to your own work. It is much harder to acquire than the habit of remembering things. Yet it can be acquired. I have seen it learned. I have known a number of writers who possessed the facility in almost the same remarkable degree as Josiah Royce, the eminent Harvard philosopher: Royce was able to forget completely the very title and content of articles he had written and thus he came at every new topic with a fresh mind, unshackled by the painful and false obligation to be consistent with his previous utterances. Every truly great artist has the power to get away from his own work, more or less at will. He can become, to some appreciable degree, his own reader and hence his own critic. Never completely, of course. But completely enough so that he can experience his own story with some innocence and can detect gross errors of omission or false development.

Let us look at a case of this false compression in which, as the author has personally admitted, the vital facts were deliberately dropped from the story because he supposed the reader would surely infer them from the situation.

The story is a not very original variation of one of the old, old triangle plots. An artist, well on the road to fame, is stricken with tuberculosis. The doctors tell him positively he has only a few months to live. His wife is horrified and sickened; she cannot endure to be with him as he wastes away, and he, appreciating her feeling, has no wish to impose himself upon her. He goes West into the Rockies to die, having said farewell to her forever.

In the mountains, he meets a lovely girl with a strain of Indian blood in her veins and that bitterness in her heart which only the half-breed knows. She is well educated and refined and hence far above the Indians on the reservation near by; yet she is not white and cannot be accepted by white society on a parity. The artist, in spite of his weakness which has now all but reached collapse, yearns to paint one masterpiece before he dies. He is

smitten by the girl's beauty. He asks her to pose and she agrees, mostly out of pity for his physical condition.

Months go by. The picture progresses and the artist begins to recover. As his body heals, his spirits rise; and, at the same time, the girl falls frankly in love with him. One day, as he comes upon her, she suddenly flings her arms around his neck, kisses him and says: "You love me. You know that you do. Say that you love me!"

"Yes, Julie, yes!" His voice was hoarse and shaken. "But you mustn't—you mustn't do this. I'm full of the plague * * * * *"

Now please note that, up to these last lines, the *artist has neither said nor done anything that indicated in the slightest way that he was in love with the girl*. The author most explicitly says that the man was broken in health; that he could scarcely walk when he reached the mountains; that his one interest in life was to finish just one more picture before he perished; and that in the girl he saw only a lovely subject for his canvas. Not once does the man speak to her with the slightest implication of passion or tenderness. All he does is to commiserate with her over her strain of Indian blood and to tell her that, in spite of what she thinks is a taint, she must and will some day find a husband and be happy.

In brief, it appears on the face of the narrative that he is not at all in love with her until she throws her arms around his neck and asks him to say that he does love her. It is not love at first sight, it is love at first hearing, and hence not at all convincing. The artist's love is lip service only.

When this criticism was communicated to the author, his reply was enlightening. "I intended," said he, "to have the artist fall in love with her first when she threw her arms about him. It was my idea that he had, up to that time, been too ill, too depressed and too deeply absorbed in his painting to think of the girl as anything but a model. Now, however, his health has returned. He feels better and *is* better than he has been for years. And the girl's physical attractiveness overwhelms him in one moment."

Now, if this was the writer's intention, does it not strike you that he should have made a point of telling us all about the effects of returning health, and how, in this love scene, it was this return of physical well-being, coupled with the girl's charm, which produced the results? *When the artist tells the girl that he loves her, the reader is compelled to suppose that he has been in love with her for some time.* This is contrary to the author's intention. Five lines of explanation here could have cleared the whole business.

"But I supposed the reader could guess it," said the author in defense.

Well, doubtless, some readers could but most of them would not. And, whether they did or didn't, the fact remains that *in drawing a picture, no artist has the right to omit any essential detail*. Facts which are an integral part of the plot, which reveal character significantly, simply must be set down unmistakably; and no demand for compression, however urgent, should be allowed to force their deletion. To omit such a fact from the story just reported is almost as bad as omitting to paint the nose in a portrait. The artist who did that might argue, if he chose: "Why, everybody knows that the gentleman I am portraying has a nose. So why need I put one in?"

EXERCISES IN COMPRESSION TRUE AND FALSE

Here is the first movement of a story. It makes clear the complication and two of the main characters.

Read it through several times. Then abbreviate it as much as you can in a purely rhetorical manner, keeping every idea and every effect intact. Having done this, compare the original with your abbreviated version and decide which is better.

Next study the complication and characters with a view to finding what elements in them may be dropped, either without injury to the main effect or perhaps with positive advantage. Then revise, making these omissions from the story structure. Compare your result with the original.

From these two exercises, you will discover how profoundly different true compression is from false.

> Behind a packing box, in the shipping room of Aaron Niederlohn & Co., pretty little Annie MacFarlane was spilling warm, salt tears upon her egg sandwich. You might have supposed the packing box was the bier of a dearly beloved friend of Annie's; for, between bites upon the egg sandwich, the young lady leaned against the hulking receptacle and put her two slim arms over her eyes. As a matter of fact, though, the box was as far removed from things funereal as anything under Niederlohn & Co.'s roof could be. It was crammed full of the livest up-to-the-minute fall frocks which Aaron Niederlohn had ever sent out to the trade. Tailored broadcloths were there, in military effect, trimmed with soutache braid, collar of raccoon fur, skirt with fulness over hips and four deep plaits in back. New taffetas, too, with tabs on sides and with collar embroidered in contrasting shades. And goodness knows

what else; goodness, and Aaron, and Annie to be exact. Best of all these, Annie knew what else. For it was Annie who had designed them all, in a fine frenzy of creation.

For a whole month she had been on what Jim, the New England drummer, had called a poetical jag. She had dreamed wondrous visions in glad rags. She had leaped out of bed in the black night of her boarding-house room, her mind aflame with beautiful skirts, and had sketched until dawn broke behind the big brewery chimney which loomed athwart her wee window. She had forgotten luncheon, in the midst of cutting her models. And at last she tremblingly informed the chief designer that she couldn't improve upon them. Then in came the other designers, and the head of the Sales Department, and old Aaron himself, to inspect them.

"Oh! Now say! Ain't they stunners?" cried the chief designer.

"Great stuff, Miss MacFarlane," commented the head of the Sales Department.

Fat little Aaron Niederlohn rubbed his treble chin, lifted his ham-like shoulders, and grunted: "Huh! I dunno about that. Freakish, ain't they, huh? Bad year to shove freakish stuff! Reg'lar gamble." And he waddled back to his office, sniffing.

Now this was Annie's first experience at a tryout. She had been two years with Niederlohn & Co.—coming fresh out of the West to Aaron's big factory—but heretofore she had been the humblest of the designing staff and not admitted to the awful rites of setting the fashions. (Wouldn't it fill you with awe, to be present when old Aaron, by one wave of his diamond-cluttered right hand, condemned a hundred thousand helpless American women to wear velveteen trimmed with fancy bone buttons and high collar with skunk fur instead of, let us say, serge with white Georgette crepe and embroidered belt?) One month ago they had elected her to the designing staff—at thirty dollars a week. Hence her poetic jag. She was going to make good in a hurry, for she needed considerably more than thirty a week, if she was going to put her young brother through college and medical school. Hence, too, those tears behind the packing box. For, when old Aaron sniffed and waddled off, after one look at her wonderful frocks, the young woman dropped out of the clouds of dreamland to the cold, hard pavement of mid-Broadway with a jolt that jarred all

the joy out of life. She had been sure that Aaron would at least say: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

But that sniff! And those words: “Freakish stuff!”

She had blubbered half a second on the spot. Then she caught herself so quickly that only the chief designer spied her woe.

“Pooh! Don’t mind him, dearie!” she patted Annie’s shivering shoulder. “The old skinflint! That’s his reg’lar trick when he sees something good. Pretends it’s common stuff. He don’t want anybody to get an idea that she’s worth a cent more than she’s getting, see? Take it from me, now’s the time to march straight up to his desk and say: ‘I’ve put something fine across, Mister Niederlohn. You’ll make a fat haul off’n those models, believe me. And if you do, I expect you to do the right thing by me.’ And don’t let him stall you! He’s got a bunch of tricks up his sleeve. But you just stick to it, and he’ll cough up.”

“I don’t believe it.” Annie gurgled miserably. “Y-you’re only trying to ch-cheer me up, Miss Upperly. He’s a—monster, he is!”

“No, he’s only the slickest old tight-wad in Broadway,” assured Miss Upperly. “I got his measures long ago, I did. Take it from me, little sister! He’s making more money than most of the Glad Rags bunch—and why? Because he knows a good thing when he sees it and never lets on that he knows. Now you just listen to me! If he doesn’t pass in an order to the factory for ten thousand of your designs, I’ll set up the sirloins. And if he does pass it in, you can bet the pretty hair of your pretty head that ten thousand ladies will jump for the goods.”

“I’m afraid to go to him now,” Annie moaned. “He might fire me—and I can’t take chances. I guess I’ll stick it out—until they’ve sold a lot of the goods.”

“The longer you wait, the harder he’ll throw you down,” sniffed the head designer. “Know why? I’ll tell you, girlie. He’ll know that you’re either too green to appreciate your own designs or else too scared to hit him for a raise. Once he gets that into his head, it’ll be something awful to pry it loose. Don’t let him get it, honey!”

“Will you recommend me to him? I mean for a raise?” Annie looked up with a gleam.

“Wow! say! You are green!” Miss Upperly patted the girl’s shoulder. “If I did that, old Aaron would chase me out of this here joint for keeps. He was born with a cent between his fingers, and he’s been pulling feathers out of the Indian’s head ever since. He sells them to the pillow factory across the road, you know. Anybody who asks him to hand over more coin insults him. No! You toddle along and shake your fist under his nose all by your lonely.”

Annie toddled.

Old Aaron listened to her plea with as much interest as a granite boulder would, were you to tickle it with a feather. He gave an extra roll to his flabby lower lips and kept his glittering little eyes upon some letters, while the young lady recounted her two years of faithful service, her faith in the high selling powers of those beautiful new designs, and her firm belief in her employer’s passionate eagerness to pay her as much as she was worth.

Her petition began boldly, if not fluently. But that awful curl of Aaron’s lip broke up her attack. It was worse than fifty machine guns, that lip was! It tore the girl’s soul to pieces. It said: “Huh, who are you anyhow?” It informed her that she was wasting her time, and that her time was bought and paid for by Aaron, and if she didn’t shut up in a hurry and hustle back to her desk, Aaron would dock her at the rate of thirty cents an hour.

Military men say you can never trust even the boldest raw recruits in their first hard battle. The whine of a stray bullet may unnerve them completely, and then they’ll break and run. So it went with poor Annie. She stuttered, she mumbled, she ambled off her major line of offensive, and started telling about her young brother.

“You see, Mr. Niederlohn,” she quavered. “Tom’s a cripple and can’t work his own way through college. So I’m going to give him a lift. I’ve simply got to earn forty a week at least.”

“Huh!” Aaron bellowed the noise like a hippopotamus. “Everybody needs money. Everybody needs more money. Nobody’s ever got enough. If I paid everybody as much as they needed, I’d be in the poorhouse long ago. Huh!”

“Well, I’m worth more than thirty dollars,” Annie cried almost angrily.

"Huh! You gotta prove it, little girl!" Aaron picked up some letters and fell to reading them. "I don't see it. Not at all, at all. Shut the door, please, when you go out. Huh!"

And now you know all about those warm, salt tears that were pattering upon that egg sandwich behind the packing box.

THE TECHNIQUE OF HEIGHTENING THE EFFECT

The effect of any story may be heightened by manipulating one or more of the six following story elements:

1. The dominant character;
2. The plot action;
3. The order of events;
4. The artist's attitude toward the subject matter;
5. The angle of narration;
6. The atmosphere.

Before we proceed to discuss this technique, I must recall what I told you about the different kinds of stories you may write. The elements of a story differ widely, according to the effect you are trying to bring out. Thus it happens that one story built, let us say, around a scene—like Stevenson's "Merry Men"—may have little plot action and but slight character development; while another story—say Stevenson's "Markheim"—builds around character, plot, and atmosphere equally. *It is not true that you can take any particular story and build its effect equally around any or all of these six elements. The rule merely means that you must consider each of the six when you wish to heighten the effect of a given story: and you will always find that some one or more of the six can be manipulated to produce the heightening.*

I may add that, in most stories, the effect cannot be heightened *very much* by the artist's attitude or the angle of narration. In character stories it cannot often be heightened *very much* by manipulating the atmosphere. In mystery stories, it is usually heightened most easily through the order of events and the atmosphere. And so on.

EXERCISES IN PICKING GOOD STORY MATERIAL

Here are some situations which have been used by various writers. Study each with great patience and then answer the following questions:

1. Is the material dramatic?

2. What “human interest” is aroused by the complication?
3. Does this “human interest” involve any desire that many people share? If so, what is it?
4. Can the complication be solved so as to satisfy the reader’s hopes and wishes?

    a. Can it be so solved in the space of a short story? Or,
    b. Must it be dealt with at greater length? Or,
    c. Is there no clear solution?

5. Can you suggest a change in the situation which will improve it as story material?

1. Peter is the gay Lothario of a small Pennsylvania Dutch village. He dresses in the height of fashion, as fashion goes in that community; and his manners, as well as his dialect, are extraordinary. A young woman comes to town to paint the quaint scenes and characters. She spies Peter and, in a most unabashed manner, approaches him with the request that he come out to the nearby windmill and pose for her. Peter is bewildered, then shocked. He suspects the lady’s motives, for the last fair strangers who had visited the town turned out to be gentle swindlers. Peter had lost $2.50 to one of them who had played on his sympathies. Peter turns the request down cold. The lady insists. She cajoles him finally into posing. At first the whole town is scandalized. Peter’s friends and relatives speak in unrestrained disapproval of his mad adventure. But the inevitable happens. Another swain, one Oswald, is attracted to the scene by all this rowdy-dow and falls in love with the artist at first sight. Now Peter is aroused. Heedless of social disapproval he stands by the girl, fierce in his determination to shoo away his new and hated rival. For, through the appearance of the rival, Peter is brought to the realization that he too is madly in love.

The girl, eager to keep in Peter’s good graces until she has painted his picture, does all sorts of nice things for the town. She subscribes to the church fund, she buys tickets to the great strawberry festival, and she calls upon the leading ladies, ingratiating herself into their favor. Meanwhile, as social sentiment changes toward her, the two rivals grow fiercer and fiercer. Finally, on the evening of the strawberry festival, things come to a head.

The rivals appear, each determined to take her under his wing. Peter wins out at first, then Oswald resorts to a contemptible ruse and gets her away from his foe. A few minutes later, the girl is called aside by some of the ladies present, to meet some other citizens, and Peter casting aside all discretion, leaps at Oswald's throat, prepared to tear him to tatters. A terrific battle ensues, in which Peter slowly but bloodily gains the ascendency and pummels his adversary without mercy. At this juncture, an automobile rolls up tooting, a dapper youth of city mien and airs hops out and in a twinkling has made off with the artist.

He proves to be her betrothed. The desperate rivals slink off into the bushes discomfited.

2. A young lady, shopping in San Francisco, comes out of the store to find a stranger making off in her auto. She has him arrested. He puts up no plea at all, and his dumbness persuades her that he is crushed with a sense of his guilt. She is sorry for him, the more as she is deeply interested in the problem of handling criminals. So she begs the judge to let the offender off this time, on condition that he be compelled to report daily to her, so that she can study his case and come to understand his criminal tendencies. The judge falls in with this plan.

She begins by making a record of the offender's past. He is not at all backward in revealing the black deeds of his long career of crime. He tells her of robberies, burglaries, and murders. She is frightened but cannot resist admiring his appearance and manners, which are excellent.

One day, in the course of her observation of him, he manages to rescue her from the advances of some roughs in a low side street. There is a running fight, in which the one sure escape seems to be by means of a nearby auto. The criminal tosses the girl into it and drives off. Later the girl, thanking him for her deliverance, tells him to return the car to its owner. He does not want to, but under her urging does so.

Two weeks later she is amazed to see him at a party she attends in a fashionable home. He tells her jauntily that he has turned honest and is now in the real estate business; and he is now "doing the society stunt" in order to build up a circle of acquaintances that will serve him in his new career. The girl is

suspicious, and her suspicions harden when suddenly the hostess announces that a precious brooch has been stolen during the party. The hostess insists that a search be made, and then it appears that the man has not been invited and is unknown to the hostess. He is unwilling to be searched; and the officers are on the point of laying hold of him when a maid appears with the news that the brooch has been found.

The man reproaches the girl for her suspicions of him and then cunningly suggests that she visit some of the properties which he has for sale. She feels obligated to atone for her harsh words and thought about him, so she goes. They visit a lovely farm out in the hills in the very car which he had taken to save her from the ruffians. She reproaches him for not having returned it as he had promised her to. He shilly-shallies, then says he bought the car from the previous owner.

The place he shows her is so lovely that she wants to buy it but she says she cannot as the price must be prohibitive. But the terms of sale that he reads to her are ridiculously easy and she buys the place. It then comes out that he is the owner of the farm as well as of the auto; his arrest had all been a mistake as he had taken the girl's car, honestly thinking it his. And when she came up and had him arrested, he was so deeply interested in her that he let her go ahead as she did.

Of course, they married and lived happily forever after.

3. Adelina is leaving the shirt factory for the last time, for tomorrow she is going to San Jose to be married to the rich Rocco with the swell café and the automobile. As she leaves the girls, each lays before her a gift to take with her on the journey. Even Rosalie brings hers though her heart is sore for the good brother Tony whose heart Adelina is breaking by going away. Both families had expected her to marry Tony but she was ashamed of the wagon in which he peddled his choice vegetables about the city. Then Anathusia had come along with her tales of the rich uncle in San Jose with the swell café, and Adelina had sent him a picture post card. He had sent back such a handsome photograph and had written of his riches; now she was going to him to be married. Her heart softened a bit toward Tony as she realized the

goodness of Rosalie and she received his own basket of fruit; still she went out with high hopes.

When she got to San Jose the Rocco who met her had been the Rocco of her handsome photograph many years ago. Now he was fat, but it seemed he still wore the same clothes. The car is a delivery truck. The café is dark, noisy, and full of flies and the cries of Rocco's children and the scoldings of the old woman who does the cooking. Poor Adelina is stunned. After the horrible meal she asks the way to the hotel where she is to stay until the wedding. The good Irish woman there tells her to take the next train home. She does, but all the way she is haunted by the vision of Rocco following her; she feels the only way she can be safe is to get Tony to marry her before another train can get in from San Jose. It is night when she gets there, but she rushes to Tony's home, gets him out of bed and on to the despised delivery wagon to hurry to the Court house and to a Justice to be married. Neither of them believes in such a wedding, but the Priest can do it right later.

4. Johnny Redbirds, twenty-year-old peon, minus his left hand at the wrist, is hunting a job. Hunting is a cheerless task with him; everywhere his tales of what he can do, how he can ride, how he can shoot, are not listened to, and he is put at boy's work. Oh, he is so much a man if only he could be allowed to show it! And last night his little brown dog, his one real friend, had died of poisoned meat put out for coyotes. He stops at last at Hacienda Thirty-three, having heard that here the men are well paid, and the Gringo who has charge is very good-natured. But even here he is put at the old boy's job of trimming grass. At noon he goes to the old Mexican woman who wants boarders. Her shack is next door to that of Jose Rivera, the best vaquero on the Rancho. As he ate, he heard the man boasting to his wife, and his heart filled with envy of this man who could ride and work and who had a wife to whom to boast. As Johnny went back to his grass cutting, he had an idea. He would take Jose's little brown dog that already loved him and go away. Then he would sell it and with the money go to the army headquarters and become a soldier.

And that night a soldier with four cartridge belts and many things of which to boast comes to drink with Jose. Johnny again hears them and lies awake in envy. In the morning Jose rides away

with the soldier, and the old Mexican woman tells Johnny of the sorrow of his family now that he is gone. John decides he cannot take the little dog from Jose's small son, who now has no one to bring him up to be a man. Two days later the superintendent tells the overseer to give Johnny a horse and rope and allow him to try out as the vaquero, because since he has taken over Jose's family and all his responsibilities, he may as well have his job.

5. Young Taylor comes back from over-seas service an officer with the ambition to win wings in aviation before he returns to civilian life. At the flying field to which he goes the veteran stunt instructor, Jerry, takes a fancy to him and secures permission to give him all his air training. He also introduces him to a very pretty girl who is being "rushed" by the adjutant in command. His interest in the girl soon equals his interest in flying. He is a wonder at flying, however, except at stunting. There he always becomes sick at the wrong time.

Jerry manages it that the adjutant, Hoban, receives a call-down from the Colonel. Hoban in return has field-leave taken away from both Jerry and Taylor for minor breaches of camp discipline. Taylor is just at this time put on cross-country flying and conveniently has motor troubles so that he can stop near the girl's house and see her nearly every day. So many young cadets are working much the same graft that the camp officials create a special air spy service and make Jerry the spy. Several times he warns Taylor but one day cannot get him away in time. Hoban finds the two of them calling on the girl. Taylor now feels he must act quickly and to some purpose. Next day he sends word to Jerry to follow him, takes a plane and does stunts, wonderful stunts, ending with an especially daring tail spin that finishes beautifully but with a messed-up final landing just by the girl's house. It wins him both the flyer's wings and Frances, to say nothing of the appreciation of his fellow cadets because of his successful out-witting of Hoban.

6. Sammy Battinyano has made himself very much of a trial in school. His teacher, the medical inspector, and the principal look up his heredity and find him to be Indian, Spanish and Negro, and that his father had committed cold-blooded murder. The teacher,

however, keeps him in school and tries to help him, until one day he deliberately attempts to poison three of the other boys who have especially annoyed him. That evening the teacher stays after school very much discouraged over Sammy and the distress he has occasioned in the school. Two of the smaller children come running back very much excited with the information that the three boys are "laying" for Sam by a certain orchard corner. The teacher rushes out, runs into the medical inspector and insists on his driving her to the orchard. They arrive too late to catch the boys but find Sammy lying at the bottom of a nearby ditch with a bad cut in his head. The medical inspector says it is a pity the cut could not have come as an operation rather than as an accident since just such an operation might have helped the child. They take him to the hospital where the teacher watches him closely until it is evident he will live. At that time she goes on her vacation. At the end of the summer she visits Yosemite. On one of the trails there she discovers Sammy, minus the something in his face that had always filled her with horror. The medical inspector is there too. He says Sammy is well now but that never again will he be sent to a book school; rather he will learn from the great outdoors that he loves. The accident had relieved a pressure on his brain. He is now free from murderous impulses but still subnormal.

7. Mona Avern, a young girl whose young husband has been killed in France after being cited for bravery in saving his superior officer's life, is in Miss Tanner's hospital with her twin babies whom she has promised to give away, as she has no means of caring for them. Mrs. Goldwin, a self-possessed, beautiful woman of about 35, comes to make arrangements to adopt one of the babies. She decides on the one with a dimple in his chin because her husband also has such a dimple. When she leaves, Mona tells Miss Tanner that she cannot give up her baby even though she has promised to. Miss Tanner quiets her but Mona continues to think about her problem and when next Mrs. Goldwin comes with her husband, an army officer, who is just recovering from severe shellshock, she faces the three of them and tells them she must keep her babies. Mr. Goldwin's sympathy she feels at once, but the two women are against her. Her poor mother love is almost breaking under the logic of their arguments when Mr. Goldwin

notices the curious ring she is wearing and discovers she is the wife of the young soldier who saved his life at loss of his own. In their eager gratitude the Goldwins take both the mother and the babies home to live with them.

8. Nine year old Carmin and her mother are taking their first all day and night ride on the train. Carmin quickly informs her mother that there is a nice boy in the berth opposite and proceeds to make the acquaintance of Buddy. Buddy's mother is a stylish lady who pays little attention to him. Buddy himself is wonderful to Carmin because he has seen so much and gets E's in school and can do so many things. They spend much of the afternoon on the observation platform. They try playing cards a while, but Buddy is rather bored at Carmin's simple game, since he plays "Five-hundred." When the train stops for twenty minutes the children get off and play about on the platform. They come back with the exciting news that there are German prisoners up in front and that they have looked at them and have talked with the guards. Buddy's mother comes forth from her book long enough to tell Buddy that it is vulgar to look at such people. She forbids him to get off the train again.

The next morning there is on the train a Miss Ames who fascinates Buddy and finally wins him entirely by asking him to play "Five-hundred" with her. Poor Carmin is quite disconsolate until the train stops again and she gets her mother's consent to go off. Buddy also goes off with Miss Ames. When they return Buddy's mother is very indignant at his disobedience. In spite of Miss Ames' protests that she asked him to go, she has his berth made up and sends him to bed. Carmin meanwhile has made conquest of a big soldier who is guarding the prisoners and leads him proudly past poor Buddy's berth to the "back-porch" of the train.

9. Big Bill Danton, sheriff of El Dorado County, rode up to the Benson shack with three men, determined this time to get Benson, who is under suspicion of murder. They find only a frightened but equally determined twelve year old boy watering the chickens and pigs. Bill smiles at the boy and insists on helping draw up the water bucket. The boy is much disturbed when he finds the men

are camping there for the night, but under the sheriff's good-natured questioning he comes out of his forced reserve and tells of himself and of his mother and her books. He will say nothing about his father, however. Next morning as the men are leaving, Big Bill asks the boy to come to town with him and go to school. He hesitates but refuses and stands watching the men ride away. When they are out of sight he goes to the well and draws up his father. He looks at his father with new understanding that irritates the evil man, who accuses him of listening to lying tales from Danton and of tattling in return. Very quietly the child replies that he has told nothing, then as firmly asks why the sheriff came. Benson becomes more and more angry as he pours forth his whole dirty story of crime and final murder. The boy turns to go to town and Danton and school, saying he will stay with him no longer even if he is his father. At that Benson bursts out again that he is not the boy's father, that the mother had a squalling brat when he married her to have her support him. Just here the sheriff comes back and holds Benson as a self-confessed murderer. He had returned soon enough to hear the whole story, and he tells the boy the chance to go to town is still open.

CHAPTER IX

CHARACTER ACTION

If you were to study portrait painting, you would first learn to use your colors and brushes. That done, you would begin the study of the human face. If you had a thorough teacher, he would set you to work at the anatomy of the human body, especially the head; then he would teach you the relations of the various planes of the face and so gradually to more advanced work.

Now you are engaged in learning to depict, not human faces or bodies primarily, but rather *men in action*. And the particular sort of action you are most concerned with is the dramatic. So, having completed your mastery of language, you must now address yourself to the direct study of human behavior as it manifests itself in those crises of life which reveal to the beholder something vivid about human nature or something significant about the world and its ways.

This study of human behavior is nothing more nor less than psychology. More narrowly, it is the psychology of the emotions and the psychology of reflective conduct. Every successful author must be, in some measure, a psychologist. If his insight and understanding are seriously defective, he may achieve a measure of popularity but never greatness. And even the least successful writer who breaks into print does so by virtue of his having caught some little shred of truth about men in action.

Study the following details therefore, with a thoroughness you have never before equalled. Exert yourself to the utmost to understand every point that is raised in the next lessons. For you have now reached the very soul of the story teller's art.

THE THREE STAGES OF DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT

Every complete dramatic development involves three distinct stages.

In the first stage there arises a situation which causes **a conflict of desires**.

In the second stage the persons involved in the conflict **struggle for a solution of this conflict**.

And in the third stage one or more of these persons find a solution and then **carry it out** *in such a manner that their actions reveal their character*.

If you recall what I said previously about the *man in a hole*, you will see that these three stages just described correspond to the man getting into a hole, the man trying to get out, and the man getting out. We can no longer talk in such a loose way. We must get down to the fine points.

We now consider each of these three stages minutely.

THE SITUATION WHICH CAUSES A CONFLICT OF DESIRES

Before we attempt to describe this type of situation, you may ask yourself: "How does it happen that just this one kind of situation proves interesting enough to form the basis of all dramatic narrative, be it in plays, motion pictures or written tales?"

This is a fair question, and one whose answering throws considerable light both on fiction and on its readers.

This situation is universally absorbing because men's nerves have been keyed up and attuned to just such conflicts of desires through millions of years of the struggle for existence and through thousands of years of the more recent struggle for better living.

This situation is universally absorbing because it is the very one which, in the course of human evolution, has started men to thinking and has developed the human mind as a reasoning mechanism.

Man distinguished himself from the beasts most sharply by his sensitivity to just such situations.

It is in the situation we call dramatic that man exhibits himself as the unique and supreme creature of the world. Such a situation arouses the highest that is in man. This highest is **his reflective foresight and his self control**.

All the studies in modern psychology and biology tend to prove that man differs most widely from his closest rival, the ape, in his ability to *look through a situation which confronts him and foresee more or less clearly the probable consequences of it and of his own acts with regard to it*. The ape has feelings; the ape can act; but between his feelings and his conduct there is interposed no perceptible moment in which the creature pauses, dips into the future, speculates over the outcome of the various courses of conduct open to him. If he does this at all, he does it so feebly that it is as nothing in comparison with the thought processes of man. As we commonly say, the lower animals all "live in the present, from moment to moment, from hand to mouth." Only man is a prophet.

In self-control we see the second immense gulf between ourselves and all other living things. Scientists have shown that some of the higher animals possess considerably more self-control than we used to suppose. The dog, the cat and the monkey restrain themselves on occasion. But as with their foresight, so with their self-control; beside man's theirs is as nothing, a moth against a mastodon.

In our own lives we are stirred to intense thought and to energetic conduct only when we find ourselves embroiled in some situation where we desire strongly to do something and are prevented from doing it by some desire, either in ourselves or in somebody else. Now, *the reflective foresight which deals with such a situation is a kind of imagination*. We fancy things that have not yet occurred and may never occur. We conjure up events of every sort. We draw pictures of the future. And this faculty is, in many men, so highly developed that it can be awakened by exhibiting to them pictures of other men and their conflicting desires. This is sometimes called sympathetic imagination. It is the imagination which puts you in the other fellow's boots. You see yourself in his predicament. You feel, as a kind of echo in yourself, his passions, his hopes and his whole thinking process.

This sympathetic imagination, which every reader must use, is aroused and held not merely by attracting the reader's attention but rather by winning his interest.

Many a misguided author and many an equally misguided publisher and motion picture producer has come to grief through failure to understand this law. They have supposed that all they have to do is to put forth a story that catches and holds the reader's *attention*. This same error, I might add, is still being practised largely by many advertisers and by some newspapers. The country today is ablaze with advertisements that do nothing more than force themselves blatantly upon your attention. They do not arouse your interest in the slightest. On the contrary, they irritate you. I have found myself repeatedly refusing to buy certain commodities because their foolish and intrusive advertisements had "got under my skin." Possibly they are the best of their kind. I do not know. But I wouldn't take them for a gift. They have glared too insultingly in my face and not once have they said a word that won my interest. So too with the noisy headlines of some papers. Of course, they force me to read them. But they too say nothing that wins my interest. And so, in the long run, I merely look and turn away.

Now, what precisely is the difference between attention and interest? How can something win my attention and yet forfeit my interest? The explanation is that there are two totally different kinds of attention (three,

strictly speaking, but the third type is of no importance in our present study). There is involuntary attention and there is voluntary attention.

Any sudden new stimulus such as a loud noise or a bright light will draw our minds and hold itself in the focus of consciousness for a brief time. We give this sort of attention not by our own choice but merely as a result of our being sensitive to such influences. The attention is passive.

The higher type of attention is not passive but active. It is an act of free choice and will. When we attend thus, we think actively. And the object which causes us so to attend is always an object that provokes thought. *Voluntary attention alone is interest.*

A thing which merely forces itself upon our involuntary attention ordinarily affects our sense organs only. But a thing in which we take interest affects our higher nervous centers in the brain. It starts into action our sympathetic imagination, our reflective foresight, and sometimes our self-control.

WHAT PROVOKES THOUGHT?

Thought is provoked by any situation from which our instincts and our established habits fail to deliver us automatically.

Surveying all the situations we encounter in life, we find three varieties:

1. Situations that we manage by simple modes of established action-instincts or habits. Thus I throw a stone at you and you dodge it. I toss a baseball to you, and you put up your hands and catch it.

2. Situations that we manage by mere thinking. Thus I ask you to multiply 45 by 10 and you do so in your head. I tell you several facts about somebody's health and you draw a conclusion from them.

3. Situations that we manage by thought and subsequent action, involving both foresight and self-control.

Here we come upon the field of drama. The first two types of situations may arouse your sympathetic imagination in some slight degree. Thus, when you watch Charlie Chaplin dodge stones hurled at him and extricate himself from a custard pie, you may take an interest in the proceedings. Likewise with some purely mental problem, even of arithmetic. But all such situations fail to grip us in that peculiar way that genuine drama does. Why do they fail? Because the people in them do not have to exercise their full human power in order to solve their difficulties. And so too with the reader; his sympathetic imagination is drawn upon but lightly. An ape can dodge a stone or even catch a baseball. A mere child can multiply 45 by 10. But a

situation that can be managed only by thought followed by action involving reflective foresight and self-control is totally different. To appreciate it we must draw upon all our powers, all our experience.

This then we must call truly the "human interest" situation. We must observe that it presents two pretty distinct varieties.

THE TWO "HUMAN INTEREST" SITUATIONS

1. Some situations of the "human interest" type involve no conflict of desires. Thus, I may find myself seriously poisoned by some strange food while away on a trip, miles from the nearest doctor. I must think energetically; shall I drop everything else and rush top speed to the doctor, taking a chance of falling by the wayside? Or shall I try to doctor myself? Is there perhaps some way of attracting help—maybe by building a fire, or climbing to a hilltop and signalling? Eventually I decide upon a course of action and then proceed to see it through. All this taxes my mental and physical resources. There is no struggle between desires. There is only one desire and that is to get relief and a cure.

Such a situation yields what I call a **simple complication story**. Many excellent adventure tales are of this type. And so are some psychological stories. Jack London's *Love of Life* is a beautiful illustration.[1]

This unusual tale is a psychological complication story. Two prospectors in the Far North run out of food. In their struggle to reach their cache, one of them slips and sprains his ankle. His mate, already so far gone that he can think only of himself and his craving for food, goes on and leaves the injured man to shift for himself in the forlorn Arctic wilderness. Then begins the tremendous struggle of the Life that is in man to keep on living. With masterly skill London depicts the efforts the prospector makes to march on, with his ankle swollen to twice its normal size, his stomach empty and gnawing at him like a wolf, and his pack weighing him down more and more cruelly at every onward step. It is a gruesome story of the primitive struggle for existence, but wonderfully true. And it holds most men spell-bound.

2. Some other situations of the "human interest" type involve conflict of desires. Thus, to use in modified form the illustration I gave above, I may be away in the mountains on a camping trip with a very good friend, and he may break his leg in attempting to jump a ravine. I am a surgeon and can relieve him; but suddenly find myself poisoned, let us suppose, by polluted water; and I know that unless I receive treatment within twenty-four hours I am all but certain to die. Shall I rush off through the forests, flag an express

train and reach the nearest large town where I can be cared for? Or shall I take my chances and stick by my friend in his agony? I know that if he is left there alone, gangrene will set in and he will perish quite as miserably as I shall if I stay.

Here you see the conflict of desires that is the soul of the highest dramatic narrative. Such a crisis arouses "human interest" to the highest pitch and for the very simple reason that the solution of it in real life, and hence in sympathetic imagination, taxes our reflective foresight and our self-control to the utmost. *What is hardest in real life is most absorbing in fiction.* To deal with such problems calls for character.

---

[1] London, *Love of Life*. Macmillan, 1907.

TYPES OF CONFLICT

These conflicts of desire manifest a number of interesting varieties, each of which furnishes rich material for the story teller. I do not propose to designate all varieties here, for that would carry us too far into detail. But the main groups must be mentioned.

1. Some conflicts occur between the desires of one man. One of the finest instances of this in all literature is in Stevenson's great story of Markheim. Here we see presented with fascinating details of analysis the struggle between two natures in the murderer. Each nature is endowed with its own set of impulses and desires, and the fight between these desires is the central plot of the tale.

2. Some conflicts occur between the desires of one man and those of another. In such cases, we find two variations, each dramatically important:

a. The conflict proceeds without concessions. That is, each man, acting under the urge of his own desire, thinks and acts with the one aim of gaining his own end. And the outcome is the simple supremacy of the one or the other, either by cunning or by force.

b. The conflict leads to concessions. One man or the other reckons with the rights of the desire that opposes him and acts upon conviction. The outcome is some sort of moral triumph.

THREE ELEMENTAL TYPES OF CHARACTER

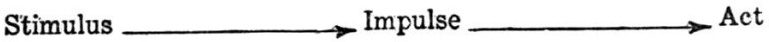
Infinite are the variations of character and the conflicts character becomes involved in. To attempt to list all types would only confuse you hopelessly. But you should see in a highly simplified form what it is that determines the types and their minor varieties. So I am going to exhibit in a diagram three of the commonest and most sharply marked kinds of human nature.

And as you study these, please bear in mind that *in real life the stimuli, the impulses, and the ensuing acts or inhibitions are often enormously complex and numerous. They cannot be drawn as simply as these figures might suggest.*

CHARACTER TYPES AS REVEALED BY REFLECTIVE CONTROL

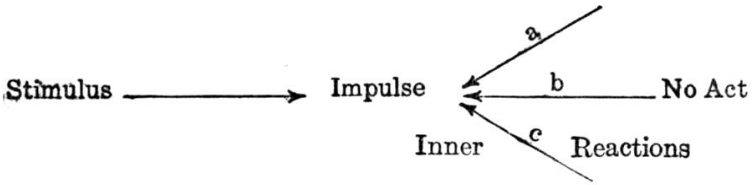
I. The impulsive type

The action here is "in line with" the impulse.



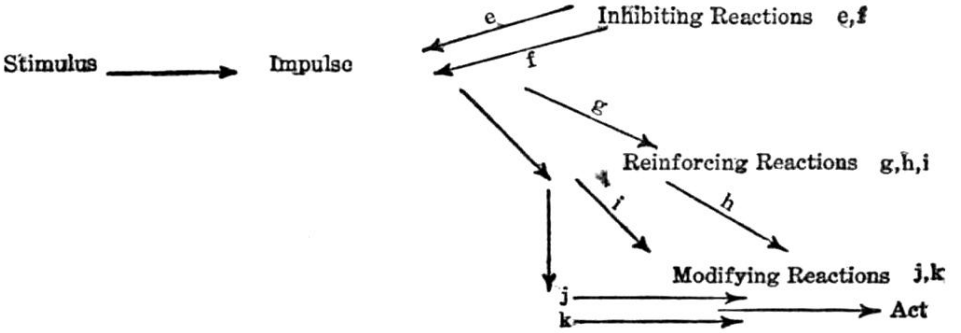
II. The repressive type

The action here is checked, wholly or almost so, by inner forces that may be native or acquired (either temperamental reactions or simple habits).



III. The intelligent type

Here the action is checked through the period of reflective delay, then reinforced and modified by various inner impulses involving foresight. The resulting act is either "in line with" or "out of line with" the initial stimulus and impulse, according to the specific nature of the latter.



Also keep in mind the precise meaning of the three chief terms used here, Stimulus, Impulse, and Inner Reaction.

The stimulus is ordinarily anything whatever in our surroundings which attracts our attention, disturbs us, and causes us "to do something about it." It may be a line in the newspaper telling about an old friend who has died and left us a million dollars provided we agree to marry a red-haired girl within twelve months and join the Mohammedan Church. It may be the faint creaking of a loose board in our bedroom late at night. It may be the theft of an heirloom, the chatter of gossips, anything indeed which in any manner comes to our attention and arouses us.

The impulse is that very first upwelling of action in us that the stimulus provokes. Usually it is a highly complex affair, containing primitive reflexes, old habits, and even freakish movements, cries, and tendencies caused by some momentary condition, such as well-being, depression, dyspepsia, or what not.

The inner reaction is that long and often highly elusive chain of subtle thoughts, feelings and secondary movements which follow the impulse in greater or less degree, according to the character type we are considering. They are the content of what I elsewhere term the "reflective delay."

Now, if we describe people in terms of the way they react to disturbing forces around them, we find three very rudimentary kinds of folks:

1. The Impulsive
2. The Repressive
3. The Intelligent

1. The impulsive man shows a very simple behavior pattern. When something touches him, for good or for ill, he responds powerfully in some

special manner; and this immediate response develops *without inner interruption* into an outer act by which he adjusts himself to the situation in which the stimulus occurred.

The simplest illustration of an impulsive man is perhaps the only too familiar quick-tempered youth who, if thwarted in the slightest degree, flies into a rage and strikes the offending party in the face with his fist.

2. The repressive man shows an equally simple behavior pattern, but one which is much harder to observe and analyze accurately because so much of it is hidden from view. When something affects him, he responds with some feeble impulse which is quickly overwhelmed by a horde of counter-forces welling up within him. He adjusts to the situation in one of two ways: he either (*a*) evades it altogether, as in the case of the coward who instinctively swallows the vilest insults and even acquiesces in repellent proposals rather than brave his foe; or else (*b*) substitutes some very weak action for what ought to be a vigorous one, as in the case of the half-coward who, when insulted, indulges in high-sounding talk about what he is going to do and how he will demand an apology or will tell his big brother about the insult and have him wallop the insulter.

3. The intelligent man is much more complex than the other two types, hence harder to understand and to portray. He may react to a stimulus with a perfectly clear impulse, or he may seem to hold himself totally in check when provoked, excited, inspired, or goaded. In both instances, of course, some impulses actually do work within him; the extent to which they become outwardly visible is determined by his power, his intelligence, and his manners. The reactions that control his final act are of three kinds, inhibiting, reinforcing, and modifying.

That is, some things he thinks of, after his first impulse, persuade him to yield to that impulse. Other things influence him to suppress it and follow a totally different course of behavior. And still other things, usually those arising after pretty long reflection, suggest and lead to a simple change of some detail that makes satisfactory the final step of "doing something about it."

Study the accompanying diagrams with care. Then observe your friends, with an eye to discovering whether any of them chance to be clear specimens of the impulsive, the repressive, or the intelligent.

Probably you will not find a very sharply marked type for some time. Most men are mixed characters. That is they are highly impulsive in a few ways, rather repressive in others, and moderately intelligent in others. It is

this intricate blending of traits that makes character analysis so hard, and at the same time so fascinating.

EXERCISE

Here is a statement that is largely true but just wrong enough to be seriously misleading. Find the error in it. To demonstrate the error, use the case of the man awaking to find a burglar in his room.

> Crises in the life of any man may be similarly settled through evocation of dead phrases or traditional wisdom. Almost every one has wondered what he would do if he awoke to find a burglar in his house. He has heard over and over again that the wise thing to do is to offer no resistance. The chances are, then, that if he meets the real situation, he will follow the advice that he has often heard with approval. If the man is imaginative and far-seeing, however, he may come to believe that if burglars always met with stout resistance they might cease to exist. If he came to this conclusion, he might feel that it would be his duty to fight burglars, whatever the cost to him. If the occasion ever arose in this man's life, it would present a moral issue, apprehended as such because he is a man of imagination.
>
> So, in fiction, a character without imagination cannot be conceived as solving a problem of account.[1]

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[1] Campbell and Rice, *A Book of Narratives*, page 397.

WHAT IS A CHARACTER TRAIT?

You will find the term "character trait" used frequently in these lessons. Probably you think you understand it without further explanation. But the chances are that you do not. You may think that a character trait is any mental peculiarity which exhibits itself in behavior. This is not correct. Here are two illustrations that lay bare the error of such an opinion.

Stuttering is, in some cases, a mental peculiarity, and it exhibits itself painfully in the stutterer's behavior. It is caused by his mind working faster than his throat muscles. Some people who normally do not stutter can be made to do so on occasions when they have much to say and feel they must say it in a great hurry. This happens when they are under the stress of strong emotions. The nerve impulses from the brain rush down too rapidly and

literally jam the speaking mechanism. It is wrong to call such stuttering a character trait.

Again, laziness might be called a character trait. But this is too sweeping a statement. Some types of laziness are true traits, others are not. A Georgia farmer infected with hookworm may be unbelievably lazy, but certainly this is not a character trait. It is a disease and can be cured easily. If we call it a character trait, then we must consistently call the moodiness and depression that so often follows an attack of influenza another trait.

A genuine character trait is a highly stereotyped manner of thinking, feeling and acting with reference to some typical situation, this manner having been born in us or else having become a fixed part and parcel of our body and mind early in life and later subject only to minor modifications.

Study the following descriptions of character and traits by eminent psychologists:

> Character is that body of active tendencies and interests in the individual which make him ready, open, warm to certain aims, and callous, cold, blind to others, and which accordingly habitually tend to make him acutely aware of and favorable to certain sorts of consequences, and ignorant of or hostile to other consequences. A selfish man need not consciously think a great deal of himself, nor need he be one who, after deliberately weighing his own claims and others' claims, consciously and persistently chooses the former. The number of persons who after facing the entire situation, would still be anti-social enough deliberately to sacrifice the welfare of others is probably small. But a man will have a selfish and egoistic character who, irrespective of any such conscious balancing of his own and others' welfare, is habitually more accessible to the thought of those consequences which affect himself than he is to those which bear upon others. It is not so much that after thinking of the effect upon others he declines to give these thoughts any weight, as that he habitually fails to think at all or to think in a vivid and complete way, of the interests of others. As we say, he does not care: he does not consider, or regard, others.[1]

Selfishness is a trait. Why? Because it is a special manner of noticing, observing, reflecting, considering results, and acting. The selfish man is quick to perceive potential injuries to his own welfare in a given situation and totally blind to the latent disasters that may come upon others. The

things that touch him he sees through the magnifying glass of egoism. And he may therefore be aware of only the best intentions when judging and acting in the most selfish manner. Listen to these same psychologists on selfishness:

> No one can read his own motives, much less those of another, with perfect accuracy;—though the more sincere and transparent the character the more feasible is the reading. Motives which are active in the depths of character present themselves only obscurely and subconsciously. Now if one has been trained to think that motive apart from intention, apart from view of consequences flowing from an act, is the source and justification of its morality, a false and perverse turn is almost sure to be given to his judgment. Such a person fosters and keeps uppermost in the focus of his perceptions certain states of feeling, certain emotions which he has been taught are good; and then excuses his act, in face of bad consequences, on the ground that it sprang from a good motive. *Selfish persons are always being "misunderstood."* Thus a man of naturally buoyant and amiable disposition may unconsciously learn to cultivate superficially certain emotions of "good-feeling" to others, and yet act in ways which, judged by consequences that the man might have foreseen if he had chosen to, are utterly hostile to the interests of others. *Such a man may feel indignant when accused of unjust or ungenerous behavior, and calling others to account for uncharitableness, bear witness in his own behalf that he never entertained any "feeling" of unkindness or any "feelings" except those of benevolence towards the individual in question. In short, the way an individual favors himself in reading his own motives is as much an evidence of his egoism as the way he favors himself in outward action.* Criminals can almost always assign "good" motives. Only the habit of reading "motives" in the light of persistent, thorough and minute attention to the consequences which flow from them can save a man from such moral error.

So in all cases.

The mark of every trait is high sensitivity to some factors in the conflict we face and low sensitivity to other factors.

As a result of this, the character possessing the trait gives over-weight to some items and under-weight to others during the reflective delay.

As a result of this distorted appraisal, he finally acts in a special manner that is the mark of the trait.

Strong passions of any sort are almost always connected with some such trait. And these passions themselves operate just as we see the trait doing. Indeed, they are merely one phase in the manifestation of the trait. As William James describes it:

> What constitutes the difficulty for a man laboring under an unwise passion acting as if the passion were unwise? * * * * * The difficulty is mental; it is that of getting the idea of the wise action to stay before our mind at all. When any strong emotional state whatever is upon us the tendency is for no images but such as are congruous with it to come up. If others by chance offer themselves they are instantly smothered and crowded out * * * * * By a sort of self-preserving instinct which our passion has, it feels that these chill objects (the thoughts of what is disagreeable to the passion) if they once but gain a lodgment, will work and work until they have frozen the very vital spark from out of all our mood * * * * * Passion's cue accordingly is always and everywhere to prevent their still small voice from being heard at all.[2]

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[1] Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, pages 255-6.

[2] James, *Psychology*, Vol. II, pp. 262-253 (Transcriber's Note: page numbers as in the original).

EXERCISES IN ANALYZING AND DEPICTING TRAITS

We now come to one of the most difficult as well as the most fascinating of the writer's tasks. We must see just how the various commoner human traits work in real life. For it is this working that constitutes more than half the subject matter of every good story, be it fact or fiction.

We must ask, in the language of Dewey and Tufts, how each such trait makes a man ready, open, and warm to certain aims (and things) and callous or even blind toward others, and hence acutely aware of certain consequences and ignorant of or hostile toward others in a given situation.

We must find the appropriate action of each such trait in a number of striking situations.

And we must finally distinguish with nicety between traits which are loosely described in everyday speech by one and the same word.

This is the work of a lifetime. You will never finish it. No novelist and no psychologist ever has finished it. And presumably none ever will. For it is the profoundest study of all human nature.

Bearing this in mind, you will not be needlessly discouraged if, after some weeks of conscientious labor over character analysis, you find you have made slight headway and have stumbled across many obscurities you had never before suspected. Remember that not even Balzac or Dickens or Thackeray or Kipling has ever analyzed one-tenth of the character traits which you can find in ordinary people, much less portrayed them all in fiction. And bear in mind that, if you can analyze and depict only four or five such traits with great accuracy and vigor, you have available the material for many a fine story, or even for a novel or two.

The long list of traits which I shall give you in a moment can never be worked through in complete detail by any single writer. Do not attempt to study all of them. Your best method is to choose a few which specially interest you. Work very hard on these. And do not rest content until you have discovered just "how their wheels go around."

Before you attack them, let me tell you four facts which will aid you in analyzing traits and avoiding some easy mistakes:

1. Many supposedly simple traits are complex. Thus a man who is constitutionally deceitful sometimes turns out to be thus because of an underlying morbid sense of inferiority. He may hide or distort facts about himself and even about other things as a result of his strong desire to conceal from the world his own real or imaginary weaknesses. And he may enjoy his deceit because it gives him the feeling of superiority which the liar sometimes enjoys when he contemplates his fellows being hoodwinked. This is the pleasure of the confirmed practical joker.

2. Some traits are secondary or derivative. The above instance would be an illustration of this if it happened that the man hated deceit, found it hard to lie, and yet did so simply because he was impelled to conceal his own inferiority. He would now prove to be not deceitful at all in his character; deceit would be merely a device used in the service of his true trait of morbid sensitivity about his inferiority.

3. One and the same trait assumes different forms according to differences in its objects and situations. Thus, gullibility is a fairly simple and elemental trait which develops in various persons in widely varying forms. With respect to matters touching the supernatural, it becomes

superstition. With respect to business matters, it becomes the mark of the simple "sucker." The "artistic temperament" is a still more striking instance of an underlying trait assuming many aspects each the result of some different subject in which the artistically tempered person has become interested.

4. Many totally different traits exhibit almost identical behavior in some situations and can therefore be distinguished only after we have observed other situations. Thus, suppose that two young men applied at the same time for an important position. Both might talk about themselves with high praise. A casual observer might be tempted to pronounce both youths horribly conceited. But one might be conceited, while the other one was merely a clever self-advertiser who believed that he could land the job by playing up his own abilities. Many a self-advertiser is not at all conceited. And many a conceited person has not the slightest instinct for self-advertisement. To distinguish between the two, we should have to place them both in some other situations where the self-advertiser would have no motive to "put himself in the headlines" and hence would not display his characteristic.

Bear each of these four facts well in mind, as you proceed to the following exercises.

Exercise I

Here is a list of traits. It is not complete, by a long shot. But it is much longer than your own time and patience, I suspect! Many of the traits here named are highly equivocal. Some of them are true traits, in one sense, and not traits at all, when taken in another sense. It is up to you to separate the true from the false.

Affectionate	Calm	Cool-tempered
Amorous	Careful	Covetous
Ambitious	Capricious	Cowardly
Alert	Cautious	Critical
Argumentative	Changeable	Cynical
Arrogant	Charitable	Deceitful
Avaricious	Cold	Diffident
Belligerent	Confiding	Discontented
Benevolent	Conscientious	Discreet
Boastful	Conservative	Domineering
Boisterous	Contented	Easy-going
Brusque	Contrary-minded	Egoistic

Egotistic
Emotional
Energetic
Enthusiastic
Envious
Extravagant
Faithful
Fastidious
Fearful
Fickle
Generous
Good-natured
Gullible
Hypercritical
Hypocritical
Idealistic
Ill-tempered
Imaginative
Inconsistent
Indifferent
Impudent
Impulsive
Inquisitive
Intriguing
Intuitive
Inventive
Jealous
Judicious
Lazy
Lacking humor
Love of beauty
Love of control
Love of detail
Love of gaiety
Love of luxury
Love of solitude
Materially-minded
Meddlesome
Mercenary
Meticulous
Optimistic
Orderly
Persistent
Pessimistic
Phlegmatic
Philosophical
Proud
Prudent
Quiet
Rattlebrained
Reflective
Resolute
Restless
Romantic
Ruminative
Self-advertising
Self-confident
Selfish
Sensitive
Sensuous
Skeptical
Sordid
Speculative
Stoical
Stubborn
Tactful
Theorizing
Thrifty
Tidy
Timid
Tyrannical
Vainglorious
Vengeful
Weak
Wilful

Exercise II

Run through the above list of traits and pick out any one which interests you, preferably one which you have often seen in somebody you know pretty well.

Next turn to your clipping files and pull out at least five *complications* in which you imagine that a person having this chosen trait might exhibit it strikingly.

Write in the fullest possible detail the behavior of such a person in each of these complications.

Take all your spare time for a week on this exercise, if need be.

Exercise III

Take the same trait as used above and the same complications. Endow the character you are writing about with some other trait that, at certain points, conflicts with the first trait. For instance, if the original trait you chose was miserliness, let your character also be extremely fond of public approval, which is rarely awarded to misers.

Now report his behavior under the impulse of these two conflicting traits in the same five or more complications.

If you find it necessary to alter the complications here and there, in order to work out this problem readily, do so.

Take another week at this exercise, if you have to.

Exercise IV

Review the results of the above two exercises and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Has the trait you first chose turned out to be complex? If so, what other traits are involved in it?

2. Is it a secondary or derivative trait that is the off-shoot of some much deeper trait?

3. Can you see that the trait assumes markedly different forms in the five or more complications into which you have set it? If so, do these forms look like the manifestations of really different traits?

4. Can some of the acts you have reported in your exercises be construed differently by different observers? Show them to some friends and ask them if the acts might not be those of a person having a trait totally different from the one you intended to describe.

Exercise V

Take Maupassant's story, "A Coward" (in *Little French Masterpieces*, Putnam's, 1903) and make the following change in the central character and complication:

Make the viscount a man of immense family and personal pride with an intense fear of appearing ridiculous. Keep the story action as Maupassant has sketched it up to the point where the mysterious Georges Lamil is slapped and challenges the viscount to a duel. Let the viscount go home, firm and furious and rather proud of his having carried himself off so well. Let his valet bring in the morning paper the next day, and let the viscount read on the first page that this Georges Lamil is a well-known movie

comedian who had staged this whole affair in order to get a much desired picture for a new slap-stick reel in which he is being starred. Let it appear that a camera man behind a convenient screen had photographed the entire affair. It also appears that Lamil has not the slightest intention of carrying out the duel, for he has already left Paris and will not return for months. The viscount is now confronted with the humiliation of being made the laughing stock of Paris, and without the relief of being able to shoot his insulter. How could a member of France's ancient nobility meet a custard pie comedian on the field of honor?

Now take up the development of the viscount's character at the point where, in Maupassant's story, the narrative runs thus:

> "When the viscount had returned to his apartment, he paced the floor for several minutes with great, quick strides. He was too agitated to reflect," etc.

Make his ensuing behavior true to his new trait, *but keep his actions minute and detailed precisely as Maupassant has done*.

CHAPTER X

THE UNIQUELY CHARACTERISTIC ACT

In an oft-quoted remark to Maupassant, Flaubert says:

> When you pass a grocer sitting at the door of his shop, a janitor smoking his pipe, a stand of hackney coaches, show me that grocer and that janitor, their attitudes, their whole physical appearance, embracing likewise * * * * * their whole moral nature, so that I cannot confound them with any other grocer or any other janitor. Make me see, in one word, that a certain cab horse does not resemble the fifty others that follow or precede it.

I cite this because it combines a great truth with an even greater error; and I am inclined to think that the error in it was largely responsible for the extraordinary difficulty which Flaubert found in writing. It is well known that he suffered agonies over the simplest of his narratives, many of which do not rise conspicuously above the level of good modern magazine stories. He was trying to do the impossible. And he did not know it. He was trying to find, in the attitudes and personal appearance and movements and utterances of those grocers and janitors and hackney coaches *their whole moral nature*.

In this error he has been followed by many a writer and many a business man and even school teachers, who ought to know better. It is, of course, true that many aspects of a person's character disclose themselves to the seasoned observer who notes facial expression, gestures, and modes of speech with great care. Frequently such an observer can make startling prediction as to how a man will behave in a given situation; and, for some purposes, such as the picking of a private secretary or the hiring of a cook, this external appraisal is highly useful. But whoever studies human nature closely knows only too well how deceiving such appearances often are, and how much deeper the springs of action lie.

There is a powerful tendency in all men to conceal thoughts, to disguise their motives, to present a certain front to the world that differs, now in one way and now in another, from their full character. Complete and unequivocal outward expression of desires and intentions and attitudes is the

rarest of traits; and every force in society that makes for politeness and convention works constantly to suppress such frank behavior.

This is the root of all the hypocrisy which infects life. Have you never known a man all sweetness and light, a man who loved his wife and children, a man who went regularly to church and gave time and money to church activities, a man whom everybody liked immensely and spoke well of, and who one fine morning was missing—by an odd coincidence at the very same time when fifty thousand dollars of his employer's funds were also missing? Have you never known a growly old grouch who snarled at his wife and beat his children, a grumpy old grouch who never paid a bill until the desperate creditor threatened to go to law about it, a surly old grouch who grunted at you when you said "Good morning," and raised your rent the very week it became known that you had been promoted at the office, and yet a queer old grouch who, when your town was swept by a tornado and a hundred families were maimed and left without a roof over their heads, handed over fifty thousand dollars to the relief committee and opened his mansion to the unfortunates and lent money right and left on absurdly easy terms for the rebuilding of homes?

If you haven't yet been bewildered by a few such surprises of character, you must be very young or distressingly inexperienced; and you had better defer story writing until you have become familiar with this mystery of human nature.

This is not always hypocrisy. Neither is it any other kind of deliberate suppression. There are ways of suppression which are involuntary. Ways of which the person himself is quite unaware, even as he is unaware of his own heart's pumping while he sleeps. And these constitute one element in the make-up of character.

Please turn back to the lesson on The Character Trait and read there once more what Dewey and Tufts say about the nature of character. Also study over again the passage I have quoted from these distinguished psychologists in which they show that no man can read his own motives or know his own real impulses and appetites.

You will easily confirm these statements by observing your own acquaintances. Then you will see the mistake of some distinguished critics.

Does not this description of the psychology of character make plain the error in Flaubert's hope and ideal of depicting the whole moral nature of a man in description of his outward and visible behavior and form? The character of each one of us is revealed, in its deepest traits, by the things we are blind and deaf to; by the things we do not take into account; by the

words we do not utter; by the acts we never perform. Or, to use the heavy language of psychology, our inhibitions are even more significant than our expressions.

There is a violent contrast, sometimes comic and sometimes tragic, between these two phases of our lives. It appears in its most striking form in our inability to see our own motives.

Beware then of expecting to find too much in the outward appearances and acts of men! Though their marks may appear there, quite as often as not they do not.

What, then, is a uniquely characteristic act? It is any act that is performed under such circumstances and in such a manner that we, seeing all these circumstances and the detail of the performance, are overwhelmingly persuaded that the very same trait which shapes this act will prevail under all other circumstances which may arise in the man's life.

Every such act, to be fully understood, must be observed through the three stages of ordinary intelligent behavior.

THE THREE STAGES OF INTELLIGENT BEHAVIOR

Every act of your life in which your character is genuinely brought into play shows these three stages, which may run into one another so smoothly that you sometimes have difficulty in separating them.

1. You find yourself in a situation which causes you some sort of trouble. The trouble may be of any sort whatever, from bunions to atheism. You may find some cherished plan thwarted by an accursed villain. You may be trapped in a burning soap factory with the janitor, who insists that he will not unlock the door without written instructions from the superintendent. You may have been jilted for the eleventh time by the One and Only Girl. And to this trouble you react in a variety of ways that exhibit, in some degree, your temper, your sweetness, your manliness, or what not.

2. After your first reactions to the trouble you cool down a bit and begin to figure cannily what you had better do about it. You imagine dozens of things you might do. You ponder over ways and means. You dip into the future and endeavor to see how each course of action that suggests itself may work out, if pursued with energy. You compute what good things you may be willing to give

up in order to gain the better thing, be it escape from the burning factory or the hand of the One and Only Girl.

3. Finally the hour of action arrives. You have thought the problem through—or at least you have thought it as far as time and the crisis *and your own individual nature* permit. And now you must do something about it. You strike out on some course of action, and you carry it through more or less neatly—again according to the situation and your own nature.

Your character, now, is the total pattern of these three stages. It is not merely the way you first react. Nor is it merely the way you reflect and consider. Nor is it merely what you finally do about it. It is rather your entire behavior in getting out of trouble.

I call these three stages of action

1. The immediate response
2. The reflective delay, and
3. The active solution.

And I state the general law of character drawing as follows:

Character is always determined by all three of these stages of action. Every man and every woman has some special way of immediate response, of reflective delay, and of active solution. Hence to depict any person's character truly, you must show all three of these special ways.

Every great writer has discovered this law and has practised it, often without quite realizing how precisely and simply the law could be stated. You must now study an admirable specimen of such work and trace, step by step, the unfolding of each of the three stages of behavior. We shall take, as an unusually clear case, Maupassant's story, "A Coward."[1]

First read this story carefully. Then turn to the following passages in it and note how each describes one of the three stages I have just indicated:

THE IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

The young woman continued, half smiling, half vexed: "It is very unpleasant. That man is spoiling my ice."

The husband shrugged his shoulders: "Pshaw? Don't pay any attention to him." * * * * *

The viscount had risen abruptly. He could not suffer that stranger to spoil an ice which he had offered. * * * * * He walked toward the man and said: “You have a way of looking at those ladies, monsieur, which I cannot tolerate. I beg of you to be so kind as to stare less persistently.” * * * * * The gentleman answered but one word, a foul word. * * * * * Profound silence ensued. Suddenly a sharp sound cracked in the air. The viscount had slapped his adversary. Everyone rose to interfere. Cards were exchanged between the two.

The reflective delay

When the viscount had returned to his apartment he paced the floor for several minutes with great, quick strides. He was too much agitated to reflect. A single thought hovered over his mind —‘a duel’—without arousing any emotion whatsoever * * * * * Then he sat down and began to consider. He must find seconds in the morning. Whom should he choose? * * * * * He discovered that he was thirsty, and he drank three glasses of water in rapid succession. Then he resumed his pacing of the floor. He felt full of energy. If he blustered a little, seemed determined to carry the thing through, demanded rigorous and dangerous conditions, insisted upon a serious duel, very serious and terrible, his adversary would probably back down and apologize.

He picked up the card * * * * * ‘Georges Lamil, 51 Rue Moncy.’ Nothing more. He examined these assembled letters, which seemed to him mysterious, full of vague meaning. Georges Lamil! Who was this man? What was his business? Why had he stared at the lady in such a way. * * * * * There arose within him a fierce anger against that bit of paper—a malevolent sort of rage blended with a strange feeling of discomfort. What a stupid business! He took a penknife that lay open to his hand and stuck it through the middle of the printed name, as if he were stabbing some one.

The active solution

So he was really going to fight! It was no longer possible for him to avoid it. What on earth was taking place within him? He wanted to fight; his purpose and determination to do so were firmly fixed; and yet he knew full well that, despite all the effort of his mind and all the tension of his will, he would be unable to

retain even the strength necessary to take him to the place of meeting. * * * * *

From time to time his teeth chattered with a little dry noise. He tried to read, and took up Chateauvillard's duelling code. * * * * *

As he passed a table, he opened the case by Gastinne Renette, took up one of the pistols, and then stood as if he were about to fire, and raised his arm. But he was trembling from head to foot, and the barrel shook in all directions.

Then he said to himself: 'It is impossible. I cannot fight like this!'

He regarded the little hole, black and deep, at the end of the barrel, the hole that spits out death. He thought of the dishonor, of the whispered comments at the clubs, of the laughter in the salons, of the disdain of the women * * * * * He continued to gaze at the weapon, and, as he raised the hammer, he saw the priming glitter beneath it like a little red flame * * * * * And he experienced a confused, inexplicable joy thereat.

If he did not display in the other's presence the calm and noble bearing suited to the occasion, he would be lost forever * * * * * And that calm and bold bearing he could not command—he knew it, he felt it and yet he was really brave, because he wanted to fight! He was brave, because—The thought that grazed his mind was never completed; opening his mouth wide, he suddenly thrust the barrel of the pistol into the very bottom of his throat and pressed the trigger.

After you have studied this passage with great care, turn back for a moment to the lesson of Three Elemental Types of Character. Observe the diagram there, then draw an elaborate chart of the viscount's behavior. Be sure to represent in your diagram each stimulus, each impulse, and each reaction which Maupassant reports in his story.

You will be startled at the result of this exercise.

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[1] In *Little French Masterpieces*, Vol. on Maupassant. Page 81. (Putnam's, 1903.)

I have shown you the common pattern of human conduct. You must now observe the source of that infinite variety within this pattern which makes every man differ so widely from his neighbor and gives rise to an endless variety of acts, dramatic and otherwise.

Men differ from one another most widely in the balance and the power of the many forces at work during the reflective delay.

If you will consider once more the three common types of Reflective Controls, you will see what this means.

In the repressive type, for instance, the inner reactions, *a*, *b*, *c*, may be of a thousand kinds, and each may vary enormously as to its energy. A man may find an impulse checked one day by a fear of being laughed at, and on the next by the wish to appear wiser than he really is, and later by the determination to study the facts more closely before he takes a stand on some critical matter. Repression, in one and the same man, is not the extremely simple thing which the rough diagram shows; it is very complex.

And yet this repressive type is exceedingly simple in comparison with the intelligent type, where we find a well developed reflective delay. This fact the diagram feebly indicates. To grasp it in its full significance, you ought to observe in real life the detailed manner in which you yourself hesitate, ponder, and struggle when weighing some puzzling problem and seeking the best course of action.

You will find that, in place of the single stimulus indicated in the diagram, you are subjected to half a dozen different ones in rapid succession, all relating to one and the same situation. Thus, you are planning to go to a distant town on a business trip which promises to be highly profitable. In that town you will meet a man who will be able and willing to aid you mightily.

You are on the point of buying your ticket, when your partner comes up and tells you that your sweetheart is very angry over the way you are always leaving town for long periods, always with the same explanation to her that "it is a very important business engagement." She does not believe it. She thinks you do not care for her any more. She thinks your affection has turned elsewhere. And your partner says he has learned this from the young lady's mother. You rush from the depot and call up the girl's mother. The mother tells you that your partner has misconstrued what she said about her daughter; the truth is that he has probably twisted it for his own selfish ends, as he has been lately showing unmistakable signs of falling in love with her daughter. In bewilderment and anger, you call up the girl and ask her to speak out what is in her mind; you say that if she cares for your partner, all

well and good, but you want to know it. The young lady is very cool. She refuses to talk. She laughs oddly, remarks that you are a very funny fellow, and firmly puts up the receiver.

Now, here is a situation in which a series of stimuli has affected you, all stimuli of a most intricate sort too. They are

1. the need to visit the distant town;
2. the alluring prospects of meeting the man there;
3. your partner's report about your sweetheart's anger;
4. the girl's mother's statements;
5. the girl's behavior.

To be sure, these do not occur simultaneously; but you react to all of them during your reflective delay later. And your reactions may be infinitely various. You may try to guess what is going on in the mind of each of your three friends. You may plan to deal with each one in several ways. You may work out some tests of the truthfulness and loyalty of each one. And so on. *And a thousand men would do all this in a thousand different ways.* With one, an impulse to hit the partner in the face might carry him into a fight on the spot; whereas with another this impulse would be suppressed by the thought that the girl's mother is trying to get rid of him in favor of the partner, who has proved himself a true friend. One man might feel that he had to settle the whole misunderstanding before he went on the trip, while another man might say to himself that it was too important to rush a decision, and one trip more or less could make little difference.

Characters of the impulsive or the repressive type must be drawn in terms of their impulses and repressions. But most dramatic characters are of the intelligent type and must hence be drawn first of all in terms of the precise impulses and controls which develop during the reflective delay.

It is within this reflective delay that emotions develop most. For an emotion is the outgrowth of a conflict between impulses resulting in a deadlock.

Thus it is that the emotional values of a story must be brought out in that part of the plot which falls between the initial complication and the decisive act that solves the problem raised by that complication.

The pattern of character can be depicted by the interplay of forces within the reflective delay. *But the dramatic proof of character appears only in the active solution that follows the reflective delay, with the single exception of the proof of a repressive character.*

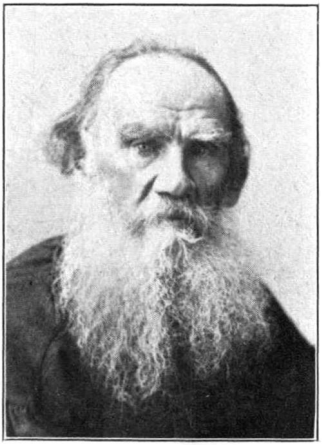
> **The proof of a repressive character usually is complete when all the forces that stifle the various contemplated lines of action have been shown to operate and check decisive behavior with respect to the given complication.**

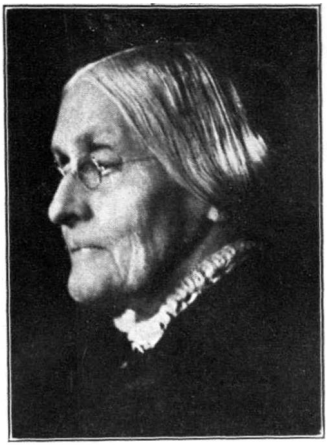
EXERCISES ON CHARACTER DRAWING

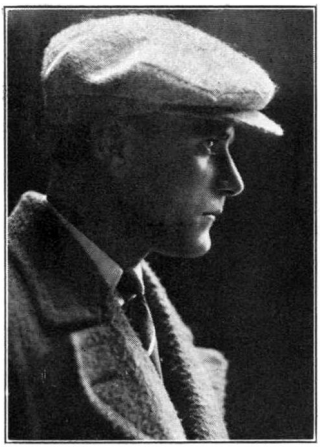
1. Here are six pictures, three of women and three of men, each showing marked expression. Study each closely, then write a description of each man and woman.

In this description do two things: first, give a purely objective description of his or her appearance; and then try to describe the character that this expression reveals.

You will almost certainly be confused at some point in this exercise. You will have two or more opinions as to what the expression or the revealed character is. If this happens, *write down each separate impression you get*.







Then compare these different ideas. After you have done this read the following article from the New York *Times*:

> Much light on the "character witness" and the value of his testimony is cast by the statements made this week at the Semenoff hearing. Cody Marsh, adjutant of the Siberian veterans, described the General as little if any better than a fiend in human form—a man who had indulged in wholesale and prolonged

murder and robbery, a ruthless tool of the ruthless Japanese, and a deadly enemy of American soldiers. Another, an Assistant Commissioner of the Canadian Red Cross, had sent in a letter filled with praises of the same officer and telling in detail of cordial and effective assistance received from him in many good works.

Both of these men spoke from personal knowledge of the Cossack leader, gained through close contact with him in the region of his military activities, and there is no reason to doubt that the statements of both were made with a sincere intention to tell the truth. And, though the discrepancy between their assertions is complete, it is not at all necessary to conclude that one of them was mistaken. The alternative to that assumption is that Mr. Marsh saw one side of war as it was waged in Siberia, and Mr. Atkinson another, quite different.

In other words, very terrible acts were committed there by the Ataman's wild followers, possibly more or less in accord with his instructions and possibly not. He has admitted that his control over his men was not perfect and that they did things which he regretted—which sometimes he punished. However that may be, he has intelligence enough, in his dealings with a representative of the Red Cross, to do all the fine things with which that representative credits him.

His "character," as a whole, is unknown to both of these witnesses, and their testimony is next to valueless as showing whether the charges made against him, in matters of which neither had any knowledge, were true or not.

Weight is to be ascribed, of course, to the reputation which a man earns among those with whom he comes in contact. Their opinion gains weight as it approaches unanimity and is founded on observation somewhat extended. Always will it remain true, however, that no man is bad to all who know him, and rarely, indeed, is there nobody without grievance against him. Only the very worst of men is incapable of occasional fine acts, and only the very best are invariably wise and virtuous. That is what makes the "character witness" of so little help in arriving at a judgment in respect to a particular charge. Nothing is more unsafe than to say of a human being that "He could not have done that." What he did

or did not do is still to be decided by a wholly different sort of evidence.

Semenoff has mild baby-blue eyes and very quiet ways, in all ordinary personal encounters. What do all these facts mean, in the light of our discussion of character?

2. Valdi is a cultured and clever Russian renegade who, at the outbreak of the war, sells his services to the enemy. He disguises himself as an officer of the Russian fleet, gets aboard a battle-ship and, by secret signals, guides a submarine to approach and destroy the vessel.

He himself, after the torpedo blows up the ship, finds refuge on a raft, to which the captain swims for safety. The captain, it turns out, is a former rival in love. Valdi has won the girl and married her. In the midst of a furious quarrel on the raft, during which the captain reveals that he is well aware of Valdi's treachery, the talk turns to the woman. And now Valdi says:

> "You shall never have her. She is mine. By the ten million devils of hell to whom I have sold myself, you shall never live to marry her after I am dead."

There is something wrong with this speech, which is quoted from a story. State very carefully what it is.

> 3. In a cheap cafeteria of San Francisco I once observed a gentleman of some fifty years. He was nibbling a ten-cent slice of watermelon while he read, with immense leisure, "The New Republic." All the other patrons of the place were pretty much like the dishes: faintly greasy from too little washing and somewhat nicked around the edges. But this citizen was of a world apart. He was dressed in a lovely tailor-made suit of finest wool—the kind you used to see before the war. He wore a costly and nobby soft hat of pearly tint. The rings on his fingers were genteel but looked like four figures to the left of the decimal point. And his handsome gray Van Dyke beard was barbered early and often by some ardent disciple of the Van Dyke school of art. While the rest of the cafeteria gobbled and gurgled, he dallied exquisitely over his warmish watermelon, heedless of a million flies and the coquetry of the waitresses, who plainly knew him of old and worshipped him. When the watermelon had gone the way of all food, he leaned back, and for half an hour I watched him gaze profoundly

into nothingness. When he finally arose and sauntered out into the night, the cash register lady bowed affectionately, while the lesser breed in aprons eyed and sighed at the retreating form.

Here is a purely external description. It can fit half a dozen totally different character types. Develop the three following character types in full, *using every detail given in the above paragraph*.

A. Make the man a consummate villain on the trail of some person or thing.
B. Make him a lovable old fellow addicted to whimsical charities.
C. Make him a silly fop.

4. Here is a situation out of which many various complications might arise. Choose for the woman a definite character trait, do likewise with the man in the case; then outline the action that might follow, were the woman to go out to Australia.

A young woman in New York has been corresponding for three years with a man in Australia whom she has never met. He is educated, of good family and has a paying business. He is musical, athletic, and she likes him immensely, so far as she can gather from their long exchange of letters.

He has asked her to come out to Australia and marry him He cannot leave his business without injuring it very seriously.

5. How many different traits can you think of which might have led the father described in the news item below to do what he is there described as doing?

Fearing that city life would ruin his small son, Andre Blaetter has fled to the wilds with the boy, according to his wife, who is now suing for divorce.

Mrs. Blaetter says she does not know where her husband and son are, but believes them to be hiding in the mountains. She states that her husband is opposed to education and was afraid that his boy would be compelled to attend school soon.

6. What character trait would the hero of the following episode be likely to have? Give your reasons for your answer.

Commuters on board one of the boats were startled today by the sudden shrill of a police whistle. They jumped to their feet. In the middle of the boat was a man, his back against a post. In his hand he held a traffic cop's "canary" and ever and anon he shrilled him a roundelay.

On land the signal means "help." On ship it means that the bottom has fallen out of the boat and that unless somebody does something about it, there is going to be a lot of excitement down at the bottom of the ocean—new arrivals and all that sort of thing.

A deckhand investigated. The man blew and blew. The deckhand went off and got a first officer who came in looking official.

"Hey, you," he said, "what's the idea?"

"I'm just trying out the whistle," explained the man.

"Well, why pick on a ferry boat?"

"I'll tell you," said the man, "I just bought this to keep in the house, see? And I wanted to try it out. If I blow it at home it will bring a cop. I don't want a cop. So I thought I would try it out on the bay where there are no cops." And he fell to blowing again.

The first officer could think of no rule prescribed by the Inspector of Boilers against blowing a traffic whistle aboard ship. So the first officer let him blow.

THE TWO TYPES OF ACTS

If you have succeeded with the previous exercises, you have probably made an important discovery, namely that many acts do not reveal character at all. This may startle you, especially if you have been taught—as many persons have—that a man's soul is completely expressed in his every deed. This doctrine rests upon inaccurate observation and loose speech. All modern psychology goes to prove that human nature is loosely built. Each of us carries around, as it were, a collection of mechanisms which, on occasions, can be geared together so that they function as one; but more often each mechanism runs along more or less independently, and in extreme instances one may become almost totally detached, as in dreams or insanity or intense concentration. Then we have something like "multiple personality." Semenoff, the bandit, is one person. Semenoff, the man of society, is quite another. Saint Paul was both right and wrong: right when he confessed that there were two men in him, wrong insofar as he thought there were only two. Probably there were forty!

It is hard enough to decide in a given case whether one of these mechanisms "belongs" to the character, in any dramatic or moral sense. But it is easy to show that, quite apart from its "belonging" or "not belonging," it is or is not *expressed* in a given act and moment. For the test of expression is simple enough. All you have to do is to look at the act and see what is visible in it. If you cannot detect, let us say, any cruelty there, then plainly cruelty is not expressed. It may, of course, be suppressed; but that is another story! And this brings me to the basic error in the theory of soul expression.

It is barely possible that, in some manner not yet understood, a man's entire nature is *involved* in every instant of his activity. But it is one thing to be involved, and quite a different one to be *expressed*. Expression means—if it means anything at all—making apparent, conveying a thought, feeling, wish, or what not to somebody. Electricity is involved in all light, but it is not expressed in every little flame. It took scientists years to discover that it was in any way connected with light. Sex is involved in a thousand and one mental activities which have nothing to do with sex, in their intent or in their objects of thought. But sex is not expressed in most of these; if it were, many social relations would become intolerable, and this is doubtless one factor which tends to suppress it. Thus all through human nature.

Now, you as a writer of stories must be on the lookout only for those modes of behavior in which some aspect of character is expressed—and expressed so flagrantly that thousands of readers untrained in psychology will instantly perceive the expression. You are in the business of drawing pictures of cruelty in action. You are not engaged in the scientific task of analyzing all the forces involved in cruelty—such as certain toxins in the blood which produce excessive irritability, tropic neurasthenia, and the like. Therefore keep clearly in mind the main distinctions between acts which reveal and acts which do not. I sum them up, for literary purposes, as follows:

There are two classes of acts:

1. Non-characteristic acts:

A. Peculiar automatic responses to simple stimuli; such as an odd way of smiling or laughing; a habit of scowling when listening; a tendency to interrupt when conversing; ways of walking, etc.

B. "Action patterns" of more complex type and stimulus, but not used to control dramatic situations; thus the habit of browbeating; concealing one's intentions; hypocritical adulation;

scheming to gain one's end through indirect and devious channels, etc.

2. Characteristic acts:

Manner of controlling a total situation involving a conflict of desires and subsequent decisive actions; the total pattern is an adjustment of conflicting impulses resulting from reflection.

Our studies of character and character drawing in the following lessons will pay much attention to showing the precise manner in which these types of acts can be used in story writing.

For the present, keep in mind this rough classification. When you observe people, for the purpose of character study, note the automatic responses, the "action patterns," and the manner of controlling situations reflectively. As you proceed further in these lessons, you will continue to find more and more that will help you in such observations.

No character reveals itself *completely* in any of the simpler types of bodily behavior. But it does reveal itself always in part this way. You must learn to avoid the two mistakes of character drawing; the mistake of describing no motions at all, and the other mistake of describing motions of a character which have little or no significance in revealing it.

The first mistake would be committed, were you to describe every hero of your stories merely with adjectives; thus, saying that "Harold was a brave young man. He had a noble soul. His manners were perfect."

The second mistake would be committed, were you to describe minutely the manner in which your hero walked, when the only trait that counted in your story was, let us say, his shrewdness in business or his scorn of women —in short, a trait which does not normally reveal itself in gait.

The second mistake is the commoner one, as every story teller learns to describe men in action before he has gone far in his art. And perhaps the commonest form of it is just this use of either irrelevant or meaningless action. It is true that something of character is revealed by even slight mannerisms; but in the main the deeper and more dramatic aspects appear only *in the manner in which a person handles a whole situation*. That is to say, I may discover something about a man's soul from the way he walks or talks or gesticulates; but I discover a thousand times as much about him when I see how he behaves in a theatre when somebody shrieks, "Fire! Fire!"

EXERCISES

1. Go out in the street and observe as minutely as possible the way three persons walk.—Describe the manner of their motions and try to interpret these.
2. Observe the motions made in conversation (talking and listening) by some person whom you know very well.—Describe and interpret these.
3. In your own observations, does it seem to be true that slow muscular movements are connected with a "slow mind"? Are nervous, jerky movements connected with a flighty, unsteady mind?
4. Read any description of the physical manners and movements of Theodore Roosevelt. Try to interpret his character in the light of such simple behavior.

In studying character, you should begin with somebody whom you have known well for a long time. Many writers who attain high success never pass beyond this study of their friends. It is well known, for instance, that Thackeray and Dickens drew heavily on their circles of intimates for their material; and, in recent years, H. G. Wells has done likewise. The better you know a person, the surer your character analysis is likely to be. You have seen him in action. You can trace the streaks in his nature as they crop out in everyday deeds. And you can detect the subtle connection between inner nature and bodily appearance and manner,—a thing woefully hard to do with purely imaginary characters and with those you know only by hearsay.

I recommend, therefore, that you make a series of studies somewhat along the following line:

1. Choose some man whom you have known for several years and have frequently seen at close range. Begin noting his characteristics, preferably in a small note book devoted to this single purpose. Record, first of all, *his physical appearance* with great minuteness.

2. Next make a similar record of his *manner of speech, his gait, and his way of meeting and greeting people under ordinary circumstances*.

3. Now observe some *one outstanding trait of character*. Choose one, if possible, which many of his friends have noticed and commented upon.

4. Set down all the incidents in his life you know about in which this trait has revealed itself in action.

5. After this, record faithfully all the peculiarities of the environment in which he has grown up, in so far as these seem to have a bearing on his character. For instance, if he left school when fourteen years old and went to work in a rolling mill, where the laborers got him into the habit of drinking whiskey, put all this down in your chronicle. In short, *try to find in the world he grew up in all the causes of his particular behavior that you can*. Of course, you will not be able to explain his entire nature by such events; for every man's life is shaped by his inborn nature as by external circumstances.

6. Repeat this study with as many persons as time permits. Above all do not dash through such work hastily. Better take a month over each case than a day. And better a year than a month, proceeding with the utmost leisure and the closest possible observation.

Remember, while you are at work, that you are doing one of the very hardest things in the world.

Here is a statement made by two eminent critics and teachers about the art of characterization.

Study it with care. Then try the method they suggest. Inspect six persons whom you see frequently. Look for such odd marks.

Describe the marks you find. Then see if you can connect these marks clearly with the dominant character traits the people possess. If you cannot, then try to connect them with some other traits or peculiarities.

What do you learn as a result of these experiments?

> For purposes of brief characterization, a single obtrusive habit is often sufficient. The dramatists and actors have taught us this, and we can see the principle, if we look, in nearly everybody we know. The absurd skip of Lord Dundreary's walk, my friend's habit of rolling his tongue across his mouth whenever he thinks he is talking unusually well, somehow denote temperament. The cartoonists have made these labels their life study. To describe a character by contrast is also an economical and a very true method. It is only by contrast with our fellows that most of us take on any character (any marks) at all. We see Celia and Dorothea, Constance and Sophia, each more sharply because of shades and distinctions which come out only when they are placed over against each other. Any true dramatic confrontation emphasizes the dominant traits. Eugenie takes on a heightened beauty in the presence of her father, he, in turn, grows more dour. It would be hard to conceive anybody in the city of Paris who could serve so

well to emphasize Villon's humor as the eminently respectable Bailly du Patatrac, beneficent and philosophical, but to whose marvelously civilized urbanity Villon is utterly impervious.[1]

1. Take the following characterization of the two persons described and point out the defects of it.

Henry Marrian, junior member of the firm of Mortimer & Co., fish merchants of Detroit, who have for many years operated the largest and swiftest fishing vessels on Lake Huron, was busily lacing his shoes in his room at the hotel in Toledo. Henry was not a nervous man, but his hands trembled as he worked the shoe laces. He had been president of his class at college, had gone in hard for athletics and had made the football team and won the coveted M that all such heroes are privileged to wear. He had, in the past few years, risen to prominence among the younger set of business men in Detroit by reason of his energy, his vivacity and his fine social connections. So he had no cause to be nervous, you might suppose. And yet the sudden knock of a hand on his door caused his fingers to relax their hold of the shoe laces and his cheeks to pale.

He tried to say something but before he could utter a syllable, the door was opened ever so slightly; and there appeared a piquant vision of big, blue eyes, a snub nose of extreme sauciness, lips enchantingly pink, cheeks aglow with perfect health and a silken crown of the fluffiest brown silken hair.

2. Criticize the psychology of this situation and action.

A ship has just been sunk in the open Pacific through the treachery of its lieutenant. The captain finds himself soon afterward in a small lifeboat with the only other survivor, the very lieutenant who had wrecked the vessel. The captain, knowing of the under-officer's guilt and knowing that if he falls asleep, the other will surely kill him, is about to kill the lieutenant when the fellow suddenly reminds the captain that he, the lieutenant, had won away from the captain his sweetheart and had married her after she had broken her engagement with the captain. He tells the captain in the coolest of insolent tones that, if the captain kills him and himself returns alive to shore, everybody will know that it was a clear case of murdering a rival in love in order to win back his

old sweetheart. At this suggestion, the captain is appalled and stays his hand for a minute, whereupon the scoundrel takes advantage of the dismay he has caused by adding: “And I know that you are not wanting to kill me because I sunk your ship. You simply want my wife. And you would dishonor yourself and her by a vile act which all the world would see through. You would be branded for the rest of your life.”

The captain inwardly asks himself if, after all, he is not more interested in winning back his old sweetheart and he has to admit that he is. So, to save both his honor and his life, he sits up, without touching food or water for more than two days, standing guard over the lieutenant; and when a ship picks them up, the crew find the untouched canteen and the unopened tin of biscuits in the boat and are unable to understand how it is that both men are at the point of death from thirst and hunger.

3. Greenwich Village is dizzy over a new variety of thief. The newcomer steals nothing but baths and he takes them by daylight. It has been determined that the marauder has been accustomed to creep along the back roof extension on the second floor of a certain block of houses so built. From the roof extension he has had a good glimpse into the bathroom, when having found the bath unoccupied, he has stealthily climbed in, and leisurely bathed, locking the bathroom door upon arrival and unlocking it just prior to leaving.

Here is a mysterious situation which can easily be made intelligible by supplying some *complication*. Probably such an addition would make the best story. But it is possible to solve the mystery and develop the story action in surprise form by adding no complication whatever. It can be done by giving the marauder or somebody else not mentioned in the news item an odd character trait.

What trait might it be?

4. In a famous old college town used to dwell a gentleman whose one joy and business in life was to operate the elite haberdashery patronized by the truly swells of the campus. At the end of the day’s work, he was wont to sally forth arrayed in the

very latest spats, fancy vest, tie, collar and trousers. As these decorations were designed for the undergraduate's eye they made a somewhat startling effect when draped on the short and portly figure of this citizen. With every fresh consignment of sartorial glories, he changed raiment, thus advertising his wares most spectacularly.

Withal he was a modest man, not at all inflated with false prides. To those who foregathered along his shirt counter, he was known frequently to say: "Gentlemen, I know I am not rich. I know I was not born beautiful. And I'm not one of the Upper Classes. But thank God, I'm nobby!"

Build on this suggestion of character. Draw a complete picture of the man.

Then put him in some college town situation in which this character finds an opportunity to reveal itself.

Do not write a complete story. Merely sketch in the action.

5. Elmore Reynolds, "monkey burglar" of police fame who is said to have stolen close to $100,000 in his short career as a burglar and to have lived in extravagance in various hotels in the country, confessed to the detectives that he had a "Cutie girl," a young wife whose name he refuses to divulge. Young Reynolds, neatly attired and with the badge of a national fraternity displayed on his vest, said, "She is so young, only eighteen. When I found that I might be arrested any moment, I sent her home to her parents in Berkeley. Don't ask me to tell her name. I intend to plead guilty and suppose I will get five years. I will tell her where I am and if she wants to stand by me she will never regret it.

"However, I wouldn't ask any woman to wait five years while I was in the penitentiary. It isn't that I don't love her because I do, but it isn't fair to her."

Take the character trait this man reveals and develop it consistently in three totally different situations. You may choose any kind of situation you like. But they must really put the trait to such a test that it shines forth unmistakably.

6. Here is a remarkable character picture. Do not try to find out who wrote it.

Read it over and over until you have formed a very vivid image of the man described.

Then sum up his traits in full and sketch the outline of some action (not necessarily a complete plot) in which these traits develop clearly.

Next choose any of the longer episodes that are used as exercises in these lessons; and work this character into the suggested action.

After you have finished all this, review your work; and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Which of the appearances of the man mentioned in the original description are intimately connected with his traits?
2. Are any of these appearances equivocal? Might they be possessed by somebody else having very different traits?

On a high chair beside the chimney, and directly facing Frank as he entered, sat a little old gentleman in a fur tippet. He sat with his legs crossed, and his hands folded, and a cup of spiced wine stood by his elbow on a bracket on the wall. His countenance had a strongly masculine cast; not properly human, but such as we see in the bull, the goat, or the domestic boar; something equivocal and wheedling, something greedy, brutal and dangerous. The upper lip was inordinately full, as though swollen by a blow or a toothache; and the smile, the peaked eyebrows, and the small strong eyes were quaintly and almost comically evil in expression. Beautiful white hair hung straight all round his head, like a saint's, and fell in a single curl upon the tippet. His beard and mustache were the pink of venerable sweetness. Age, probably in consequence of inordinate precautions, had left no mark upon his hands; and the O'Connell hand was famous. It would be difficult to imagine anything at once so fleshy and so delicate in design; the tapering, sensual fingers were like those of one of Leonardo's women; the fork of the thumb made a dimpled protuberance when closed; the nails were perfectly shaped, and of a dead surprising whiteness. It rendered his aspect tenfold more redoubtable that a man with hands like these should keep them devoutly folded like a virgin martyr—that a man with so intent and startling an expression of face should sit patiently on his seat and contemplate people with an unwinking stare, like a god, or a god's statue. His quiescence seemed ironical and treacherous, it fitted so poorly with his looks.

7. His wife refused to patch or sew buttons on his clothes, but would embroider initials on shirts for other men with whom she associated, complains Charles Siss, a bartender, in answer and cross-complaint filed to the divorce suit of Mrs. Bernadette Siss. Siss further denies that he spent his evenings around saloons but admits that he told his wife that he was leaving her forever. He said this was in answer to her statement to friends "to let him die" when he was taken sick at a party. Siss asks to be given the decree and the household furniture.

Give the wife some two character traits which fully cause her behavior as above indicated.

Trace the development of these two traits far enough to make them wholly clear to some friend of yours to whom you show your exercise.

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[1] Campbell and Rice, *A Book of Narratives*, page 287.

CHAPTER XI

EMOTIONS AND THEIR PORTRAYAL

We now come to a branch of technique which has never been developed even sketchily until now and here. When I first studied the problems of the portrayal of emotions, I found the psychologists had not analyzed the emotions themselves sufficiently to make it quite plain just what they were and what it was in them that had to be depicted. Even yet the psychology of the emotions is full of dark corners, and we dare not be too dogmatic about certain aspects of these profound and mysterious psychic occurrences. But we do know enough to lay down at least the broader facts and the rules of portrayal which they imply.

In the following pages I shall be obliged to go pretty deeply into psychology. I know that some of the things I shall say will be pretty hard to understand. So I want to impress upon you now the high practical value of every fact to be mentioned on this subject. He who would go far in fiction or in any other line of writing that appeals to many people must understand the emotions. It is literally true, as we shall see, that the emotions are the things that *move* people—to tears, to laughter, to deeds high and deeds low. They are the motive power of life itself, next in rank to the appetites. As their Latin name indicates, they themselves are *motions*. A peculiar kind of motion, to be sure, and one hard to analyze at times, but motion none the less. They are a primitive way of reacting to and dealing with critical situations in everyday life. Some of them are instincts, hence built into the very structure of the human body. And there is a sense in which we can fairly say that they are human nature *in the raw*. To be sure, there is much more to human nature than the emotion—though in millions of simple folk there is not very much more. But what more there is cannot be understood unless we first comprehend the emotional basis upon which the higher developments of our lives are founded. For this reason, spend much time and thought on everything you find in this lesson.

Let us begin with a definition of an emotion and a very simple illustration of emotional portrayal. The first definition I give here is not a complete one, from a psychologist's point of view. It contains merely the broadest and most obvious external marks that are of special utility to the writer. Later we shall add a number of other qualifications to it.

An emotion is an inner disturbance that results from the simultaneous arising of several impulses to actions which interfere with one another and thus produce a temporary jam or deadlock that makes smooth and effective behavior either difficult or impossible for a time.

This interference of impulses gives rise to inner feelings which we commonly but inaccurately identify with the emotion. These feelings are only one phase of the entire emotion. And both dramatically and practically they are the least important phase.

We shall next study a masterly specimen of very simple emotional portrayal, namely Kipling's "Without Benefit of Clergy." You are first to read the story through with care. Then turn to the passage I quote and note how the above definition of an emotion has been used as the basis for drawing the picture.

Here follow the paragraphs we shall analyze:

> The first shock of a bullet is no more than a brisk pinch. The wrecked body does not send in its protest to the soul till ten or fifteen seconds later. Holden realized his pain slowly, exactly as he had realized his happiness, and with the same imperious necessity for hiding all trace of it. In the beginning, he only felt that there had been a loss, and that Ameera needed comforting, where she sat with her head on her knees shivering as Mian Mittu from the housetop called, "Tota! Tota! Tota!" Later all his world and the daily life of it rose up to hurt him. It was an outrage that anyone of the children at the bandstand in the evening should be alive and clamorous, when his own child lay dead. It was more than the mere pain when one of them touched him, and stories told by over-fond fathers of their children's latest performances cut him to the quick. He could not declare his pain. He had neither help, comfort, nor sympathy; and Ameera at the end of each weary day would lead him through the hell of self-questioning reproach which is reserved for those who have lost a child, and believe that with a little—just a little—more care it might have been saved.
>
> "Perhaps," Ameera would say, "I did not take sufficient heed. Did I or did I not? The sun on the root that day when he played so long alone and I was—ahi! braiding my hair—it may be that the sun then bred the fever. If I had warned him from the sun he might have lived. But, oh my life, say that I am guiltless! Thou knowest

that I loved him as I love thee. Say that there is no blame on me, or I shall die—I shall die!"

"There is no blame,—before God none. It was written and how could we do aught to save? What has been has been. Let it go, beloved."

"He was all my heart to me. How can I let the thought go when my arms tell me every night that he is not here? Ahi! Ahi! O Tota come back to me—come back again, and let us be together as it was before!"

"Peace, peace! For thine own sake, and for mine also, if thou lovest me—rest."

"By this I know that thou dost not care; and how shouldest thou? The white men have hearts of stone and souls of iron. Oh, that I had married a man of mine own people—though he beat me—and had never eaten the bread of an alien!"

"Am I an alien—mother of my son?"

"What else—Sahib? * * * * * Oh, forgive me,—forgive! The death has driven me mad. Thou art the life of my heart, and the light of my eyes, and the breath of my life, and—and I have put thee from me, though it was but for a moment. If thou goest away, to whom shall I look for help? Do not be angry * * * * * Indeed, it was the pain that spoke and not thy slave."

"I know, I know. We be two who were three. The greater need therefore that we should be one."

Analysis of the emotional portrayal.

1. In the first two sentences Kipling calls attention with consummate skill to that first onset of numb bewilderment which is so commonly the beginning of an emotional crisis. He compares it to the slow development of pain following a body wound. This is correct. Why? Because it takes time for the many conflicting impulses which well up in a tragic situation such as Holden's, to gather force enough and muscular disturbance enough to make the jamming perceptible.

This is particularly true of those situations which cause a quick confusion of thoughts.

2. "The same imperious necessity of hiding all trace of it" is the source of half of the intensity of the emotions that later develop in Holden. How

so? Well, he has the natural impulse to give vent to his grief. He would cry, would take a week's vacation, would go away with poor Ameera, would spend all his time consoling her, would perhaps later fling himself into some work with frenzy, the quicker to forget. Here are half a dozen or more impulses. *Each such impulse involves motions of behavior, and such motions involve the use of muscles.* But at the same time Holden has other stronger impulses. He must suppress his acts in so far as they might betray to the world of white men his relations with this Hindu woman. If he does not conceal it, he will bring down more trouble upon himself and Ameera. *So all the impulses of prudence and his desire to keep his social standing oppose the other impulses to express his grief and sympathy for Ameera.* The two sets of inner impulses deadlock.

3. "Later all his world and the daily life of it rose up to hurt him." Here we come upon one of the subtlest and truest touches. When Holden saw the children at the band stand playing clamorously, his impulses were to play with them; *for his habits of playing with his own child had already become well established. So the sight of a playing child would start these habits into action. But in the very next instant his realization that these children were not his own dead child set up other impulses that suppressed his parental habits.* And this suppression was like all suppression, very painful and infuriating.

A superficial student of emotions would never have written what Kipling does here: "It was an outrage that any one * * * * * should be alive and clamorous, when his own child lay dead." The superficial student would have argued that such a description would make Holden out to be a very selfish, spiteful man. But those who understand the emotion of such a terrible loss as is here depicted know that *Holden's rage is the pain of an emotional deadlock and not an expression of the trait of selfishness at all*. Many clear-seeing writers have noted this same strange indignation toward the whole world of happy, contented people which arises in those who have lost and suffered.

4. "It was more than mere pain when one of them (the children) touched him." This is flawless analysis. Observe the tremendous opposition of impulses in such an event. A child toddles up while Holden is sitting on a bench in a daze, scarcely knowing what is going on about him. At the first sensing of the child's hand on his knees, the man reacts precisely as he would, had it been his own child. His impulse sends out his hand to pet the child, or perhaps to draw it to him. Another impulse starts a smile on his face. Another instigates him to call out his own child's name, Tota. Then his mind takes in the real situation. The child is not Tota. He is in the park, with

people looking on, gossips scanning him and only too eager to chatter about any oddity in his behavior. And his Tota is dead and gone forever. Instantly the impulses of suppression and concealment arise to check these first ones. The deadlock once more is agony, the agony of doing nothing, of being unable ever to do anything about it at all.

At this point I want you to take up this analysis, beginning with Ameera's self-reproaches and her horrible suspicions that with just a little more care she might have saved her baby. You will find that Kipling has reported in the woman's talk and act every consequential impulse and in such an order that the conflicts and suppressions and deadlocks are clear.

SOME CASES FROM REAL LIFE AND SOME FURTHER FACTS ABOUT EMOTIONS

You are next to study the following accounts of emotional experiences which some of my students have written. They are all drawn from real life and not "played up" or dramatized at all. After having read them and the further facts about emotions which I am about to give you, come back to each account and see how these facts appear there. (Most of the italics are mine.)

Case I

a. The greatest earthquake ever felt on the Pacific Coast was experienced on April the eighth at about five o'clock in the morning. Unlike other shocks in former years, this gave no forewarning, no tendency to "earthquake weather," for the day before was unusually beautiful and the sunset wonderfully roseate.

The movement was so violent that people were thrown from their beds, chimneys were disintegrated and fell to the ground, dishes were hurled from the shelves and everything movable was flung to the floors. After twenty-nine minutes it ended with a vicious twist that thrust houses from their foundations and completed the work of destruction everywhere.

The people rushed into the streets, disheveled, half-clad or in their night clothes, and so terrorized that nothing seemed incongruous to them. Dogs fled to the foothills and did not return for three days and the birds disappeared for weeks.

b. My personal impressions of the earthquake

I was awakened suddenly from a sound sleep by the rocking of my bed. I opened my eyes and, in the dusk of the early morning, saw the red-papered walls of my room come toward me and then recede. There was a chimney in the room and it seemed to lean over me and then draw back, only to return again. I felt that it was about to fall upon me. A dreadful nausea swept over me and a cold wave passed up my spine to the back of my head and stayed there. My hair felt stiff as though frozen. I tried to scream but was unable to make a sound. My throat seemed to be closed, as though a hand was tightened about it. As the house continued to shake I tried to move but could not at first, finally I managed to put my feet on the floor. The floors were tipping, now up, then down, like the deck of a steamer in a storm. I sat watching them, waiting dully for the walls to fall upon me or the ground to open and swallow us all. I expected to die.

Then came a terrifying twist followed by the crash of all movable objects. The floor was littered with them. I should have said the *falling* objects, for I had no impression of sound. I saw them on the floor but did not see them fall nor hear them. It was done too quickly. I threw my arms upward and said, “Oh, my God!” then put them down. I repeated this three times. Then I heard my husband, across the room, swearing terribly. (He was not a profane man, rather the opposite.) He called to me to get up and dress, swearing at me all the time and at the d—— earthquake.

I stood up. I felt deathly nauseated and my limbs trembled so that they kept hitting together. Then the earthquake seemed to stop and with a quiver everything became quiet. Then I thought of my children. We were not to die after all. I ran to the door and tried to call but I only made a croak in my throat. It still seemed to be closed. I tried again and made a little sound. They came running to me. The older was crying hysterically, the younger girl was laughing. She danced up and down gleefully crying, “My pictures are down and every thing is smashed. The plant in the front room is in the middle of the floor and all the dishes in the kitchen are off the shelves.” I looked at her and wondered if it had turned her brain for *she seemed to be enjoying the confusion*.

My husband called to us. “Get dressed, d—— you, before we get another shake.”

The children, frightened at his words, ran to obey. I felt deathly sick and my knees still trembled. I went to the chair by the center table where I had placed my clothes the night before. They were in a heap on the floor. A part of my student lamp was on top of them. I noticed the chimney standing on a mahogany table on the other side of the room. (It was not cracked I found later.) The stem of the lamp lay in a corner. I remembered wondering dully who had unscrewed it. Not till afterward did I realize the miracle of its separation in a second of time, during the earth twist.

I lifted my clothes. They smelt of kerosene. “These are not my clothes,” I complained, “they are the rags I clean the lamps with.”

“Get clean ones, d—— you, then,” bawled my husband, still swearing continually.

I tried to think where my clean clothes were. I could not. I gave it up and began putting on the ones covered with oil. My hands shook so that I could hardly dress. I left off half my garments and began fastening my dress.

L——, my youngest, ran into the bathroom and cried out joyfully, “The pipes are burst, the walls are dripping and the carpet’s full of water.” We all ran in. The walls were streaming and the carpet was oozy. My husband pushed me aside roughly and went to the basin. He turned the faucet.

“The water’s all right now, but get out of this d—— house for we’ll have another shake soon, we always have three, d—— them.”

I was buttoning my dress. *My fingers seemed stiff, and numb.* I did not comb my hair. It was streaming over my shoulders. I took a hat from the hall table and put it on. It was my husband’s wide slouch hat and was too big. It kept coming over my eyes.

We went down stairs and out the front door. I sat down on the steps. I felt very ill, as though I should faint if I did not exert my will. My throat hurt and I felt dizzy.

I quieted myself and tried to appear as usual. I had no thought of my appearance. I noticed that there were no chimneys on the houses and the house across the street looked out of plumb.

“The Ames’ house is six inches over the foundation,” said my husband. “We are fortunate. Ours does not seem to be disturbed.”

“I saw the houses tip and touch each other,” said L——, “I looked out the window;” she was really enjoying it all. (Others said this same thing about the houses touching.)

The neighbors began to gather on our steps. My husband put his arms about us. “Let us pray silently to God for having spared our lives,” he whispered. He did not swear again. I am sure he did not know he had been profane.

The bachelor across the street came over. He was English and particular about his appearance, always. He came and sat beside me. I did not dare trust myself to stand for fear I might faint. I felt very ill. He took hold of my hand which was trembling. I did not know him well but we talked intimately about death, the hereafter and God. He had on pink pajamas, bathroom slippers and his vest. He took his watch from his vest pocket and looked at it. “It has stopped,” he said.

I did not think his appearance odd, and he did not seem to notice my streaming hair and big hat. I did not think of it myself.

A young lad came by on a bicycle. He stopped and asked if I would loan him a *hat*. His mother lived in Fruitvale and he wanted to go and see if she was all right.

L—— ran up the steps and took her father’s best hat from the hall tree and brought it out to him. He put it on and pedalled away.

I noticed that he had on only his undergarments but not till days afterward did it strike me as strange that he had not asked for trousers instead of a hat. *We all watched him pedal away without comment.*

Our cat came crawling to me. I noticed that his yellow fur was two inches high on his back from neck to near his tail. I tried to smooth it down but it wouldn’t stay. (Ever afterward, and he lived five years longer, if anyone came upon him suddenly or something crashed to the floor, the fur would rise instantly. Even the jar of a door would cause it.)

My husband came to me, as I sat on the steps surrounded by neighbors. “You look very pale and you smell like a kerosene lamp.”

He did not smile nor did I.

“You sit here,” he continued, “I am going to make some strong coffee, enough for us all,” he waved his hand toward the others.

I saw that he was ghastly and great drops stood on his forehead. He brushed them away and went inside the house.

He wore his hat and did not take it off when he went in. He wore it for two days constantly in the daytime.

When I asked him why he wore it, he said he felt more comfortable, safer, as though he were outdoors.

My first impression had been of fear for my own safety. The next, for my children. *It was not until days afterward that I thought of the people in other cities*, not until we saw the red glare of burning San Francisco and the flames hundreds of feet in height racing up the hills, and the living stream of refugees passing continually by our house. Then the strenuous relief work began as we filled our homes, our hospitals, and our churches.

During the continual tremblings of the earth for weeks, I felt always the dreadful nausea, my older daughter cried, and the younger capered excitedly. *For months I retained the feeling of the ground moving beneath me.* Possibly it did move. It was as one feels on land after a long voyage.

This happened in 1906 and yet I had difficulty in finishing this account at one sitting because of the nausea that came over me as I recalled the events, and my emotions.

Case II

a. One evening, as the choir was forming in the vestry-room, preparatory to going into the church, the choir-director came to me and said: “Miss Williams is not here this evening. Will you take the contralto solo in the anthem?” I was very much pleased that he asked me, and I said I would. Unfortunately, over an hour had to elapse before the singing of the anthem, during which *I dreaded the ordeal*. When the time came I got through it, but *I was scared to death*. The following are the exact details of the anguish I went through:

b. A warm little tingle crept over me. There were other contraltos present. He had asked *me*.

c. Once in the choir-loft, I began to feel *queer little wavy feelings* in my stomach. The tingling warmth had left me. Spasmodic little shivers took their place. The service was long,

and there was the sermon ahead of us before my solo. “If it could be but now—this minute,” I would sometimes say to myself, as the shivers, for a moment, subsided. But at the thought of really doing it my heart would beat thick, and as fast as the purring of a cat. My favorite philosophy of “what will it matter a hundred years from now?” brought no solace. I knew it wouldn’t matter then, but I knew it *did* matter—desperately—*now*. And at the very realisation of the “now,” my hands became like stones and the most deadly nausea swept over me in waves.

d. At last—and yet, oddly, all too suddenly—the sermon came to an end, and we all stood, I with the rest, and on two things presumably feet, and with knees that bent both ways. The organ played a prelude, which came to my ears as through cotton, the chorus—I, perhaps, a part of it—burst into something semi-joyful about a blessed place to which we all look forward—I, certainly, at that moment, the most yearningly—and then, as though bitten off, it all came to an end.

e. The organist touched four notes, one after the other, slowly, faintly, and then raised her hands—and waited.

The last silence, that sickening silence that I must break, was upon me. It was not *coming*: it was *there*.

f. My heart made a leap, almost to my shoulder; then a short jerk, and sat, like a dry sponge, in my throat.

I opened my mouth. Something began to press at the back of my teeth. Then from far off, and sharp as scissors, came a sound. It was I—it was my voice—it must have been—for it operated simultaneously with the thick movement of my lips and the steady pressure behind my teeth. My hands clutched the music and held it squarely in front of me. My eyes were focused on it, yet the notes swam halfway between the page and my face. I felt my eyes crossing. A cord at the back of my neck tied a sudden knot and fastened my head on my shoulders.

The sounds continued, a shade less sharp and a little closer to me. My hands slightly lessened their clutch. What I stood on began to feel more like feet, and I found myself poised on the balls of them. The muscles at the back of my neck relaxed. Did I dare toss my head, just a little, as the contralto soloist sometimes did? Better not; it was lighter than it had been—it might toss off.

The belief came to me that something within me could affect these tones that now sang nearer me. My hands almost relaxed. A tingle started at my feet and ran up and out of my fingertips. There was but a phrase to go. This I would make my own. And I did.

The organ now had its chance in an interlude. Then the whole choir was with me again. The blood from my head let go and came surging into me, evenly distributed. I was a human being once more,—warm, and unknotted, and glad to be alive.

Case III

a. I had just time to keep my appointment if I caught the next car. I started on a brisk little run down the slope of the sidewalk, but just as I reached the corner the car drew up at its usual stop. I was on the wrong side of the street, but some one was getting off so I increased my speed and ran across just behind the car. As I crossed the track just behind the car, I called twice, "Will you wait, please?" But just as I was ready to lay my hand on the car, the conductor started and the car sailed off.

b. Without an instant's delay I turned and walked up the hill toward the other car-line. I felt a sense of grievance at the two passengers on the platform who could have called the conductor's attention to me, but did not until after the car started. Then I transferred my sense of injury to the conductor who had given the bell-rope a second jerk after the passengers called his attention. I hoped they noticed that I did not waste any time looking after them. But even that thought gave me a sense of futility, for I realized that the other line was not a competing line, and they should worry if I walked four blocks or bother over which box my nickel jingled into.

My sense of rancor toward the conductor increased. I wished that I had crossed in front of the car. I have often remarked that the only way to stop a street car is to stand on the track. I wished that I had caught hold of the bar and swung myself on even after the car had started. I rehearsed a sharp little dialogue with the conductor following such an action in which I had undeniably the best of the argument. I even realized that my voice would rise so it could be heard clear thru the car and that I would lower it, and felt the same sense of chagrin as though I had actually done it.

My disappointment at being late came over me and brought a fresh sense of grievance against that conductor and conductors in general. Several instances of arrogant and high-handed action on the part of various and sundry conductors occurred to me, also the fact that the company was threatening to raise the rates for that kind of service. And this brought a surge of righteous civic wrath. By this time I had reached the other car line where a more frequent service promised to make up for the delay of walking so far. But the other car was slow in coming.

Somewhere along the line, I think it was about here, a thought started to work itself out as to just how I chanced to miss that car. That being settled I had a vague sense of self-reproof that I did not start earlier. It was not an enthusiastic sentiment, however.

After I was seated on the car I found myself wondering what the result would have been if I had shied a rock at the platform of that car as it started off. When the wonder got fairly above the threshold of my consciousness it brought me to with a jerk. I had a swift vision of all the pathological cases I had ever heard of and felt a sort of understanding of their perpetrators which I had never realized before. A person pronounced pathological is instantly set apart as in a class entirely distinct from all good people. For half a minute I realized that they were probably just like the rest of us—when we get mad.

When I came to my destination the conductor carried me a block beyond altho' I had told him my street distinctly two blocks before. This brought a mild resurgence of my feelings of the afternoon which however subsided quickly and brought also a reminder that the conductors on these lines had been very, very kind to my little mother and very careful of her thru several years of infirmity while she was still able to go about.

Case IV

a. A lively scene occurred in a Fourteenth street millinery store today when, in a fit of anger, a well-dressed woman knocked Easter bonnets helter-skelter. The manager of the store started to remonstrate and then, apparently remembering the high cost of hats, she fled to the work room. The woman knocked one last hat from the standard beside the door, while clerks and customers

gaped at her in amazement. We trust that her Easter bonnet was more becoming than her behavior.

b. It was spring; Easter hats were ripe and my daughter was insisting that I go with her to select one. I had been suffering from an attack of indigestion for two weeks and I had been putting off the hat ordeal, as she is very hard to fit. One evening she came home with a hat to save me the task of going with her. It did fit and the clerk had assured her that it was becoming. However she had agreed that in case I didn't like it we could exchange it the following day. I tried to but couldn't like it. It was expensive but looked very cheap. It turned straight up in front and made her pug nose and glasses on a line with the turn-up.

The next day I got out of bed to meet her down town, and I took the hat with me. On the way I became gnawingly hungry and went in a candy store and ordered a hot malted milk chocolate. The girl served me a frosted chocolate containing ice cream. She insisted that I got what I ordered and tried to prove this by her order which she had written herself. I got up and left the store. I also left the odious hat and had to go back after it.

I met my daughter and we proceeded to the millinery store but I should have had my rabbit's foot with me instead of my indigestion. The manager informed me that milliners were not exchanging hats this year. I calmly mentioned the agreement to exchange and she said the clerk was a new girl who was only there one day. I insisted that the hat was too unbecoming to be worn and in despair said, "I see you are very busy. Suppose we just look around and see if we can't find one we like better. We may find it in a higher priced hat." She shrugged her shoulders and turned away.

We looked around almost in despair for, alas, few hats were built to cover a large head with a heavy head of hair. They sat on top like Happy Hooligan creations. Finally we found a white sport hat that could be worn later in the season and we decided to take this and buy another one elsewhere for early spring. Though several clerks had been free, none helped us.

I mustered a smile in spite of my gnawing interior and told the manager we had found one and that I knew she wanted us to be satisfied. She disdainfully put the hat in a bag, held out her hand and chirped, "Ten dollars please." I remarked that that was the full

price of the hat. She said if we wanted that hat we'd certainly pay for it—that we had bought one and now we could buy another—that milliners were imposed upon every day, etc., etc.

Without a moment's warning of my feeling or actions I started knocking hats from the show case to the floor. The manager started to bluster at me and then turned and fled to the workroom. My daughter took hold of me and begged me to come out. Then I realized that I was creating a scene and that it was before her. We picked our way through the hat-strewn floor but an especially jazzy upturned one by the door sent another flood of anger over me and I knocked it from the standard. My daughter carried the unbecoming hat. I was trembling and had to sit down in another store. I had to stand on the street car and as my coat was heavy and I was fiercely hot, I laid my bundles and purse in a stranger's lap while I took off my coat. She smiled at me and gave me her seat but I had to get off at the next corner and call a taxi to take me home.

The next day at noon my husband telephoned that he was coming to lunch and I suddenly feared that he was coming to scold me for my terrible act and got such a severe attack of hiccoughs that I could only stammer in answering him. This attack lasted several minutes after I had left the telephone and then I suddenly realized that he had never scolded me in his life and that he was simply coming because I was upset. Then the hiccoughs ceased. I lay awake nights and worried two days because I feared I was going insane. I finally took this dread to our physician, who questioned me closely. He assured me that I had simply had a bad attack of temper and he went to work to ease the indigestion. I left my burdens in his office and went home. When the family came to dinner the cook was sound asleep. Later I was able to retrim the hat and turn it hind side before, though I never saw it without shuddering.

Case V

a. At the junction of Broadway and Twenty-sixth Street, after a six hours' drive my machine was struck by a heavy truck, pushed with frightful impetus sidewise across the street into a second car,

in which the owner was sitting, wrecking all three cars, but injuring no one.

Notwithstanding the damage, I remained in the car and was driven home.

b. I had been away from home for one week. I was eager to return. Notwithstanding some fatigue, I found myself *singing inaudibly*, as I drove down Webster street. Approaching Twenty-sixth Street, where I wished to turn, crossing both Broadway and Webster Streets, I slowed down, to allow the cars at my left, and going in the same direction, to pass. Putting the gear into second, I made the necessary signals and turned across Broadway, in safety.

At this point, Webster Street crosses Broadway at an acute angle, and from my window I saw a large truck approaching on Webster Street, travelling rapidly. Its speed was soon demonstrated, for almost at the moment of my observation, it struck me, pushing me across the street into another car.

My first impression was an *astonished inquiry as to the man's purpose*. Every muscle of my face seemed to ask the question. This was followed by *indignation* at his action. *My third feeling was one of inevitable disaster.* In less than a second, I seemed to review my long, difficult trip, made without any accident, ending in such a manner. *Busied with the control of my car, I was conscious of no fear, and conscious of wondering at it.*

The certainty of a serious accident aroused in me a peculiar *impersonal levity*. As though I said, "Well, here I am! Do your worst!"

Seeing the other machine toward which I was dashing, my mind gave me the expression, at once, "Between the Devil and the deep, blue sea,"—and the quick glimpse that I had of the man in the car, added the thought, "and you are not the Devil!" a negative arraignment of the driver of the truck. All of this action and this conscious reasoning was nearly instantaneous.

With my machine wedged into a "V" shaped opening between the two cars, *I sat perfectly still*. I remember a feeling of *coldness in my solar plexus*. I felt a complete relaxation, as though I had reached my journey's end.

I had *no impulse of positive action*, no inquiry into the legal aspects of the accident. I wished the crowd to depart, and the noise

to cease. The only anger displayed was by the man whose car I had struck. He berated the truck driver with violent language.

I accepted, as a matter of course, his sympathy and concern for me. He had expected to see my car overturned and myself injured, and the presence of his car had prevented that disaster. I felt and expressed the keenest sorrow over the damage to his car. For the driver I had a scornful pity, for his ignorance or carelessness and the knowledge of the penalty he would have to pay.

My *indifference over my own plight* was disturbed by a traffic officer, who asked me to try and move my car as we were obstructing the streets. I got out of the car with difficulty, the running boards being wrecked. I inspected my wheels; the front axle was broken and the wheels badly bent. I looked about me, selected from the mechanics who had gathered, one whose face attracted me, and asked him to drive me home.

After the impression of certain disaster, I had no emotion regarding myself, unless my peculiar analytical mental state was an emotion.

In relating the story of the accident to my husband, *I felt for the first time the seriousness of the affair*, and that feeling was entirely *reflected from his distress and excitement*.

As a result of the accident, for many nights, at the moment of dropping into sleep, and at every waking during the night, I would feel, and seem to hear, the impact, and would suffer a disturbance of my pulse. I can reproduce the same feeling now, but with less intensity.

Emotions which I distinctly experienced:

Eagerness to reach home.
Happiness.
Astonishment.
Inquiry.
Indignation.
Resignation.
Wonder at myself.
Levity, followed by analysis of thought.
Physical relaxation.
Mental apathy.
Sympathy for one party.
Scorn and pity for the other.
Indifference for myself.
Deliberate action and decision.
Realization, reflected from my husband.
Physical reaction, manifested at night.

Case VI

a. My baby suddenly developed a serious, agonizing illness. Five physicians at a consultation declared he must be operated upon. One of them called to take him to the hospital. Instead of letting him have the baby, I called up some of the other physicians and made a plea *for dispensing with the operation since the baby had been sleeping peacefully for two hours*.

b. As Dr. A's son drove up to the house to get the baby, I rushed out to meet him.

"There is still half an hour before the time set for the operation. The baby has been sleeping peacefully for two hours. Every minute of sleep is precious to him."

"I agree with you," he replied. "I shall call for him in half an hour." (*Stimulus in the situation*—the baby's sudden peaceful sleep.)

I returned to the room. There lay my twenty months old babe in my mother's arms, sleeping peacefully. The terrible convulsions that had made his shrieks of agony heard for blocks away had ceased. I looked at him despairingly.

(*Impulses are released.*)

What could I do? How could I prevent this terrible operation? I shuddered as I thought of the cruel knife entering that tender little body and severing its vital organs. Yet how could I, one lone individual, withstand the life and death ultimatum of five of the best known specialists on both sides of the Bay?

(*Implicit experimentation begins.*)

I wanted to scream aloud, that they were all wrong. I knew they were. I knew my child better than those strange men. How I hated them at that moment! How I wished that I had never called them. I had an impulse to snatch my baby from my mother's arms and hide with him where those cruel men could not find us. Acting on the impulse, I started toward my mother, only to kneel softly by her side.

(*Chaotic emotion.*)

I could not wake the sleeping child, every second of sleep was so precious to him. Oh, dear God, would he be breathing so gently an hour hence? The agony in my breast was intolerable. I looked at my mother. She sat holding him, scarcely daring to breathe for fear of awaking him. The silent tears were streaming unchecked down her face. Suddenly I felt my own face wet with tears. (*Sympathetic imagination.*) Almost impatiently I wiped them away. I did not have time to cry. I must act. I must do something to prevent that awful operation. The minutes were slipping by so rapidly. Should I let the operation go on? If he died from it, I would blame myself for allowing it. I could not help feeling that all those doctors' diagnosis was wrong! Should I refuse to have the operation? Then if he died, wouldn't I consider myself a murderess, going against the best judgment of five specialists? Perhaps prayer would help? I tried to pray, but I could not. There was no softness in me, rather a bitterness and a sense of futility that was overpowering and almost driving me mad. I wanted to scream aloud my dissent and my defiance. I wanted to vent my rage upon someone. (*Transfer of emotion.*) But there was no one except my baby and my mother. Restlessly I tiptoed back and forth between the child and the door. I felt if the doctor came, I would lock him out. I pressed my lips to the warm little hand. The contact galvanized me into action.

(*This becomes the dominant impulse.*)

I rushed to the door.

“They are not going to butcher my baby,” I whispered tensely to my mother as I passed out.

I sprang to the telephone. In vain I tried again and again to get Dr. B, the specialist in whom I had most faith. He was not in. I was in despair but the thought of the flying minutes urged me on again. I tried to get Dr. C on the telephone. He was in. How I pleaded for that baby’s life, urging that the *inflammation must have subsided and the awful danger have passed or he could not* sleep so peacefully.

“I would not think of putting the knife to him under such circumstances,” was his reply.

“God bless you, Dr. C,” I managed to gasp in such a revulsion of relief it was almost painful (*Action giving relief.*)

(*Minor impulses still tug.*)

How long I sat on that stool I don’t know. It may have been a second, it may been much longer. Still tugging at my heart was the awful fear of the morning when those five men had declared an operation absolutely necessary. I wanted Dr. C’s opinion to be bolstered up by others. So I tried again to get Dr. B and was successful. Again I made my passionate plea.

“You must hurry the operation,” he replied. “The cessation of pain shows the last stages. Only an immediate operation can save him now.” (*The incongruity* between his answer and that of Dr. C, also the fact that he was the one in whom I had the most faith, doubtless *caused my next feelings*.)

At his words horrible fear overcame me, then I smiled grimly to myself. Such difference of opinion but confirmed me in my decision.

In the hall I heard Dr. A’s voice. I bounded out and barred the doorway before the astonished man.

“You can’t take the baby, Dr. A,” I declared. “He is not going to be operated on. I want another consultation. I telephoned Dr. B and Dr. C. Please notify the others.”

I sensed his impatience and anger at me.

“That was not professional, you should have let me ring them up.”

“When a baby’s life is at stake, a mother does not stop to think of professional etiquette,” I scorned, “nor did I do anything wrong.”

I entered the room. I felt my baby was saved.

Case VII

a. A severe earthquake visited the bay cities at an early hour this morning. It caused a great panic, and did considerable damage to homes in the way of falling chimneys, broken windows, etc. Some gas mains were broken and a number of fires resulted.

b. It was hardly daylight. At the first faint rumble and tiny preliminary shake of the quake, my pulses quickened. I smiled—I was glad. At last I was awake in time to feel an earthquake from its very beginning—. Always before I had awakened at the very last tremble of a quake, or the household had told me of it in the morning, and I had not felt it at all.

But now—I would enjoy it all. Another shock came, greater than the first—a twisting, soul sickening motion. The smile died on my lips—my eyes were wide and staring—a nausea-like fear welled up within me that seemed to close my throat, and shut off my voice. I tried to call my husband, but I could not speak. But just here my husband jumped suddenly from a sound sleep. In a daze he snatched our small son from his crib, and called to me to follow him. “The house is doomed!” he said—“Hurry.” Then I was able to move. I hurried after him to the stairway and fought my way down. It seemed as if I was going up stairs instead of down. The stairs rose to meet my feet. I was tossed from wall to wall as I went forward, and unconsciously I kept saying to myself, “I’m not safe in my own house—I’ve always felt safe in my own house—if I’m not safe in my own house where can I be safe?” A feeling of smallness crept up within me, a feeling of futility. I felt that I was in the grasp of the superhuman. My husband stood in the open front doorway looking out at the street that seemed to rise in ripples like the waves of an incoming tide. “It’s worse outside,” he said and shut the door. So we stood and listened to the windows rattle furiously, to the dishes crashing in the dining room—to the dull thunder and roar on the roof. Then a memory came to me. A doorway set in a thick wall—we must always run to this doorway

in case of an earthquake to keep falling plaster from striking us. I made a wild dash for the folding doors. I looked above—the wide beam was not there. Breathlessly I ran from door to door looking up—but it evaded me. In my terror in not being able to find the right doorway *I forgot the earthquake, and the twisting room. All that mattered now was the doorway.* Then suddenly everything grew quiet. Dishes ceased crashing, windows stopped breaking. We opened the front door again and the quiet was so intense it suffocated. I could scarcely breathe. When I did manage a deep breath *the odor of crushed plants and raw earth came to me*, and I wondered vaguely why. *I hated the quiet, it was so calm that I wanted to scream.* But I didn't. The baby was laughing at our antics—if I screamed he would cry. So we stood as though rooted to the spot—like statues unable to move. Then came the raucous whistle of the fire alarm. The sound broke the tension—we were able to move.

We closed the door and turned inward. I brushed my hand across my eyes to wipe away the horrid dream, but it still persisted. Everything about us was wrecked and broken but I could see it clearer now. Before it had been as if a veil were over my eyes. I turned to look at the doorways. Then I laughed, and said to my husband, "I was looking for that *wide doorway in the house where I used to live when I was a little girl*."

Case VIII

I had planned to go to San Francisco with a friend to buy some new clothes for myself and have a day's outing. *My young daughter's needs seemed to be so much more imperative than mine that I usually devote my energy to her affairs* and let my own wait, but this day was to be mine and I anticipated a pleasant trip. My friend informed me at the last moment that she could not go, and I felt a pang of disappointment which acted like a sudden weight in my chest. It was not so keen at first as later, for my mind began to plan some substitute. I proposed to my daughter that she go with me, seeing it was Saturday. She wanted to go because of the restaurant lunch and the possibility of getting something pretty for herself. But she wanted more to go with some of her chums to a football game in which her school participated. I felt hurt at her choice and the sense of weight and tightness about my heart

increased. My voice took on a husky tone which I noticed when I had to answer the telephone.

My next impulse was to give up something, so I immediately decided to give away some of the money I would have spent on myself to some one who needed it worse than I did. After settling that, I offered to take my daughter to the dressmaker and to the Oakland stores, and spend the whole morning selecting styles and material for her instead of looking at a thing for myself. *Having thus made a martyr of myself* I began to resent the treatment accorded me. After she had rushed away, I recalled how little care I received and how much I had to do for others and a feeling of dismay and disappointment overwhelmed me—dismay to realize that I was to blame for not training my child to be more unselfish, and disappointment that she failed me in this regard. Suddenly my feelings overcame me. My head drooped down on my hands and I burst into tears. This outburst relieved my pent-up emotions. A feeling of calmness succeeded and I decided that things were not so bad after all. I no longer felt that my child was selfish in desiring to carry out her own plans but I decided to urge her to try to do something for others for the sake of her own character. I realized that my trouble was mostly *a transfer of my morning's disappointment* so I grew calm and contented with life again. For the rest of the day, however, *my breathing was irregular*.

SOME MENTAL LAWS WHICH THESE CASES ILLUSTRATE

A psychologist, studying these interesting cases, finds the following highly significant facts exemplified in them:

1. An emotion is a complex mass of impulses, not a single act.

2. It is automatic. That is, one does not have to think out, plan, and will all its constituent impulses. They arise of themselves in a vast inner upheaval.

3. It is brought about, in most cases and possibly in all, by a sudden interference with one's behavior. Anything that sharply suspends what one is doing at a given time will produce an emotion. Thus, we find that even infants develop unmistakable rage when their arms or legs are held so tight that they cannot move them naturally. And they exhibit the emotion of fear when they are dropped from a little height upon a bed or are left suspended by their hands so that they finally weaken and fall. Experiments on cats and dogs show that they too develop such emotions under similar conditions.

4. The mass of impulses released automatically may discharge in two manners, each giving rise to a distinct kind of emotion. They may discharge into the same muscles simultaneously and there set up antagonistic movements which, by interfering with one another, result in no outward motion whatever but only a kind of paralysis or "stalling." Or they may in other cases discharge in very rapid succession into different muscle tracts and thus set up a series of motions which barely get under way when they are checked by slightly later impulses. The outcome here is a helter-skelter jumble of fragmentary acts such as you may have seen in a panic-stricken woman whose house is on fire. The first instant, she screams. The next she seizes the parlor clock and throws it out of the window. Then she starts to carry out the divan cushions tenderly but drops them as she recalls the chocolate cake in her oven, which must not burn. And so on; each act erratic, wild, and usually incomplete.

5. Psychologists have noted the amazing energy which people often exhibit when under the stress of some mighty emotion. But it has been left for the physiologists to discover by actual experiment, that *under the stimulus of an emotion, notably such elementary ones as rage and fear, various glands of the body are excited and produce secretions which cause the liver to supply the blood with a peculiar form of sugar. This sugar is the energy which enables the muscles of the body to work hard. At the same time the stimulation of the adrenal glands neutralizes the fatigue poisons of the blood. Thus the body is actually made more efficient and capable of greater exertions by the emotions!*

It has been found that the adrenin which these last named glands secrete will, if injected into the blood in very small quantities, actually rest the body in five minutes as completely as one hour of deep sleep will. If we were here interested in physiology alone, we might go on to show that these remarkable reactions are plainly set up for the purpose of keying one up to face and deal with a grave crisis in which every ounce of energy may be drawn upon. We might further show that the simultaneous release of many impulses, in a moment of emotion, is really a useful adaptation, in spite of the immediate confusion which it often precipitates. But this goes beyond the questions of technique.

6. The normal development of an emotional state is a "struggle for existence" among the various competing impulses which have been automatically aroused. Even in those states in which the deadlock appears complete, the tendency is for some one set of impulses finally to break down this tense equilibrium and drive through to overt action. As a rule, the man who stands paralyzed in the presence of a bear he stumbles across in the

lonely forest eventually does something (though, to be sure, it occasionally happens that he does not).

7. This "struggle for existence" is, in the case of very intense emotions aroused by situations in which time presses hard, a subconscious one. After it is all over, the person is quite unable to say why he acted as he did, although he can, on longer reflection, find some rational explanation for his behavior. He acts first and thinks afterward.

8. The highest type of struggle, however, is not this subconscious one. It is the struggle between impulses which takes place in the person's thinking. As I point out elsewhere, this is the chief as well as the best subject for character drawing and dramatic narrative. Each strong impulse aroused in the moment of emotion reflects itself in thought, and the *thinker contemplates the possible consequences of following it to its own natural outcome*. These various consequences then compete with one another in thought, and influence the course of the various impulses which suggest them. In an impulsive person, they are overwhelmed by some impulse. In a suppressive person, they overwhelm all impulses, and no action—or some insignificant act—results. But in a normally balanced person of reflective mind and a sound instinct for "getting results," foresight gains control of the situation and the "best" course of behavior is chosen.

9. The excess energy created by an emotional stimulus must be used in some manner. Ordinarily it expends itself in one of two channels; in a well-balanced person it is consumed in the carrying out of the chosen line of action which he concentrates finally upon, and in a less favorably balanced person it overflows in a number of useless and unrelated impulses, all of which ought to be suppressed, for the sake of efficient behavior. An illustration of the first case would be the anger of a gentleman who has been mightily irritated by a couple of dubs ahead of him on the golf course, who dribble along, ignore his call of "Fore!" and do not give him a chance to play through. He has many impulses. He is moved to shout rudely at the dubs. He is moved to call the greenkeeper and file a complaint. He is moved to talk hotly to his own companions and speak out his mind as to the propriety of allowing dubs on a golf course. He is moved, as his rage mounts, to throw stones at his human obstacles, to run up to them and hustle them out of his way, perhaps even to strike them with his fists. But being a well-balanced gentleman, he gives way to none of these impulses. All this surplus of energy which has been created within him by this complex of impulses he focuses upon his game. And on his next drive he smashes with a fury and force that sends the ball far ahead of the dubs—and incidentally breaks his own driving record, to his immense joy. It is this concentrating of

new power that makes it possible for an emotional person with fair self-control to rise to heights of achievement which the unemotional person of much higher average ability can never attain.

The second mode of expending surplus energy is so important and peculiar that I shall deal with it separately in the next paragraph.

10. This second mode exhibits two quite distinct sub-forms. In the first, we see the energy overflowing with almost total lack of control into any or all of the aroused impulses. The result is chaotic, senseless behavior, such as we behold in a child that has been spanked. The child kicks, screams, throws stones, spits, rolls on the floor, refuses to eat, scratches its face—anything for which there exists at the moment even a faint impulse. These acts have no logical connection or order. They are purely explosive. Many women who are called "hysterical" are of this type. The second sub-form is most peculiar; it is a transfer of the chosen line of action to other objects and situations than those for which the action is appropriate and useful. In other words, this is a form intermediate between well-controlled behavior and uncontrolled. Psychologists have sometimes called it "the transfer of emotion." You have surely witnessed many instances of it. Here are two which I have seen. You can match them from your own experiences.

> Smith, a shrivelled and brawnless gentleman, has been shamelessly bullied by Jones, a huge lout. Smith, in his rage, yearns to wring Jones' hairy neck, but desists, as he can barely reach said neck, and if he did reach it, could make scant impression upon it. He swallows his humiliation and digests it on his homeward way. Reaching home, he encounters the eldest son of the widow Robinson. This youth is somewhat smaller than Smith and stands in awe of him, as Smith is famed in his neighborhood for drawing the highest wages paid in the nearby glucose factory. Smith glares at the youth, bumps him as they pass on the narrow sidewalk, then berates him furiously and, seizing his collar, gives him a good shaking—all because the youth happened to be the first human on whom Smith could vent his pent-up indignation and wish for retaliation.
>
> A pleasant gentleman I know was proud of his accomplishment as a billiard player. One evening I came upon him in the billiard room, and he asked me to play. Now I play billiards about as well as I pilot dirigibles and speak Thibetan. I told him so with much meekness, whereupon he, being bent on filling in idle

hours, persuaded me to play with him with the advantage of an enormous handicap. While we played, he entertained me with pleasant reminiscences of rare shots he had made and fine players he had vanquished. He also showed me how he made various difficult shots, explaining the physics of them in rich detail, to my great awe. After an hour of this, a dour gentleman ambled into the billiard room and eyed us morosely for a while. Soon after his arrival I wearied of my own idiotic cue work and resigned, whereupon my friend cordially invited the dour gentleman to take my place. He offered the dour gentleman a modest handicap. The dour gentleman accepted it silently and removed his coat. The next minute he was making my expert friend look like a blind man who had taken a correspondence school course in billiards. I never saw anybody make balls roll the way he did. They were solid ivory, but they marched around the table like three trained seals in a side show. As I gaped, my friend's conversation lagged mysteriously. He glowered at the dour gentleman and gulped more than seemed necessary. I don't recall the score when I left the room, but it was something scandalous and indecent. The next morning I met the private secretary of my friend and marked her bewildered despair. "I don't understand it," said she. "Here I've worked faithfully and well for him three years. And this morning he comes into the office with a face as black as night. And just because I forgot to go to the Post Office and buy some stamped envelopes, he discharged me on the spot. I'm afraid he's ill." In a sense, he was ill, I am sure. He was suffering from an emotional "hang-over." His fury and humiliation at being walloped at billiards in the presence of a greenhorn to whom he had been bragging about his own skill were all spent on the hapless secretary.

11. Like most other modes of human behavior, emotional reactions tend to become habits highly stereotyped in form. Every man develops, rather early in life, certain complexes of impulses and certain ways of displaying and checking these. His rage, his fear, his humiliation, his joy, his horror, and all the rest finally shape themselves into what the psychologists call "behavior patterns." It is only a most unusual situation or some profound inner change that ever causes a marked alteration in such patterns once they have become established. A man or woman of thirty years is pretty certain to show each common feeling in the same way on most occasions. I do not mean, of course, that all men and women show it in the same way; I mean

that each person, in his own life, shows it alike through most of his adult years. From man to man, and from woman to woman, the variations are great, but not within each individual life. This fact brings us to consider a comment that has often been made by literary critics and has quite as often been misstated or misunderstood.

Critics condemn many a story because its characters are stereotyped. Do they mean that the hero everywhere in the story displays joy with the same gestures, cries and speeches? If they do, they are wrong in their condemnation; for this is the natural picture of the average man. And one of the effective devices in both stories and plays—but especially plays—is just this reiteration of the same line, the same look, the same explosion of feeling so often that it finally becomes fully identified with the character. Perhaps, however, the critics mean that the characters are too much like a million other people. If they do, this may be partly justified if the desired effect of the story—or the effect which the critics desire—is romantic, rather than simple realism. What the critics ought to say, in this case, is that the characters are true but commonplace, and that they, the critics, do not like the commonplace. There is a third sense in which this term, "stereotyped characters," is used; it means that the portrayed behavior is not true to life at all but is simply a combination of acts which have somehow become conventionalized and regarded as the sign of certain emotions. Thus, the author of shoddy melodrama or backstairs novels may always use the very same set of curses, cries, and gesticulations for all of his male characters regardless of their probable differences of nature. If he wishes to depict anger, he may always brandish a fist and utter a fearful oath. Would he show us sorrow, he gulps and sobs and flings his or her head upon the nearest shoulder, bed, or table. When the critics have this trick in mind, their objection is well founded and without flaw. For such portrayal of emotions is utterly false. *There is no one single act which is always performed in connection with any one emotional state. Hence there can be truly no one act which always depicts such a state.* And the worst error you can fall into is that of supporting the contrary and always making your heroes and heroines do the same thing in the same general emotional situations.

12. Not only does the behavior pattern of an emotion become fixed, but it frequently happens that the "transfer" of the emotion also does. In this case the person reacts to all sorts of situations and objects in certain stereotyped emotional ways. In so doing he manifests what we commonly call a "temperament," or in weaker forms an "attitude." Thus, the cynical attitude is nothing more or less than a habitual type of reaction toward most of the matters one has to deal with in everyday affairs. In this attitude, the

various impulses bound up with suspicion of good motives, disgust with things as they are, and disillusionment, are variously patterned. The "confirmed skeptic" exhibits another complex. He believes nothing, be it your assurance that today is a fine day or the statement in the school book that twice two is four. His fixed impulse is to reject what is offered him—either as a fact or as a proposal—and to nose around for something to the contrary. We find another only too familiar behavior in the futility attitude. The man who suffers from this is always throwing up his hands and saying, "Oh, what's the use? Why bother? It'll all be the same a hundred years from now."

Such habits of "transfer" reveal character perhaps more completely than any other single mental or bodily peculiarity. They always have been and always will be one of the story writer's most alluring sources of material.

The above twelve facts do not exhaust our subject. Far from it! They barely graze it. More we cannot give here, for this is not a course in psychology. You must look, for further light on this whole fascinating field of human nature, to the great novelists, the modern psychologists, and best of all your own conscientious observations of people.

RULES FOR DEPICTING EMOTION

The following rules grow directly out of the facts we have just given about emotions. Commit them to memory and practice them deliberately until you have "got the habit."

1. First describe fully the situation which provokes the emotion.

2. Next describe the initial deadlock, being sure to point out whether it is of the paralytic type or the chaotic. And in doing this, do not call it paralytic or chaotic! Give the exact *picture* of the paralysis or the chaos of impulses.

3. Next describe how one impulse after another manages to work itself out to some degree and is then checked or sometimes diverted into some other channel.

4. Next describe how the character's foresight, if any, arouses new impulses and suppresses some of the original ones.

5. If the character is of the impulsive type, show the outworking of the dominant impulse. If he or she is of the suppressive type, depict the precise impulses which are suppressed and the precise inactivity which results. If you are drawing a normal type, you have only to carry out Rule 4 to the point at which foresight and new impulses finally determine the decisive action.

6. At each of the above stages, show only the most significant moves and suppressions and thoughts—in short, the "high lights." The real emotion will be complex and too elaborate to admit of clear and brief presentation in a story, as a rule.

EXERCISES ON EMOTIONS AND THEIR PORTRAYAL

You have already studied the real life cases given above, in which you find the minute reports of some interesting emotional experiences. You are now to duplicate these from your own life.

Recall the most recent experience in which you personally were stirred by *anger*. Write down every detail you can remember of the occasion on which this occurred. Having done this, then report as fully as you can every *impulse* which you then had. Report the thoughts that you had, too, and show how they were connected with your impulses.

Do the same with each of the following emotions:

Joy	Panic
Horror	Fear without horror
Despair	Scorn

During the next year or two, make a point of observing emotions in the people you meet. Write down the more striking cases with the same attention to detailed symptoms that a good physician would give to a peculiar disease that puzzled him.

CHAPTER XII

COMEDY AND TRAGEDY IN CHARACTER DRAWING

In depicting character, you are not aiming solely at a faithful picture of human nature. You are aiming at an *effective* picture. That is, a picture which leaves a clear and delightful impression on your readers.

There are two great types of effect, of which almost all the special effects you may produce with your words are but variants.

One effect is the *comic*. The other is the *tragic*.

Artists and psychologists have long disputed as to the exact nature of each of these effects, and have never yet reached a general agreement. There are, however, certain things which can be said about each with considerable assurance.

In the vast majority of cases the comic effect is produced by our contemplating *incongruities of behavior which do not leave the character in a desperate plight at the end of the depicted action*.

a. What is an "incongruity of behavior?"

It is any behavior which results in the character's doing things that vary widely from what, at the outset, we were led to believe he would do.

b. There are two levels of incongruity. The lower level results in the *merely funny*. The higher level gives us true comedy.

In the first case, low incongruity, the behavior of the person is not character action. That is to say, what he does is not the expression of some trait in his make-up.

For example, you see a fat man wearing a tile hat, a black frock coat, and carrying a gold-headed cane marching majestically up the aisle of a church during a wedding ceremony. As he passes you, his toe catches on the projecting tip of a spectator's umbrella, and he falls flat on his face. His tile hat flies up the aisle. His cane catches his vest and rips off three buttons shamelessly. And his face turns deep purple.

This is not comic. It is merely funny. Why? Because the fall was not a deliberate act done as an expression of some desire or idea that grew out of the sorry wretch's nature. It was, as we say, accidental. Any character whatever might suffer the same mishap.

The gentleman, however, did do something that fell far short of what we expected him to do in church during a wedding. The event was beneath his dignity. Our natural expectations were shocked and upset. But we did not take the fall tragically, for the consequences were trivial. They did not leave the man in a desperate plight. Hence we give way to laughter.

The higher level of incongruity is totally different. Here the behavior must grow truly out of some trait. It must be a natural reaction to some situation.

Consider again the same dignified fat gentleman. Suppose that he were the bride's father. Suppose his trait were petty vengefulness. Suppose his daughter had had her heart set on a swell ecclesiastical wedding, to which he objected strenuously on account of the expense. Suppose that Ma had sided with the daughter and overruled his objections. Then suppose that his vengefulness began to work out. He might make up his mind that he would take all the joy out of the church affair, so that his women folk would wish forever after that they had let Pa have his way. So he set out to botch the affair, to the best of his portly ability. He managed to lose the wedding ring. He bribed six chauffeurs to deliver the wedding party to the wrong church. He aided a hundred vulgar bystanders to sneak into the side door of the church and grab the best seats. And, after all his other mean pranks had been finished, and Ma and the girls and the neighbors and the rector had finally got down to brass tacks and the gold ring, Pa blundered up the aisle with consummate acting, stuck his toe under the fatal umbrella, and went headlong, raising thus a bump on his forehead and a gale of laughter.

This would be comedy.

VARIETIES OF THE COMIC IN CHARACTER ACTION

The wealth of comedy in human character defies all classification. Every trait shows a thousand hues and facts. Trait combines with trait in bewildering medley. Not even Balzac, in his Human Comedy, did more than graze the surface of this measureless mine.

There are, however, several great types of character comedy which you ought to know about. You should get into the habit of thinking about them, searching for instances of them in real life, and analyzing people with an eye to these distinctive effects. Here are some of the more important types. After you have grasped them, you will be able to add many more types to the list.

1. A single trait suddenly develops consistently in a direction we did not anticipate and culminates in an act that impresses us at

first as incongruous.

2. One trait collides with another in the same man with incongruous results. The outcome could not have been easily deduced from either trait singly, because it has taken shape partly from the situation.

3. One trait of one man collides with a trait in another man with incongruous results.

4. A trait that is about to result in characteristic action is mysteriously checked by some other trait that has not appeared on the surface: Thus the resulting action is most incongruous and remains so until the reader learns what the suppressing force is.

5. A trait develops as if the person possessing it were aware of both the trait and the true nature of his art; but all the while he is unconscious of both. Thus his behavior becomes incongruous to the onlooker or reader.

6. A trait develops as if the person were unaware of it. And yet he is thoroughly aware of it. Hence the resulting behavior strikes the onlooker or reader as incongruous.

7. Primitive impulses and passions aroused by a given situation dominate the first stages of behavior and seem to be on the point of shaping the whole course of conduct; but they lose all their power during the "reflective delay" and die out at the finish, producing the effect of comic anti-climax.

8. A trait sets a line of action going that promises to have a definite outcome consistent with our expectations; then some defect or incapacity in the person thwarts the fulfilment incongruously.

9. A trait stimulated by a given situation responds out of all proportion to the exigencies of the case, either exceeding the needs or falling short of the needs to an incongruous degree, and yet developing in a consistent direction.

Illustrations of these comic types

1. This first type is the one you will find most frequently in stories of straightforward character development. It is the mainstay of the older school of American Realism whose head and front is Howells. Every issue of the magazines that have followed this school more or less faithfully is full of this type of comedy. Here is one case taken from hundreds:

In "The Gift," by Charles Caldwell Dobie, published in *Harper's Magazine* of August, 1920, we read about the odd friendship of a Bohemian boy and a young Japanese in the kitchen of a San Francisco restaurant. The other workers hated Ito, the Jap, and tormented him. Vitek, the Bohemian, liked Ito. And when one day Ito burned his hand terribly in hot grease and the other workers laughed at his misery Vitek bound up the hand and took over Ito's scullery work until the Japanese had recovered. Ito, deeply grateful for this aid and sign of friendship, promised Vitek that on Easter he would bring Vitek a fine gift; Vitek went home all excited. He spent days wondering whether the gift would be carved ivory or a sword in an inlaid scabbard or a gilt god. He talked with his friends about it. Came the Friday before Easter, and with it Ito bearing a great bundle. He opened it and gave to Vitek a branch of cherry blossoms. And all because, one day in a tea garden, Ito had heard Vitek exult over the beauty of these blossoms.

Now observe, please, that Ito's trait of sincere gratitude worked naturally here. But the final characteristic act is incongruous to us, not because of its inconsistency with the trait, but rather by reason of its inconsistency with our expectations as to what an act of gratitude would be under these circumstances. We did not anticipate the direction a Japanese mind would take under the influence of gratitude. Hence the comic surprise, which in this particular instance is flavored with pathos.

2. This second type is much subtler than the first. It requires more skill both in character analysis and in presentation. An illustration of it you will find in "The Murderer," by Perceval Gibbon, in *Harper's Magazine* of August, 1912. A young sailor has been grossly abused by the second mate. The other sailors, observing the lad's cowardice under torment, taunt him. They say no real man with red blood would stand for such treatment. To this the youth responds not at all. He only cringes and holds his peace. His hatred of the mate, however, is plain to everybody; and it would, in any man less timorous, lead to violent revenge. One day the mate slips and falls and is killed. The manner of his death is unknown to the rest of the crew, most of whom immediately suspect that the worm has turned. Some sailors slyly congratulate the supposed murderer. Others clap him heartily on the back. They all make him feel that now at last he is a man able to shift for himself and to strike back. The lad did not kill the mate, and he is smitten with horror at the prospect of being accused of the crime and convicted when the ship reaches shore. The circumstantial evidence is rather strong against him, and the unanimous belief of the crew would reinforce it. At the same time he is sick of his own cowardice and submissiveness, and he comes to realize that his life in the future will be much easier if he has the reputation among

the sailors of being a desperate and revengeful character. So, one morning, when a friend alludes to the dead man and his manner of death and the chances of catching the murderer, the boy winks significantly. And with that wink he produces deliberately the impression of being guilty.

The two traits here are submissiveness to the point of cowardice and the wish to appear well before one's fellows. The fear of being convicted of a crime he did not commit collides with the desire to stand well and have a reputation of striking back. The outcome is incongruous. We never expect a person to admit guilt of murder under such circumstances.

3. This third type is very common, both in real life and in fiction. It often calls for little skill in delineation. Nine out of ten of the encounters in ordinary life are of this sort. John is uxorious and domestic, devoted to Mary and felt slippers and his Morris chair. Mary is modern and full of politics and themes for essays at the Women's Thursday Morning Club. John yearns to spend his evenings with Mary on his lap. Mary sighs for the forum, fame, and feminism. The conflict of traits may lead John to run for alderman against his wife and beat her, in a savage campaign full of bitter personalities,—and all done in the wild, wild hope that Mary, crushed to earth by the Voice of the People, will forever after stick around the fireplace and whimper for kisses.

4. This fourth type is fairly common in real life but less so in fiction. It presents grave difficulties of portrayal. A young newspaper man has for ten years been running an uplift reform daily in a small interior town of California. He took up the work simply because the paper was left him by his grandfather and it was a money maker. He was a gay young dog, had led the swift set in college, and had been Among Those Present at many a giddy affair in San Francisco. The editorial work was interesting in a business way, but obnoxious for a long time because of the strict and narrowly proper way he had to tread, as the writer of daily articles on uplift and reform. Often he sighs for the old days and the bright lights and the gay dogs. In his heart he yearns to go back secretly now and then and have his fling. Thus the years slip by. Ten of them have gone the way of all almanacs, when in blows an old college chum, also a gay dog, and urges him to knock off for a week or two and come to San Francisco with him and have a grand old time with the boys and girls. The editor wavers, but a warm glow invades his spinal column as he ponders. A little more urging, and he cooks up a lie for his devoted wife and slips off "on business." The twain blow into a gilded café, moonshine is produced, and the sun shines again in the editor's heart. Things become gayer and gayer in the vicinity. But at a certain point the truant editor begins to grow listless. He does not sing with his wonted lustiness. He

does not beam on the dancing girls. He fails to drain his cup with that velocity expected of a gay dog. His friend is alarmed, thinks him ill, and prescribes a certain stronger potion out of the private cellar. The dancers sympathize with the sick man. Then the sick man leaps up with a whoop, kicks his old pal, jostles the damsels aside, and rushes out to a nearby hotel, where he telephones his wife to come over and join him; after which he sits down and pens a long puritanical editorial on the Evils of Dance Halls.

This situation (not a complete story, you will notice) shows us the old youthful traits that center around wine, women, and song asserting themselves consistently at first, then mysteriously checked by something invisible which is misconstrued. Later we see that the incongruous action is really the natural outworking of the newer habits of thinking and living. Uplift and reform have now become so powerful that they overwhelm the impulses of a Youth that has passed.

5. The fifth type is very familiar to us all in certain traits, but rare in others. A conceited person, for example, is seldom fully aware of the extent to which conceit pervades all his deeds, coloring and moulding them. And a selfish person is in the same dangerous state of ignorant bliss. This unconsciousness has been well characterized by William James, thus:

> When I am led by selflove to keep my seat whilst ladies stand, or to grab something first and cut out my neighbor, what I really love is the comfortable seat; it is the thing itself which I grab. I love *them* primarily, as the mother loves her babe, or a generous man an heroic deed. Wherever, as here, selfseeking is the outcome of simple instinctive propensity, it is but a name for certain reflex acts. Something rivets my attention fatally and fatally provokes the "selfish" response * * * * * It is true I am no automaton but a thinker. But my thoughts are, like my acts, here concerned only with the outward things * * * * * *In fact the more utterly selfish my thought will be in the objects and impulses of my lust and the more devoid of any inward looking glance.*

Thus, a thoroughly selfish woman spends her husband's money on her own pleasures, monopolizes his time, which ought to be spent—at least some evenings—on study or business; makes her daughters run errands for her and get up in the middle of the night and fill the rubber bag with cracked ice and hold her hand until her faint headache has subsided. Finally, when somebody revolts and calls her selfish, she is shocked and hurt; she declares that her whole life is devoted to her husband and children and she has never,

never done a thing that was not for their own happiness. She is, in fact, a willing slave to them. She has suffered, nobody knows how often in their interest. And so on.

It is the genuineness of her protestations that make the comic incongruity. She is no hypocrite. She really believes what she says.

6. This is the reverse of the fifth type. It usually occurs only in people of pretty high mental powers. It calls for restraint and suppression in almost every instance, though there are cases where the concealment of self-knowledge and realization of the nature of one's acts are due to fears and timidities. This is the comedy of the poker player and his perfect poker face. He allows a certain faint flicker of joy to traverse his treacherous countenance, at the very instant his adversary eyes him covertly. The flicker is carefully suppressed, so that it appears to be kept under an immense effort of will, in the presence of four aces. The next instant, the wisp of joy disappears, and a blank look succeeds it. Any specimen of such deceptive demeanor or action in which a genuine character trait is involved has a comic incongruity. The generous merchant who, as a result of having been imposed upon by charity swindlers and unscrupulous beggars, comes to pose as a hard and crusty miser is one of the thousand such types. And the surprise of his behavior when its inner motives become apparent in retrospect makes for strong comedy of the most elementary sort.

7. This is one of the broader and yet most delicious of comedy patterns. It is typical of youth, as well as of certain odd emotional characters, in which initial impetuousness swiftly loses its force and turns either into weak inaction or coldness. A young man of immensely generous instincts falls in love with the eleventh daughter of the second assistant janitor of the city hall whose life is haunted by the H. C. L. Arabella, the damsel aforesaid, goes moaning in the moonlight because father has served notice on her that the family cupboard is bare and mother hasn't even thread enough on hand to darn Arabella's silk stockings, which she bought when she worked in a gas mask foundry during the war. As Arabella leans against a weeping willow, Henry strolls up—Henry being our horrible example, you know. Arabella's lustrous topaz eyes hypnotize Henry, as they have always done. "Dearest, wed me quick!" he breathes and kisses her daintily manicured extremity. "Never!" sighs Arabella and props her pessimistic form against his palpitating one. "Father and mother are dead broke, and my ten brothers and sisters must eat and wear clothes. It is my duty to help them shoo the wolf from the door. Duty before pleasure, darling!" Henry curses all ancestors and relatives, at which Arabella draws up her slender form (it was slender, I think) haughtily and indicates in no equivocal language that ancestors are

exceedingly necessary and as long as you have them, you might as well be decent toward them. Henry is crushed by her argument. All the latent generosity in his system bubbles up of a sudden. He sees his beloved's plight and yearns to help her. "Arabella," he whispers, "let me share your burden. It will make me so happy! I can conquer the world, and make you and your unhappy parents comfortable." Arabella in a rush of admiration lifts her lips and her streaming eyes (the same topaz ones above mentioned) and murmurs Yes. "And let's make it a long engagement, dear. Let's not marry until next Friday." Henry walks home on night air, his soul singing and aflame. (Flames sometimes sing, you know.) He sees visions of himself and Arabella conquering the world for Love's sake and a few dollars. How easy it will be, with Love and courage to back one! How much Arabella will help! He will fling himself into work—some highly profitable line—maybe oil or autos or fig farming. He will toil from dawn till dusk. He will force his employer to notice his energy, his breadth of mind. He will tactfully let it be known that he is supporting Arabella and some of her family, for Love's sake. That will touch his employer's soul. Employers have a habit of raising a man's pay if they think he needs the money. In a year or two Arabella will have a bungalow of her own, and her father will resign as second assistant janitor at the city hall. Possibly they will have a seven-passenger touring car by then, too. And—

Henry reaches home, is sleepy, goes to bed—

Then the alarm clock rings, and it is seven A. M. Henry leaps from his uneasy bed of dreams and strangles the melody. As he dresses, it occurs to him that he is to marry somebody next Friday. Ah, yes, Arabella! Of the topaz eyes! Yes, yes! It also occurs to him as he is lacing his left shoe, that he must have his footwear half-soled. That means two dollars. Cash at that. Gosh darn it all! He hasn't that much jingle left in his jeans. Last week's wages went like warm waffles. Rotten pay he's getting at the hardware store! Sixteen dollars a week, and a slave's job at that, selling barbed wire and carpet tacks all day long. To support Arabella & Co., he must strike for twenty a week—strike while the iron is hot and Love at the same temperature. Henry pauses in lacing the left shoe. He contemplates the wall. He contemplates the calendar on the wall, the calendar of Muggins & Buggins, Hardware Supplies, 456 Main Street,—the very Muggins & Buggins for whom he slaves at sixteen per. Out of the calendar stares the calm-blue eyes of Hiram Muggins, purveyor of barbed wire, and every barb of Muggins' wire pricks Henry's confidence all of a sudden. Henry has a sickening hunch that Muggins will impale him on the barbed wire at the very suggestion of a four dollar raise. Muggins isn't strong on topaz eyes

and Love at first sight. Muggins is fonder of C. O. D. and Positively No Checks Cashed Here. Muggins hates the city hall, where Arabella's father toils, for the aldermen took Muggins' contract away last fall, and Muggins no longer sells carpet tacks to the Public Schools at 700 per cent. profit. If Henry can't raise the wind before Friday, he will have to be married in his old shiny blue serge suit. Confound it all! Why couldn't Arabella have waited longer? The girl is unreasonable. Maybe all topaz eyes are unreasonable. And drat her parents! Why should they have eleven children? Why should a hardware clerk support them? Arabella presumes too much. Can she be—a vamp?

Henry totters to his feet and gropes for yesterday's collar, as this horrible thought penetrates deeper and deeper into his anatomy. His brow is bathed in perspiration. Feebly he mops it off, thinks he has performed his morning ablutions, and wanders forth to ham and eggs * * * * *

At ten o'clock Henry is wrapping up a keg of ten-penny nails for a customer when Muggins grunts at him from his office: "Wanted on the 'phone, boy." It is Arabella. She says she has just bought the loveliest hat for the wedding and honeymoon, and she wants dearie-darling to slip over to the Emporium and see it right away quick. Henry reaches the outer door somehow. The fresh air revives him. Up the street he sees the Emporium, and ladies streaming in and out. A robin sings in the trees. From behind the imitation maple syrup factory down toward the depot there arises the shriek of the ten-fourteen express, bound for Cincinnati. Henry recalls the long columns he saw in last Sunday's Cincinnati paper: Help Wanted Male. Henry ducks up an alley, circumvents the Emporium, runs down to the depot, borrows three dollars from a friend there, and swings aboard the train on his way to Cincinnati, Forgetfulness, and Help Wanted Male. At the first stop he mails a souvenir post card to Arabella. It reads: "Dear Madam: I am passing forever out of your life. It was all a terrible mistake. My affinity is elsewhere. Tell your pa to go to Muggins and strike him for my old job. Respectfully, Henry Ipplekin."

8. This eighth type of character comedy is not common. The line of behavior it develops more often ends either in dark tragedy or in the near-tragic forms, such as pathos. Consider, if you will, the splendid illustration of this in its tragic variation, Maupassant's story, *A Coward*. Turn to the passage where we were discussing the three phases of character action, and read the long quotation from this story in which the Viscount, acting according to the French gentleman's code and his own personal dignity, demands an apology of the stranger who is staring at the Viscount's guest. You will perceive at once that it is a pure physical defect in the poor man

which prevents him from going on with the duel. He is a true *physical* coward—not to be confused with a *moral* coward, which is a totally different species. The Viscount simply cannot sleep, cannot steady his hand, cannot control his body in the face of the impending encounter. He wants to do the right thing, and he has set things in motion rightly according to his notions of gentlemanly conduct. But his body will not stand the strain.

Now, we might alter the complication and the active solution of this beautiful classic so as to transform it from a great tragic picture to low comedy, simply by having the Viscount choose a less terrible way out of his dilemma. Let him remain a physical coward. Let the original situation stand as Maupassant has drawn it. Let the Viscount suffer the agonies of physical collapse, though let these be described in a manner that befits comedy, not in the grim way the original handles them. Let him reach the conclusion: "It is impossible. I cannot fight like this." Then, instead of shooting himself, let him feign sickness, summon his physician, carry on so violently that he is packed off to a hospital and kept there for some months, after which he manages to persuade the doctors that he must go to some quiet rest cure in North Africa or Haiti or possibly Siberia. He also sees to it that the story is broadcast that he is suffering from mild paralysis which makes his hands shake. The clubmen and the ladies naturally feel sorry for him and do not hold it against him that he has failed to appear in a duel with the mysterious Georges Lamil. They may even make a hero of him.

This is, of course, not a full story plot; but it does present the special comic incongruity of character action.

9. This ninth type is that of "the mountain laboring and bringing forth a mouse"—or *vice versa*. You recall perhaps the story of the old negro mammy on her first train trip. The train jumped the track at full speed, overturned, and was pretty well smashed up. All the passengers were in a panic, except the old mammy, who clung to her seat serenely and crawled out of the wreckage with the coolness of a movie heroine. After it was all over, her mistress expressed amazement at her bravery. Whereupon the mammy replied "Shoo, Missus! A' s'posed dat wuz de way dese yeah cyahs allus stopped." The comic effect here is produced by the incongruous difference between stimulus and reaction. It is scarcely comedy at all, but rather mere fun because the mammy's reaction did not grow out of a character trait. It grew rather out of misinformation about trains.

The true comic effect here is the one which Alphonse Daudet attains with such consummate skill, over and over again, in his famous sketches of Tartarin of Tarascon. This lovable gentleman is always "seeing things."

Little episodes get him tremendously wrought up. He finds stupendous adventures in trifles. His imagination runs away with him. We find the same comedy in Don Quixote, though in a very different aspect. We find it again in Mark Twain's dear old Colonel Mulberry Sellers. They get "all het up over nothing," as we commonly put it. A drummer strikes town selling patent dishwashers, and the visionary sees a fortune in it, plans to plunge every dollar in it, and all his friends' dollars too; sees an opening for a huge dishwasher factory in his home town; goes out and picks a site for the factory before the drummer has sold a single machine; makes arrangements with a contractor to buy a carload of cement before cement prices go up, so that they can build the factory cheaply; calls on the town printer and has him submit sample stock and bond certificates; and so on—until the drummer leaves town, when it appears that our great promoter has failed to get the precise name and address of the firm making the washing machines and has not made any arrangements with the drummer for selling them and, to tell the truth, has not even tested the invention at all.

This comedy type is one of the richest mines for the literary prospector to delve into, albeit it is a hard one to work. It offers a rare combination of broad comedy and subtle delineation, as well as a chance for exposing in a kindly mood one of humanity's best failings, enthusiasm.

The specimens I have cited illustrate only a few of the many varieties. I have, you will observe, left out of the list all those types of situation in which two or more characters, because of their respective traits, misunderstand one another with incongruous results. This is one of the most fruitful sources of comedy, and has been heavily drawn upon by farce comedy.

EXERCISES IN COMIC EFFECT

1. Let it be clearly understood that the Russian is a delightful person till he tucks his shirt in. As an Oriental he is charming. It is only when he insists upon being treated as the most easterly of Western people, instead of the most westerly of Easterns, that he becomes a racial anomaly extremely difficult to handle. The host never knows which side of his nature is going to turn up next.[1]

What comic type have we in this gentleman who is thus subtly changed by tucking his shirt in?

Explain your answer in detail.

Sketch a situation (not a full plot) in which the comedy of this character is made clear and interesting.

2. There is an old story, told by many a drummer in a Saturday night lobby, about a man down in Arkansas who was so stingy that he married an armless woman, so as to get out of buying her an engagement and wedding ring. This same man, saith the venerable yarn, always looked over his spectacles, so as to avoid wearing the glasses out.

What comic type is this?

3. There was once a learned historian who knew everything that ever happened in the Balkans ever since they began balking. During the World War he became a high authority whose judgment on Near Eastern affairs was sought by the lords of the earth. He wrote wise articles on the Balkans and made many wonderful speeches. One day he fell to thinking about some things that had been happening in business and finance down in his special territory, and he suddenly discovered some amazing laws of economics in them. With the enthusiasm of a man who has unlocked Nature's deepest secrets, he hurried to write down his findings, which were promptly published. Strange as it may seem, the essay created no stir among economists and business men, for the things he had therein set forth were all to be found in any good elementary textbook on economics.

What type of comedy have we here? Can you develop it, with suitable modifications, into a plot?

4. Read Maupassant's little story, "Moonlight," in which the Abbe Marignan is determined to rule the mind and spirit of his gay little niece and is constantly baffled by her. She laughs at him, refuses to take his preachment seriously, and in every wise shows herself to be a pleasure-loving sprite unawed by threats of hell or swayed by promises of future glory. When the Abbe learns that she has a lover he is infuriated at her deceit and frivolity. He sets out to surprise the pair one evening. He bears a heavy oaken staff and is fully prepared to deal harshly with the girl and lover alike. As he steps out of doors, he looks upon a night of moon and mist and unspeakable loveliness. And under the spell of the scene, his mood changes. When he comes upon the pair embracing and cooing, he halts and says to himself: "Perhaps God has made such nights in order to throw a veil of idealism over the loves of men." And he withdrew, "bewildered, almost ashamed."

What type of comedy is this?

Change the story to Des Moines, Iowa. Make the Abbe a harsh old Puritan farmer. And develop the same comic effect in this setting, in

complete consistency with this change of scene and character.

5. Study the acts of people you see daily. When you come upon one which makes you laugh, analyze it carefully. Does it exemplify one of the comedy types we have been describing? If not, what is the source of its fun?

6. Make a list of comic effects other than those given in the last few pages. See how they all grow out of the general definition of comedy.

If you are thorough, you will eventually have a list of types much longer than the one I have given you.

---

[1] Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Was*.

SOURCES OF TRAGEDY

We may dismiss tragedy with a word. For every type of comedy, we have a corresponding type of tragedy which differs from the former in only one essential respect.

The tragic effect results when the outcome of the situation is disastrous to one of the characters involved.

Any incongruity whatever may be used in tragedy, sometimes with an associated comic effect, which frequently heightens the tragedy.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ORDER OF EVENTS

Few beginners can manage the order of story events with ease, grace, and precision. For this there are two common explanations. One lies in the writer himself, and the other in his readers.

Most people try to write their stories before they have finished them, and this is a fatal mistake. You think this sounds absurd, I know, but it is an absurdity that conceals a vital truth. I mean, of course, that

> **Every story must be calculated through as to its meaning and also as to its single effect before the order of plot episodes can be most advantageously settled.**

The Germans have a saying, *Aller Anfang ist Schwer*. All beginnings are hard. This is true, but men have not understood why it is so, especially in fiction writing. The reason is just this: the opening of a story should be determined by the whole pattern as well as by the specific impression that is to be conveyed to the reader, and few writers have either the patience or the skill to figure out the pattern and the details of impression before they begin writing.

Usually the writer has to learn some plot details and some features of the single effect by sketching his narrative in the rough and noting the impression it creates. He cannot do it all in his own imagination.

Hence it is that he usually makes several beginnings and advances some distance with the entire narrative, only to find that some later element in the story requires a change in the order of events.

So much for the difficulty, as it arises out of his own personal peculiarities. The other difficulty, which arises from his readers, is intimately connected with the "Problem of Three Bodies," which we have discussed. The story must be communicated to a reading public. This public lacks that intimate knowledge of the characters, the complication, and the inner emotions which the author possesses. The author may have been thinking about these for months before he sets his findings down on paper. The reader, on the other hand, comes to the story with no advance

information. He reads it perhaps in the span of half an hour, and in that time he must gather all the essentials of drama, meaning and impression.

Thus it happens that

> **The order of events is determined not merely by the exigencies of suspense and climax and natural sequence but also by the necessities of *informing the reader* about the general situation out of which the complication arises and *building up the plausibility* of such story elements as might not be readily accepted by him.**

There are many persons who have "a story sense" and who never succeed as writers simply because they cannot master this fact and apply it. They can tell a good story when they read it. They can even invent admirable plots. But when it comes to "putting it across," they fail dismally. They see the inner developments of character and the comedy or tragedy of situations to a nicety. But they forget the reader and his peculiar needs. To the bitter end, they go on seeing the story exclusively from their own personal point of view.

There are others who do the opposite. They have only a modest sense of plot and people. But they have the instinct of communication. They think ever of their hearers and readers. And so they make everything they write vivid, lucid, and pleasant.

The first class generally become literary critics, teachers and magazine editors. The second class become successful authors.

WHAT THE ORDER OF EVENTS ACCOMPLISHES

The order of events accomplishes the following things, in degrees varying with each story:

1. It builds up the prior plausibility of character and action.
2. It fills in the background of the story in such a manner as to clear the later and most swiftly moving stages of the plot from slow descriptions and explanations.
3. It facilitates suspense and hence climax.
4. It smooths transitions.
5. It sets the tone of the single effect early in the narrative and maintains it consistently.
6. It sometimes makes possible the omission of events and developments which, in a different order, might be necessary

by way of explanation or plausibility.

FIRST LAW OF ORDER

There is one rule of order which you should violate as seldom as possible. It is a rule that grows out of the general need of making narrative as simple as your single effect permits.

Change the Historical Order of Events No More Than Absolutely Necessary.

With every story, first outline it in its historical order and carefully test the arrangement. Other things being equal, this order is the most easily understood and requires the least effort in the telling. It is, to be sure, quite often inadequate, notably in stories of mystery and surprise. But this does not alter the fact that, insofar as it can be made adequate, historical order should be adhered to.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS OF ORDER

These are three. They are the problems of

1. The opening event.
2. The closing events.
3. Distribution of events throughout the story.

Taken all in all, the opening event is by far the most important as well as the hardest of these three. We must give it close attention at once.

THE OPENING EVENT

The opening event may serve any or all of the six functions I have enumerated above.

There are ten outstanding types of openings, which differ according to the way they serve one or more of these six functions, now by direct action, now by indirect action, and now by no action at all. We may conveniently arrange the ten thus:

The four types of direct action	1.	The opening reveals in some degree the characters, the complication (including setting), and the single effect.
	2.	It reveals character only.
	3.	It reveals the complication only.
	4.	It reveals the single effect only (generally in the form of a theme).
The four types of indirect action	5.	Same as 1.
	6.	Same as 2.
	7.	Same as 3.
	8.	Same as 4.
Anticipatory generalizing with no action	9.	A "philosophical overture."
No anticipatory generalization and no action	10.	Pure descriptive opening.

Specimens of the ten types

Type 1.

Edith Wharton gives us an exceedingly clever opening of this all-inclusive sort in her amusing story, "Xingu."

> Mrs. Ballinger is one of the ladies who pursue Culture in bands, as though it were dangerous to meet alone. To this end she had founded the Lunch Club, an association composed of herself and several other indomitable hunters of erudition. The Lunch Club, after three or four winters of lunching and debate, had acquired such local distinction that the entertainment of distinguished strangers became one of its accepted functions; in recognition of which it duly extended to the celebrated "Osric

Dane" on the day of her arrival in Hillbridge, an invitation to be present at the next meeting.

First notice here that it is all direct action. That is to say, the events are the deeds of the very people who are going to figure in the ensuing plot, and they are also the very same events out of which the complication arises.

Next observe that *every story element* is introduced. The single effect of mildly satirical merriment over ladies who pursue Culture is clearly brought out. So is Mrs. Ballinger and her friends and the eminent lioness, Osric Dane.

Such an opening requires rare skill in sensing all the story factors at once. It is not always to be recommended, especially in those stories whose effect or action or character traits involve the danger of improbability. Of this more later.

Type 2.

Revealing the character only, and by direct action, Lucian Cary makes an admirable start in his comic-romantic "Supper for Two." (*Collier's Weekly*, January 26, 1918.)

Stephen Corbett was a very sophisticated young man. Or a very naïve young man. It depends on the point of view.

He had definite ideas about the difference between the "Revue de Deux Mondes" and the "Atlantic Monthly"; he hadn't the least notion about the difference between a Ford and a Rolls-Royce.

He knew all the things that nobody else knows and none of the things that everybody knows.

He knew just when it is permissible to split an infinitive and precisely how to use shall and will, and all about Unity, Coherence and Emphasis. He knew who edited the *Yellow Book* and who were the originals of the story George Meredith told in the "Tragic Comedians" and who gave Bernard Shaw his first job as a dramatic critic. He knew that you don't eat artichokes with a fork or put Burgundy on ice or wear a top hat with a dinner coat. Only he wouldn't have said: "You don't wear a top hat with a dinner coat." He would have said: "One doesn't wear a top hat with a dinner coat." He had gone to Harvard and specialized afterward in

Contemporary English Literature and he had read about all these things.

He didn't know when a Harvard accent is an insult in the Middle West, or how to dance the foxtrot, or that four of a kind beats a full house. He didn't know who Walter Johnson is, or which club the White Sox are, or how Jess Willard won the heavyweight championship. He had never seen Charlie Chaplin or Mary Pickford or Mrs. Vernon Castle. He had spent his leisure in libraries, indulged in no recreation except long, solitary walks, and he didn't know that if you very much want to kiss a girl you don't ask her if you may.

This opening tells you nothing at all about the complication or the theme. It seems perhaps to hint at the single effect. You may imagine from this amusing description of the hero that the impression finally to be conveyed is one of amusement at his pedantic ignorance and highbrowness. But this is not at all the case, as you will find as soon as you have read the story.

Type 3.

A very pure though weak instance of opening by sketching little save the setting out of which the complication develops is found in William Dean Howells' "The Pursuit of the Piano."

Hamilton Gaites sat breakfasting by the window of a restaurant looking out on Park Square, in Boston, at the table which he had chosen after rejecting one on the Boylston Street side of the place because it was too noisy, and another in the little open space among evergreen in tubs, between the front and rear, because it was too chilly. The wind was east, but at his Park Square window it tempered the summer morning air without being a draught; and he poured out his coffee with a content in his circumstance and provision which he was apt to feel when he had taken all possible pains, even though the result was not perfect.

(The remainder of the opening is an account of the food he ate.)

Here you may be mildly deceived into supposing that this describes Gaites' character slightly, as well as the setting. You may think that Gaites' trait is to be that of a fussy gentleman who catches cold easily and devotes much thought to such trifles as finding a warm and draughtless seat. But as the story develops you find this is not of the slightest significance in the ensuing complication. Indeed, the very hint of such a character trait is downright misleading. All that Howells tells us of his story is the locality in which things later begin to happen. He reveals here nothing about Gaites; and all the fidgeting over the seat has no bearing whatever on the man's traits in the drama.

Type 4.

A fairly good sample of a direct-action opening which reveals only the single effect will be found in Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher." Turn back to it and study it again, as soon as you have read the entire story. This opening is not absolutely pure in type, for it does reveal a little about the setting as well as the single effect. But as the single effect is bound up very closely with the setting, and as the effect is here produced so intensely that we think of little else, it may be used as a passable illustration.

Type 5.

An excellent piece of opening by direct action in which all the story elements are introduced is to be found in Poe's great story, "The Descent into the Maelstrom."

> We had now reached the summit of the loftiest crag. For some minutes the old man seemed too much exhausted to speak.
>
> "Not long ago," said he at length, "and I could have guided you on this route as well as the youngest of my sons; but, about three years past, there happened to me an event such as never happened before to mortal man—or, at least, such as no man survived to tell of—and the six hours of deadly terror which I then endured have broken me, body and soul. You suppose me a very old man—but I am not. It took less than a single day to change those hairs from jet black to white, to weaken my limbs and unstring my nerves, so that I tremble at the least exertion and am

frightened at a shadow. Do you know, I can scarcely look over this little cliff without getting giddy?"

The "little cliff" upon whose edge he had so carelessly thrown himself to rest that the weightiest portion of his body hung over it, while he was only kept from falling by the tenure of his elbow on its extreme and slippery edge—this "little cliff" arose, a sheer and unobstructed precipice of black shining rock, some fifteen or sixteen hundred feet from the world of crags beneath us. Nothing would have tempted me to be within half a dozen yards of its brink * * * * *

(The rest of the opening describes the Maelstrom, as seen from this cliff.)

You must first observe carefully what I mean here by indirect action. Contrast this opening with that of "Xingu," and you see that, while both stories give us at the outset something of the setting, the dominant character and the single effect, Poe's tale does not give these as a part of the main action of the story. The descent into the maelstrom occurred years before the events presented in the opening lines. The old fisherman who leads the narrator to the brink of the cliff was the hero of that adventure, but what he does now is not a piece of the plot; it is merely a device for getting him to tell the story. The opening, in short, is only a frame for the story; it is not the story itself.

In general, this type of opening is not to be recommended. But there are cases where it is not only unavoidable but by far the best. And I may add, there is a considerable difference of opinion among readers as to the effect it produces. I have canvassed my classes on several occasions with regard to it, and I find always a good number of persons who declare that such an opening heightens the realism and probability of the ensuing tale. They state that when the story teller does not give forth his tale on his own say-so but merely reports what somebody else has told him they look upon the story as a newspaper report and hence escape thinking of it as fiction. Doubtless this may aid not a few in believing stories of high adventure. And the writer may well reckon with this psychological effect in choosing his opening.

Type 6.

Indirect action that reveals character is to be found in the opening of Kipling's "A Second-Rate Woman."

> "Dressed! Don't tell me that woman ever dressed in her life. She stood in the middle of the room while her ayah—no, her husband—it must have been a man—threw her clothes at her. She then did her hair with her fingers and rubbed her bonnet in the flue under the bed. I know she did, as well as if I had assisted at the orgy. Who is she?" said Mrs. Hauksbee.
>
> "Don't!" said Mrs. Mallowe feebly. "You make my head ache. I'm miserable today."

(Then follows more about the Dowd, who is the heroine.)

Here you get nothing of the complication, and nothing of the single effect, but some foreshadowing of the heroine's traits. You get it, not in the action of the plot, but solely through the chatter of gossips about the Dowd. It is not often that this opening is needed, and still less frequently is it good. Its chief function is that of producing a false impression such as is wanted in a surprise story. What other people think about your hero or heroine may count heavily in your plot, sometimes by way of making things hard for the hero or heroine, and sometimes by way of creating a comic misunderstanding. In such cases the opening type is excellent, as you can see by a little analysis.

Type 7.

To open with indirect action that reveals only the setting, as in Coppée's "A Voluntary Death" (which follows), is seldom advisable. Consider this beginning in conjunction with the whole story.

> I knew the poet Louis Miraz very well, in the old times in the Latin Quarter, where we used to take our meals together at a cremerie on the Rue de Seine, kept by an old Polish woman whom we nicknamed Princess Chocolawska, on account of the enormous bowl of creme and chocolate which she exposed daily in the show window of her shop. It was possible to dine there for ten sous, with "two breads," an "ordinaire" for thirty centimes, and a "small coffee."

Some who were very nice spent a sou more for a napkin.

(Then follows the description of the other habitués of the cremerie.)

It is difficult to understand why such a skilled writer as Coppée, in such a strategic position, should have squandered so many precious words on irrelevancies. The setting here presented is not that of the story proper; it is merely an incidental environment in which the narrator chanced to become acquainted with the hero, Louis Miraz. The Polish woman, the chocolate, the ex-dictator, the cheap meals, and all the rest of this introductory scene count for nothing at all in the pathetic-tragic career of Miraz. Modern American writers would never have committed the mistake of beginning thus. None the less, there may be stories in which the plausibility must be built up in advance by a little play of simple realism which gets the reader into the believing mood. Then one might resort to this style of introduction.

Type 8.

Here we come to an opening still worse, as a rule, than the one just considered. A peculiarly offensive specimen of it is Balzac's "A Passion in the Desert." This exhibits luridly the well-accepted truth that a great novelist may be a lamentably clumsy writer of short stories.

> "The sight was fearful!" she cried, as we left the menagerie of Monsieur Martin.
>
> She had been watching that daring performer work with his hyenas, to speak in the type of the posters.
>
> "How on earth," she continued, "can he have tamed his animals so as to be sure of enough of their affection to—"
>
> "That fact, which seems to you a problem," I replied, interrupting her, "is however perfectly natural."
>
> "Oh!" she exclaimed, while an incredulous smile flickered on her lip.
>
> "Do you mean to say that you think beasts are entirely devoid of passions?" I asked her. "Let me tell you that we can safely give them credit for all the vices due to our state of civilization."

Here the theme of the story is merely stated in the midst of an episode which has absolutely no connection with the story. Neither the man nor the

woman nor the scene at the menagerie plays any part in the passion in the desert. Nothing would have been lost had Balzac launched directly into this story. The idea that animals have passions that are almost human would have become quite clear in the story itself. Or, if that had proved hard, it would have been easy and much more natural to have had the man to whom this strange adventure came state this theme boldly, perhaps on his return to civilization, which might have been made an event integrated with the main action.

There are cases, however, in which this stating of the theme through indirect action is effective. The best instance I have encountered is in Daudet's "The Goat of M. Sequin." It runs thus:

> To M. Pierre Gringoire, Lyrical Poet, at Paris.
>
> "You will always be the same, my poor Gringoire!
>
> "Think of it! You are offered the place of reporter on a respectable Paris newspaper, and you have the assurance to refuse! Why look at yourself, unhappy youth! Look at that worn-out doublet, those dilapidated breeches, that gaunt face which cries aloud that it is hungry! And this is where your passion for rhyme has brought you! This is the result of your ten years of loyal service among the pages of my lord Apollo! Aren't you ashamed?
>
> "Be a reporter, you idiot! Be a reporter! You will earn honest crowns, you will have your special seat at Brebant's; and you will be able to appear every first night with a new feather in your cap.
>
> "No? You will not? You propose to remain perfectly free to the end? Well, just listen to the story of Monsieur Seguin's goat. You will see what one gains by attempting to remain free."

The skill of this opening is not apparent on the surface. You must study the whole tale carefully to detect it. Daudet states his theme in ironic form. But instead of merely sticking it up like a wooden sign post in front of his story, he plays it up with highly illustrative action. He generalizes on the idea, he argues cunningly, and thus he works up your interest. In fact, after finishing the tale you are inclined to believe that it was written to prove a black truth about newspaper reporters. Thus the opening with its allusions to the poor poet and the sleek reporters ceases to seem irrelevant. It becomes the very hub of the tale.

Type 9.

The “Philosophical Overture,” or opening with anticipatory generalizations but no action whatever, be it direct or indirect, has been often used with high effectiveness. A neat sample is O. Henry’s powerful story, “A Municipal Report.”

> East is East, and West is San Francisco, according to Californians. Californians are a race of people; they are not merely inhabitants of a state. They are the Southerners of the West. Now Chicagoans are no less loyal to their city; but when you ask them why, they stammer and speak of lake fish and the new Odd Fellows Building. But Californians go into detail.
>
> Of course, they have in the climate an argument that is good for half an hour when you are thinking of your coal bills and heavy underwear. But as soon as they come to mistake your silence for conviction, madness comes upon them, and they picture the city of the Golden Gate as the Bagdad of the New World. So far, as a matter of opinion, no refutation is necessary. But, dear cousins all, (from Adam and Eve descended), it is a rash one who will lay his finger on the map and say “In this town there can be no romance—what could happen here?” Yes, it is a bold and rash deed to challenge, in one sentence, history, romance and Rand & McNally.

I call this opening philosophical because it indulges in general comments about a larger state of affairs of which the tale that follows is but a case in point. It is a device familiar to all essayists and known to the ancient minstrels. Almost every great author has used it repeatedly. Thus Kipling, in the most succinct form, starting “A Germ Destroyer”:

> As a general rule, it is inexpedient to meddle with questions of State in a land where men are paid to work them out for you. This tale is a justifiable exception.

The power of such an opening is great, and it is adaptable to many plots and effects. It fixes the thought of the reader at the very outset, thus enabling him to relate and interpret all that follows much more readily than if he had to build the thought and effect as he reads on.

We may lay down a pretty general rule for the use of the opening. We may say that

When the first action of a plot or the first action of the dominant character has slight dramatic interest or intensity, the philosophical overture is usually better than any direct or indirect action.

Why is this so? Because by stating the central thought of your story in vivid generalized form you can attract your reader's interest and also reinforce the initially weak single effect of the plot through its first development. Consider those few generalizing words with which Kipling commences "Miss Youghal's Sais":

> Some people say that there is no romance in India. Those people are wrong. Our lives hold quite as much romance as is good for us. Sometimes more.

Those last two words, "sometimes more," throw open to the reader long vistas of tragic and comic possibilities. They excite his curiosity. And this aroused, he plunges through the tale keenly.

Type 10.

Of all openings, the weakest is the kind used by Mary Wilkins Freeman, in "A Taste of Honey":

> The long, low, red-painted cottage was raised above the level of the street, on an embankment, separated into two terraces. They were covered with green, slimy moss, and little ferns and weeds sprang out of every crack. A wall of flat slate stone led from them to the front door, which was painted green, sagged on its hinges, and had a brass knocker.
>
> The whole yard and the double banks were covered with a tall, waving crop of red-top and herds-grass and red and white clover. It was in the height of haying time.
>
> A grassy wheel-track led around the side of the house to a barn dashed with streaks of red paint.
>
> Off to the left stretched some waving pasture land, and a garden patch marked by bean-poles and glancing corn blades, with a long row of beehives showing in the midst of it.

A rusty open buggy and lop-eared horse stood in the drive opposite the side door of the house.

When you have read these two hundred words, more or less, you know absolutely nothing about any character in the story, nothing about the theme, nothing about the complication, nothing about anything save the inconsequential landscape. It is pure description and extraneous to the story. I cannot see that any good purpose is served by this manner of beginning. The author doubtless supposed that the story might be made realistic by painting in the background richly. This is true, as a general proposition. What she failed to understand is the need of getting the reader interested as early as possible in the plot and its people, and conveying to him the emotional tone of the story, with the least possible waste of words.

To realize how serious this failure is, let me suggest that you perform an easy experiment upon this opening. Take it as it stands, and see how many totally different plots and effects you can tack onto it equally well. Run over the story plots cited in these lessons and affix them to this opening. The result will amaze you. It will show clearly that the opening has given the reader virtually no direction of interest and no direction of emotion whatever. To generalize, that means that the opening is not an integral part of any story. It is little more than a painted curtain hanging between you, the reader, and the events that are to be enacted. To get the story, you must wait till the curtain rises and the players appear. And any picture on this curtain might serve equally well.

THE CLOSING EVENT

The closing event is much easier and also much less important than the opening. There are three types of it:

1. The direct denouement;
2. The significant aftermath;
3. The interpretative comment.

1. The direct denouement.

This always will be the ideal finish of the dramatic narrative whose plot and effect can be fused and made perfectly clear in and through the action. Word by word, line by line, both the plot and the effect advance up to the very close. With this close, both have been completely developed.

Such a perfect movement is almost never achieved. We do find it in the extraordinary ending of Poe's masterpiece, "Ligeia." Never has any story so carried its surprise, its character development, and its tremendous emotional impression with mounting power up to the very last word.

> * * * * * I stirred not—but gazed upon the apparition. There was a mad disorder in my thoughts—a tumult unappeasable. Could it indeed be the living Rowena who confronted me? Could it indeed be Rowena *at all*—the fair-haired Lady Rowena Trevanion of Tremaine? Why, *why*, should I doubt it? * * * * * *Had she then grown taller since her malady?* What inexpressible madness seized me with that thought? One bound and I had reached her feet! Shrinking from my touch she let fall from her head, unloosened, the ghastly cerements which had confined it, and there streamed forth, into the rushing atmosphere of the chamber, huge masses of long and disheveled hair; *it was blacker than the raven's wings of the midnight!* And now slowly opened the eyes of the figure which stood before me. "Here then, at least," I shrieked aloud, "can I never—can I never be mistaken—these are the full, and the black, and the wild eyes—of my lost love—of the lady—of the *Lady Ligeia*."

Up to the last sentence, the reader is misled. He supposes that Lady Rowena is returning to life. With this in mind, he may well be pardoned for supposing that the very long account of Ligeia earlier in the story is somewhat irrelevant, or at least overdone. But at the finish the whole puzzle suddenly solves itself, and the story becomes a tremendous demonstration of the theme which Poe repeats three times in the narrative: "Man doth not yield him to the angels nor unto death utterly, save only through the weakness of his feeble will."

Such an ending is, of course, peculiarly desirable in a surprise story and most difficult in almost all other plots. But the direct-action finish can nevertheless be employed in a much weaker climactic form. You are advised, in this connection, to study O. Henry's stories. He had the knack of handling the direct denouement with consummate skill. Many of his plots solve themselves in the last ten lines. Observe particularly "The Furnished Room," with that final remark of Mrs. Purdy: "She'd a-been called handsome, as you say, but for that mole she had a-growing by her left eyebrow." Or again, "Tobin's Palm." Or, best of all, "A Municipal Report," whose yellow horn overcoat button clears up the whole mystery and

completely finishes the proof of the thesis which O. Henry lays down in the opening paragraphs.

2. The significant aftermath.

By the significant aftermath I mean an ending in which some event is reported (or alluded to briefly) which is not a part of the main plot at all but which reveals some later outcome of the plot events, usually in such a manner as to intensify either the character trait or the single effect.

In "Xingu" there is such a finish. It begins in the passage in which Mrs. Ballinger says: "And they're shrieking over us at this moment." A much more vivid specimen is in Coppée's "The Substitute." The denouement is done when Jean Francois holds out his hands for the handcuffs. Then this:

> Today he is at Cayenne, condemned for life as an incorrigible.

The outcome of the action is, by these words, made clear as crystal, and Jean Francois' nobility is fully demonstrated. Strictly speaking, his being today at Cayenne is not a part of the plot, for the action ceases when the police enter and he allows them to arrest him. But his fate tremendously intensifies the heroism of his stepping into his friend's place and bearing his punishment.

This type of ending is fairly common, and it seldom offers much difficulty.

3. Interpretative Comment.

This is the same treatment at the end as the philosophical overture is at the beginning. It may contain no action, direct or indirect. It may, and generally does, sum up some sentiment, some thought that brings out vividly the single effect.

The close of Jack London's "The Heathen" does this admirably:

> And so passed Otoo, who saved me and made me a man, and who saved me in the end. We met in the maw of a hurricane and parted in the maw of a shark, with seventeen intervening years of comradeship the like of which I dare to assert have never befallen two men, the one brown and the other white. If Jehovah be from his high place watching every sparrow fall, not least in his

kingdom shall be Otoo, the one heathen of Bora Bora. And if there be no place for him in that Kingdom, then I will have none of it.

Or in Howell's "A Circle in the Water," where the author, having opened the story with his speculations about the consequences of good and evil, returns to the same thought in a new mood as follows:

> * * * * * So far as human vision can perceive, the trouble he made, the evil he did, is really at an end. Love, which alone can arrest the consequences of wrong, had ended it, and in certain luminous moments it seemed to us that we had glimpsed, in our witness of this experience, an infinite compassion encompassing our whole being like a sea, where every trouble of our sins and sorrows must cease at last like a circle in the water.

This is excellent craftsmanship. The final thought brings you back to the title of the story and completely integrates it with the theme which the plot demonstrates, as well as with the emotional impression of the whole.

DISTRIBUTION PATTERNS WITHIN THE PLOT

Reading stories at random and without much reflection, you might well gather the impression that there is an enormous variety of dramatic patterns. But as you practise analyzing plots you come slowly to the point of discovering that the basic patterns are few indeed.

By far the commonest pattern is that one which breaks the story development into pretty much the same three stages which we find in nearly all good plays:

1. The first movement, or "act," presents three story elements:

   a —the setting;
   b —some of the important characters;
   c —the circumstances generating the complication (or sometimes the complication itself).

2. The second movement presents two story elements:

   a —the complication (or the first development of it beyond the stage reached in the first movement);
   b —the reaction of the characters to this complication.

3. The third movement presents two story elements:

a —the crucial situation;
b —the uniquely characteristic act in this situation which brings the denouement.

This pattern is the commonest, not because writers are too dull to invent new ones but simply because *it is the normal historical sequence of dramatic events and this sequence is the easiest for the reader to follow and grasp*.

From this fact there follows a safe rule of technique:

Always employ this basic pattern of sequence except when the particular single effect you have chosen or some peculiarity of your plot structure makes necessary some different ordering of events.

THE INTEGRATION OF SEQUENCES, OR "TELESCOPING" AND MASSING

You have already learned how plot, setting, and characterization must be woven smoothly into a single web of narrative. This method of integration, as I have called it, applies to the ordering of events as follows:

1. Within each of the three movements above described use the fewest possible distinct events to develop all the elements. Make each episode develop the maximum number of elements compatible with good dramatic movement and clearness. This is the "telescoping" of events.

2. If the events cannot be thus telescoped, first depict those which require the greatest amount of pure description, except insofar as the single effect or the dramatic sequence make this impossible, as may sometimes happen.

3. Arrange the events so that the last episode of one movement is telescoped with the first episode of the next movement. That is, let there be, when possible, a common scene for both movements, instead of a sharp break between them.

4. In a surprise or mystery story, where it is of the highest importance to conceal the solution up to the latest possible moment, the reader may be thrown off the track most easily by some inversion of the natural sequence of events or by some confusing sharp break between movements.

5. In some plots, the action arises as a result of some character's misunderstanding what has been or is happening, and it is necessary to convey the full effect of this misunderstanding to the reader. Hence here it is necessary to order the events in such a manner as to produce this confused effect, in which case none of the above rules apply.

6. The more completely the plot action and the single effect grow out of a single setting, a single trait, or a single generating circumstance, the more completely should the descriptive handling of events be massed around that factor.

CHAPTER XIV

FINDING YOUR READERS

Scarcely a month passes without my hearing some earnest student protest as follows at the criticism that his story is "unconvincing" or "not dramatically true."

"Why, you're quite wrong. Everything in my story happened exactly as I've told it. I didn't change the facts at all. So it must be realistic."

All of which I cannot deny. And yet I can only repeat that it doesn't make the slightest difference.

Many events in real life arouse our interest there but quite fail to satisfy us in fiction.

This bewilders many writers. Why should it be so? Well, there is a very simple explanation.

> **Every work of art, whether it be a painting or an opera or a motion picture or a short story, must be complete in itself. It must produce upon the normal beholder a single and fairly complete impression. That is just what makes it a work of art. It gives us pleasure in an artistic way in so far as our feelings and our thoughts about it are not confused and conflicting.**

Real life is only too full of situations which stir us up and yet leave us horribly unsatisfied or even dissatisfied and worried. The problems they raise in our minds are too tangled. The interests at stake are too intricate and obscure. We may argue along on a line for a while and then find ourselves halted by some unforeseen obstacle; then we may proceed along another line, only to meet with the same interference.

In other cases, situations confront us which are downright meaningless. The blank tragedy of them, their unrelieved horror, or even their utter silliness leave us gasping. We cannot fit them into our ideas of life as it is. We cannot harmonize them with life as it should be.

Consider, if you will, a few familiar instances. Take the struggles of a poor, weak-lunged clerk with a large family to make a living for and keep alive, in a dingy, smoke-hung mill town. The man, let us suppose, has had no sound education. He has married on impulse, early in life. He has a

frowsy wife addicted to gin and the movies. He lacks resourcefulness and energy. His employer is a harsh disciplinarian. The wife, lacking both dollars and sense, has rashly bought a piano on the installment plan and has taken the money set aside for settling an overdue grocery bill to make first payment on the instrument. On the same day the clerk is discharged.

A very common crisis in everyday life, this. Will it do as a subject for a short story? Certainly not, unless tremendously modified by the introduction of other factors. As it stands, it contains all the ingredients of tense drama. There is a desperate situation which must evoke thought and worry. The problem of living must be solved and in the face of great obstacles. We must feel sorry for the clerk. We must wonder how he is going to work out his own salvation. But as we wonder, it dawns upon us that the whole situation is hopeless and dark. Whatever the poor devil does he is probably going to find himself in a plight afterward that will be quite as evil as the present one. His problem is too complex to be solved with the resources at his command. Had he a strong character, he might accomplish something. But he has not. If his wife had one, she might bring a little daylight into their lives. Had his employer profound pity for the fellow he might change things for the better. But Things as They Are leave us with one of those ghastly deadlocks which fill our newspapers with tales of murder and suicide and abandonment.

Nine readers out of ten will therefore turn away from any story based on such a complication. It has neither beginning nor end. It trails off into darkness. It leaves them with a spectacle of hopes stifled and visions blurred by the surge of dark forces.

The effect all such situations make on the ordinary man is extremely unpleasant, even painful. We should like to turn away from them. And we are held to them only because in real life we simply must wrestle with them and win out. But in the reading of stories, we are free to choose both the situations and the effects they produce upon us. *Every normal man and woman naturally chooses to read stories whose effects are in some way pleasant.*

This does not mean that everybody prefers always the tales with happy endings or pure romance. There are other pleasant effects beside these; for instance the picture of poetic justice or more generally the picture of a character trait working out its nature with dramatic consistency.

FICTION AS THE VISION OF FULFILLED DESIRE

We may present this great fact from another angle that illuminates it considerably. The real world is far from being a bed of roses. It is not built

as we should like to have it built. Things are continually happening in it which any man would amend to suit his pleasure. And many things persistently refuse to happen that we want to have happen.

I suppose that everybody except very young children is quite familiar with the way we all indulge in day dreaming about these wished-for things, and how, the harder they are to attain, the more we sigh and fancy and yearn. What the real world refuses to deliver to us, our imagination endeavors to furnish. It is no idle play of wit, this imagining of things desired. It is, on the contrary, the very means by which we come to hit upon ways of attaining our wishes.

In this free play of the fancy we come, after many visions, upon some way of gaining our wish. And in this manner the world progresses. In this way inventions are hit upon. In this way new plans of business and politics are devised.

There can be not the slightest doubt that thousands of people read stories avidly just to find in them such visions of fulfilled desire. Such visions stimulate their own imagination and thereby lead them a step further toward finding a way of satisfying their desire.

That is particularly true of young readers. Their desires are hot and strong, but their imagination is unpractised. They find in certain types of fiction an aid to the exercise of fancy which maturer persons neither need nor wish.

The bearing of this fact on the author's choice of story material is now plain. People will always tend to prefer stories that in some degree present visions of fulfilled desire, precisely because in real life people will always be conjuring up such visions. So long as men strive to get what they want, they will indulge in fancies, and so long as they indulge in fancies, they will be highly responsive to the pleasant fancies which the story teller narrates. And so, on the other hand, they turn away from those tales in which the unpleasantness of real life is depicted in all its harsh and bewildering complexity.

I am speaking now of the great mass of mankind. I recognize, of course, that we find small groups of readers whose maturity and intellectual development give them literary tastes quite apart from those of the public our magazines try to reach. They are genuinely interested in moral and political issues and in the presentation of truths, be they sweet or bitter. There is no profit, however, in reckoning with this small class. Writers who appeal to it, as Henry James did, cannot hope to win either popularity or bread and butter.

This dislike of realism makes itself evident in the preference most readers show for stories that grossly violate truth in the interest of sentimentality or piety. Consider, as a clear demonstration of this, the story by Ben Ames Williams, "They Grind Exceeding Small," which appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* and was subsequently picked by the Society of Arts and Sciences as one of the best works of 1919 and published in the *O. Henry Memorial Volume of Short Stories* (page 42).

> Hazen Kinch, a miser in a remote New England district, takes advantage of the carelessness of one of his poor debtors and picks up a dollar bill which the fellow has dropped in his office, when there to pay part of a sum which he owed Kinch. Kinch keeps the dollar and defends his act to a neighbor. Later the debtor, one Doan Marshley, returns seeking the dollar and explains that it was not his money but had been given to him to buy medicine. This does not move Kinch who flares up and pretends that he is indignant at Marshley's hunting around his office for the money. Marshley, a weakling, slinks out. Kinch chuckles.
>
> The next day, after a heavy snowfall, Kinch returns to his home, out in the country, and finds that his one and most dearly beloved child has died, all because the medicine his wife had asked Marshley to get had not been delivered.

In this meagre outline, the story might be a piece of realism. And had Williams developed it in this simple form, it would have been readable. To popularize it, though, the author has woven into it a moralizing strain. He interprets the whole action as a part of God's plan to work justice. He foreshadows this in the opening by saying: "It is easy to believe that a brooding God dwells upon these hills." And of Kinch: "That such a man should live and grow great and prosper was not fitting; in a well-regulated world it could not be." Later, when the narrator of the story is impelled to lend Marshley the dollar for the medicine, "an overpowering compulsion bade me keep my hands off in this matter. I did not know what I expected, but I felt the imminence of the fates." And finally, when Kinch, stricken and screaming, looks upon his dead boy, who might have lived but for his own abominable thievery, the narrator says:

> "I understood in that moment the working of the mills. And when I looked at Hazen Kinch, I saw that he, too, was beginning to understand. There is a just mercilessness in an aroused God
> * * * * *

"I knew now that a just and brooding God dwelt among these hills."

Now this makes a very pleasant impression. We all like to feel that scamps and scoundrels are brought to book. We like to see them forced to atone for their misdeeds. We all carry around in our heads that ancient notion of primitive justice which claims "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

If we yield to our impulses, we lapse into this monstrous perversion of justice. If we use our reason, however, we repudiate it; and, if there be a God that clings to such a code, we will have none of him, though we burn in hell fire for it. All the great religious thinkers, from Buddha and Christ down to the most modern, have vehemently denounced such a conception. All the evidence of modern science goes to show that, in the real world, there is no such tendency for the wicked to be punished for their misdeeds. Today, as of old, the wicked wax fat in their wickedness, if only they are clever. The realist cannot close his eyes to the fact, established in the statistics of crime, that more than nine murderers out of every ten are never discovered; and, of those discovered, only a few are ever punished for their crimes. So with all other offenses.

From the realist's point of view, again, there is a hideous stain on the so-called act of justice in Williams' God: that is the suffering the death of the child caused Mrs. Kinch. In order to punish Kinch for his years of miserliness and petty dishonesty, this alleged God kills the child and thereby breaks its mother's heart. The mother is an innocent woman. She has been one of Kinch's victims all her life. Why should she be stricken, that Kinch might suffer? The colossal stupidity of a God who botches his job thus is apparent to every realist.

Had the whole situation in the New England village been handled realistically, it would have been repellent to nine out of ten American readers. For Kinch would have suffered not at all; he would have grown richer and richer, would have squeezed Marshley, and all the other neighbors, as usual, would have stolen Marshley's money needed for medicine for Marshley's boy, thereby causing the latter much suffering; and eventually the old miser would have owned the whole neighborhood. Had he wished, he would have been elected to Congress. Or, if it had happened that his acts had led to the death of his own boy, the evil consequences of that death would have stricken the boy's mother and others even more than himself, because a miser as thoroughgoing as this Kinch would not be so tremendously bound by the heart-strings as Williams makes him out to be.

The story as it stands appeals to the infantile mind. It is only the infantile mind that revels in tit-for-tat. It is the infantile mind that insists that all villains be hanged in the third act, and all heroines wedded to rich heroes with shiny black hair and noble brows and limousines. In short, it is simply a fairy story disguised as fact. And this, as I have said, is what a very large group of readers demand, notably the immense group of the immature and the uncultured which makes up more than half of our total reading public.

THREE TYPES OF READERS

There is another angle from which you should approach the problem of story material. You ought to ask yourself two questions:

1. In what sort of affairs am I personally interested?
2. What sort of affairs do I best understand, from personal experience?

Having answered these for yourself, you ought then repeat the queries with reference to the great world of readers whom you, as an author, are trying to reach.

When you consider these readers, you will find them falling into three pretty clearly demarcated groups, each of which shows sharp peculiarities of interest.

1. Immature and uncultured readers.
2. Mature and uncultured readers.
3. Mature and cultured readers.

Before we discuss these groups, let me make plain what the adjectives mean. On your understanding of them will depend your success in aiming a story at the group you wish to reach.

Every ordinary human being is capable of developing his mind and his tastes and preferences in two ways. He may “grow up in the school of Hard Knocks” or he may take the Carnegie Road to Knowledge. He may learn by experience or he may learn by reflection over books and the learned discourse of his elders. In the course of years he is sure to grow up mentally as well as physically, though with some this growth is much slower than with others. When he has learned as much as the average man of, say, thirty years acquires in everyday life, he is mature; at least, for the purposes of our present discussion, we may arbitrarily call this maturity.

As for culture, this is a much more subtle matter to define and measure. What a man may learn by the study of books is limitless. So, too, with what he may learn by orderly reflection and analysis. We may say that he has attained some culture as soon as he has developed a lively interest in learning all there is to know about any important aspect of life and has made some substantial progress toward acquiring that knowledge. It has been said that a man is truly cultured only when he has developed his own philosophy of life and is able to take a definite attitude toward all affairs and issues. Rare indeed is the man who can boast of having reached this intellectual height. With him we need not concern ourselves. But the man who is working in that direction and has progressed perceptibly is an important figure in the world of readers.

It is obvious that some men develop in one of these two ways, some others develop in the other way, and a smaller class are lucky enough to develop in both ways. Here we have our three great classes of readers, each with a special set of interests, each capable, therefore, of being appealed to through a distinct variety of stories.

To present here a full analysis of the kind of persons in each group is impossible. But some general characteristics may be pointed out, with the request that you study the types in greater detail at your leisure.

1. The immature and uncultured class

This class embraces considerably more than half of the total population of the United States. Out of our 105,000,000 inhabitants well above 50,000,000 are infants, children, and young people whose minds and bodies have not matured and whose experience is much too limited to enable them to understand or be interested in many things which appeal to grown-ups. In addition to this enormous group, which is always with us, though ever changing its membership, we find millions of negroes, poor whites, and slum dwellers showing seriously retarded development. If you wish to learn how serious this retardation is, and how many Americans are affected thus, study the amazing figures, given out by the United States Army shortly after the war, on the subnormal minds and illiterates who were found among the soldiers. It will shock you to discover what a horde of child minds inhabit the bodies of grown men and women. The claim is made that the average intelligence is that of a fourteen-year old.

2. The mature and uncultured class

This class includes the rank and file of our more prosperous farmers, our skilled laborers, our merchant and trader classes, and probably three quarters of our doctors and lawyers. These are the men and women who have grown up normally and have had their eyes open and have used their wits in dealing with men and affairs from day to day. Most of them are pretty shrewd and sensible. They "know what's what." They have lost many of Youth's illusions. They have found themselves. They take life seriously, work hard, want to make money and enjoy the important comforts and pleasures of life, and are, in the main, eager—often too eager—to get along amiably with their fellows. David Belasco has described them pretty accurately as follows:

> There is in America an enormous class—in fact, the preponderant class—which very stupidly is often called bourgeois, especially among coteries of pale-faced, flaccid young people who suppose themselves to be radical and who prattle about sociology, the proletariat and the plutocracy. That class is, in fact, the very substance of our nation and the chief hope of the world—the great mass of people of moderate means; normal, healthful, simple of tastes and appetites; intent on working and living; grateful for even small pleasures; patient and cheerful under great privation; resolute to maintain American institutions; aggressively positive that we have the best and dearest country in all the world; generous, amiable, industrious; feeling quickly and deeply but inclined to conceal emotion under a quip or a laugh; reacting instantly to direct, dominant, elemental emotional stimuli; loving honesty; piteous to affliction; sympathetic with virtue; hating vice; despising cowardice; honoring courage; always willing to be pleased, to applaud the hero, to hiss the villain; eager for the triumph of good over evil, but just as quick as those who think themselves more intellectual—and a bit quicker—to recognize the facts of life as true even when they run, as often they do run, contrary to their hopes.

3. The mature and cultured class

This class is quite small. I have frequently tried to estimate its size but cannot do so with much accuracy. It seems pretty certain that it does not include more than 500,000 people, and it may fall as low as 250,000. Those who belong to it are men and women whose natural ability of mind is much higher than the average. Their minds are more alert, more receptive, and

more analytical than the minds of most of us. Their insatiable lust to learn and know and understand has driven them to take time to read serious books, study some one subject thoroughly, and reflect at great length on some of the deeper problems of life. They can learn new things from two to twenty times as fast as a person of average mental ability; a fact, by the way, which has been amply corroborated by the Army Intelligence Tests and other similar experiments. Thus it comes to pass that, as they grow up, they accumulate an understanding and an interest in many subjects toward which the mass of people must forever remain cold.

The members of this fortunate group you will find chiefly among our leading physicians, lawyers, scientists, college teachers, engineers, and "Big Business" men. You will come upon a few elsewhere, and they will turn out to be men or women who have withdrawn from the world in order to enjoy the more the solace of good books and quiet thoughts. Every town in the country has one or two of these gentle folk, upon whom the corner grocery assembly looks with scorn and scoffing.

LAW OF INTEREST

Each of these three classes displays a special interest toward a type of conflict arising in life.

THE THREE CONFLICTS

A careful study of life discloses three great varieties of conflict perpetually arising and perpetually being faced and solved, more or less successfully, by thought and action. These are conflicts of

1. Man with the physical world;
2. Man with man;
3. One force with another, in the same man.

1. Man with the physical world.

Ever since man dropped his tail and came down out of the trees, his time and energy have been almost wholly consumed by the desperate struggle for existence. What this tremendous fact means, not only to modern life but more particularly to story telling, cannot easily be appreciated by the young man or woman who has grown up in a comfortable American town and been tenderly nurtured by a dozen medical specialists, ten high school teachers, Carnegie librarians, policemen, chocolate sundae purveyors, and movie stars. It takes a youth who grew up as Jack London, Rudyard Kipling and

Joseph Conrad did to discover the elemental facts about this struggle for existence early in his literary career. If it is your literary misfortune to have grown up in unmitigated comfort and culture, you stand a slim chance of ever piercing the veils that hang between you and Things as They Are for the Common People. You will, I regret to say, go through life as Henry James did, utterly unable to understand either the truth or the human interest in such tales of stark adventure as fill half a hundred magazines every month. You will write furiously, and perhaps well, about many subtle shades of character, only to be ignored by the world. Your royalties will be payable in Heaven.

Take any thousand men, anywhere in the world today. What will you find? Nine hundred and ninety-nine of them will be spending most of their waking hours—and some of their sleeping hours too, alas!—toiling feverishly to earn their daily bread, worrying over the cost of the shoes they must buy on the morrow, nursing a wound they got at the mill, walking the floor with a sick child, and so on. Even today in the United States, where there exists a degree of comfort and prosperity unknown in all previous history, this struggle for existence is still the rule. No longer so violent and bloody, it still thrusts itself into the foreground of almost every man's thoughts and dominates all his acts, all politicians' speeches to the contrary notwithstanding. It is the problem that haunts him when he is wondering whether he dare marry. It is the problem that hangs over him menacingly when, after breakfast, he kisses wife and children and hurries off to the day's work.

Do not misunderstand this. I am not saying that most people are in a state of desperation over this struggle for existence. Nor am I saying that they are barely able to keep alive. I am merely saying that most people live so close to the margin of existence that, even though they may be living comfortably, still they have to be thinking most of the time about how they are going to make ends meet tomorrow, next week, and next year.

It is this necessity of attending to the subject that is the significant thing here.

This struggle for existence almost always reduces to a struggle with the physical world. In the final analysis man lives by mastering Nature. Half of our Americans, for instance, are farmers, and they fight day and night with Nature, year in and year out. Up at three o'clock, they milk cows. At dawn, they hitch horses and plow the stubborn earth. In the winter they chop down trees in the frozen forests. Never for a day can they take their minds off Nature and her treacheries. No matter how rich and comfortable a farmer

may become, he is constantly absorbed with this struggle with the physical world. As with him, so with our million miners who dig out the mountains. So with our sailors. So with our road builders, our steel workers, our fishermen, and nearly all the rest.

So it has come about, through the millions of years that this struggle has been going on, that man's wits have been sharpened best of all on the edge they turn toward Nature. Tell them about a fight with wild beasts, and most of them will sit up and listen breathlessly. Narrate a sea captain's narrow escape from a typhoon, and they will hang upon your every word. Is it because they are specially interested in wild beasts or in typhoons? Not at all! It is merely because they see in your anecdote a man fighting for his life, fighting against the blind savagery that stalks the sea and the jungle. The normal man is keyed to his highest pitch when he is forced to fight for his life, and the sympathetic imagination of the normal man is correspondingly stirred by such a spectacle.

2. Man versus man.

In a civilized society such as we find in Western Europe and the United States, the ordinary man has to spend a large part of his time and thought in getting along with other people. If he is a farmer, he has to keep his hired man contented and at the same time get work out of the fellow; he has to hold his wife, sons and daughters to the iron routine of plowing, planting, harvesting, and milking the cows; and he has to watch the small boys of the neighborhood when cherries turn red. If he is a street car conductor in some sizable town, he has to spot the citizens who try to dodge paying their fares, keep an eye on other citizens who endeavor to separate strap-hangers from their watches and purses during the rush hour, and shoo off small boys who try to hook on behind. Thus through the whole range of community life. Wherever we find two youths falling in love with the same girl, two millionaires vying with each other to gain control of a mucilage factory, two politicians calling each other scoundrels and traitors, two society dames giving rival teas and cutting each other dead on dress parade, there we see this everlasting social conflict.

Now this type of conflict is dramatically richer than the conflict of man with Nature. And for a very simple reason. In conquering the blind forces of the world, man merely has to use his own wits against a witless Thing. But in struggling against other men, he has to employ his own wits against other wits, which often are shrewder than his own. Thus it is that the most intense mental effort and correspondingly high level of interest is reached in such

cases. For this reason it is our average mature reader who finds here his chief source of delight and esthetic education. These social conflicts move him most profoundly, in fiction as well as in real life.

3. One force with another in the same man.

This conflict is purely psychological. It is the subject of all great psychological stories, such as Stevenson's "Markheim." It is the subject of all stories in which we see two or more traits of character in one person fighting for supremacy in some crisis—greed versus family pride, honesty opposed to ambition, loyalty combating hypocrisy.

Now I am sure it will surprise you to be told that *not one man in a hundred is mentally able to be interested in and follow through such inner conflicts when the latter are realistically portrayed. The most he can do is to enjoy a few highly conventionalized and very artificial psychological situations.*

In making this statement, I am not merely airing a theory of my own. I am summing up ten years' experiments with a good many hundred people, most of whom have been intellectually far above the average reader of our better magazines. Very few, even of this select group, care much for the psychological analysis made by such writers as Henry James, Mrs. Wharton, Stevenson, and others. I find the best of all reasons for their indifference. They cannot analyze and construe subtle impulses and instincts of ordinary people—let alone extraordinary ones—nor can they follow the development of a genuine conflict of traits save in the crudest fashion. And there is a good biological reason for this incapacity. The normal man's attention has to be focused constantly upon *the things he has to deal with, in the everyday struggle for existence*. Thus his senses have been, throughout innumerable ages, sharpened to perceive and understand those things and nothing else. They are not trained to observe his own inner workings, either of body or of mind. Just as you do not know how your heart works or how currents run up and down your spinal cord, so you are ignorant of your own mental processes. To understand either body or mind, you must devote years of study to yourself. If you are like most other people, you have neither the time nor inclination to do this. The moral is clear. If you are trying to reach any sizable group of readers, shun the psychological story. Or depict only such conflicts as are very simple and more or less conventionalized. Only a tiny group of intellectuals will be interested in anything like psychological realism.

The three classes of readers we have been considering may be characterized as follows:

The immature and uncultured class is composed of children, adolescents and retarded adults. And the interest of these three groups is directed each toward a special type of conflict.

A. Children are interested chiefly in those conflicts between man and the physical world which can be solved (at least in appearance) by the intelligence of a child.

B. Adolescents are interested chiefly in those conflicts between man and the physical world or those other conflicts between man and man which can be solved (at least in appearance) by the intelligence of an adolescent.

C. Retarded adults are interested chiefly in those conflicts between man and the physical world, those other conflicts between man and man or else those conflicts between one force and another in the same man which can be solved (at least in appearance) by the intelligence of a retarded adult.

Before I explain this law in detail, you must notice one thing about it. Observe, please, that children are interested in *one* type of conflict, adolescents in *two* types, and retarded adults in *three*.

It is a favorite notion of many critics that, as a man grows in stature and understanding, he acquires new interests and puts away the old ones. Those who hold to this idea are therefore much bewildered when they find eminent financiers reading Nick Carter as regularly as their grandmothers read the Bible. They are confounded when they discover a college president perusing the dainty-sentimental love stories in the women's magazines.

The psychologist knows that the critics are wrong. He knows that people do not slough off an old interest soon after they find a fresh one. Interests are much too deeply rooted, thus to be flung aside. The critics suppose the whole business proceeds according to logic; they imagine that as soon as a youth becomes a man, with a man's understanding, he concludes that his youthful interests are no longer profitable nor consistent with the life he is

going to lead; and hence he suppresses them. What really happens is, fortunately, quite different. An interest that has persisted for years becomes a powerful habit. It follows the general law of habits. It dies out by lack of exercise, but very slowly, the speed of dying being roughly determined by the age of the habit. The longer you have been interested in a given subject, the longer it will require to break down that interest. (To this rule there are a few curious exceptions which we cannot go into here.)

There is another significant fact, too, which figures largely in the story teller's choice and handling of story material.

Any number of widely varying interests acquired at different periods of life may be kept alive, even if they are more or less contradictory, provided they do not interfere with one's carrying out in practice what one is most interested in doing.

Let us consider the eminent financier who reads Nick Carter piously. In his daily life this gentleman is most vitally interested in operating a huge bank. He is concerned with foreign exchange, the rate on commercial paper, the condition of the corn crop, and the prospects of opening branches in South America. To such matters he devotes his best efforts.

Some critics would say that it is absurd for such a man to waste time over Nick Carter. They call his taste depraved. They pillory him as a Philistine. The truth is, though, that the financier is not wasting a minute unless the time he spends over Nick Carter either lessens his power or his opportunity to think about his bank problems or else leads him to behave *à la* Nick Carter in his business transactions.

If, for instance, he took to toting two revolvers down to the bank; if he lurked at midnight around the bank vaults watching for robbers; if he shadows his vice-president; if he picks up the scraps of papers in his cashier's waste basket and laboriously fits them together in the hope of discovering a dark conspiracy, then we should all agree that he ought to lay off on Nick Carter and while away a season at some quiet sanitarium. But this does not happen. *The child interest in detective thrillers lives on without disturbing the peace. It is held within the domain of the sympathetic imagination. It is not allowed to influence action. And it is this very restraint which intensifies the thrill.*

RIGHT AND WRONG CONTACTS WITH YOUR READER

Each and every reader you reach lives in his own world of memories, hopes, ideas, and practices. No two men's worlds are precisely alike, but our many worlds tend to fall into large groups. We speak of a man of narrow

experience, and we mean that his world is bounded by his own doorstep and a dull imagination. We speak of a worldly man, and we think of his world as being inhabited by rogues and saints, and full of adventures and subtle schemes.

In order to establish the best contact between your reader's world and the world described in your story, you must achieve two things:

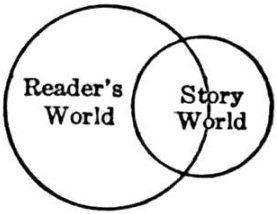
1. You must make your reader understand your story world, and that means that the two worlds must overlap; and

2. You must lead him, at least a step or two, beyond himself into another world where he finds some novelty, something he never happened to observe or think of before. And this means that the two worlds should not coincide.

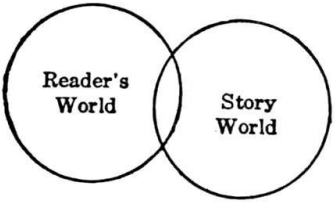
Thus we find four kinds of contacts between story and reader, and four types of story values. The following diagram displays them clearly:

THE FOUR CONTACTS

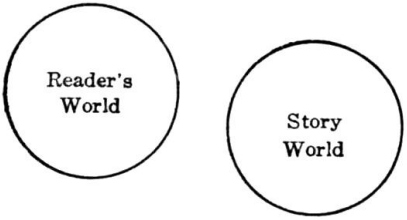
I. The Extreme Realistic
"Quite true, but rather dull."



II. The Moderately Romantic Story.
"Essentially plausible, yet full of surprises and strange touches."



III. Extravagant Romance.
"It might happen that way, but it doesn't ring true."



IV. Fantasy and Nonsense.
"Absurd. Nobody ever did such things."

THE FOUR CONTACTS—EXERCISES

1. Study the following news item with care. Then write a list of every sort of person who, in your opinion, might be interested in the fight described here. Your list will obviously begin with policemen. How many other classes can you find?

State your reasons for your choice.

> Persons occupying neighboring apartment houses were held breathless, thrilled and horrified, as they watched a fight for life between a policeman and his prisoner on the roof of 989 Sixth Avenue. Both, they saw, were struggling for possession of the policeman's pistol. The battle twice was carried to the roof's edge, and it seemed inevitable that both should pitch headlong to the yard six floors below.
>
> By a great effort the policeman manoeuvred his opponent back to the centre of the roof, and while the struggle was hidden from view by a chimney, the many witnesses heard a shot. Then the tussle was renewed near the edge; and it seesawed back and forth for fully five minutes. The policeman, handicapped, it was

evident, by a heavy raincoat, apparently was getting the worst of it. His assailant gradually pushed him nearer the edge.

Then a man in a sailor's uniform ran across from the roof of 102 West Fifty-sixth Street and by sheer strength dragged both combatants to the centre of the stage. The sailor struck the civilian with a wooden club, apparently with no effect. The policeman, his balance recovered and still retaining his pistol, dashed after his antagonist as the latter attempted to flee through the roof door of 987 Sixth Avenue. Here there was another clinch, and when the policeman attempted to club his prisoner with the butt end of his pistol the man grasped the butt, and for a moment had the "drop." But he couldn't grasp the trigger.

A quick movement by the policeman brought him into possession of the business end of the weapon. He fired and his man dropped into a basket of newly-washed clothes, a bullet through his heart.

2. What readers might be interested in this, or in some story based upon it?

VIENNA, Oct. 11.—A company has been formed by American financiers and physicians with the purpose to found an establishment for rejuvenescence by the Steinach method in Vienna.

The capital is $1,000,000.

3. Read through at least twice the following passage. Grasp clearly the scene described and the thoughts and emotions of the writer toward it. Then rewrite the subject matter in three forms adapted respectively to each of the three following groups:

1. School children under ten years of age;

2. Adult Americans who have never seen the ocean and have had no close acquaintance with immigrants;

3. Members of the United States Congress whom you wish to convince as to the desirability of admitting all immigrants freely to the United States.

Let me warn you that you are not expected to follow the wording of the original in any respect, save where it seems to serve your purposes.

When you have completed the three writings, go through the first one and see whether you have used words which ten-year-olds do not understand; then see whether you have used thoughts that are beyond them.

In checking through the third rewriting, addressed to Congressmen, take into consideration the probable prejudices and political opinions of both the Democrats and Republicans. See how well your draft meets these.

> We steamed out of the Clyde on Thursday night, and early on the Friday forenoon we took in our last batch of emigrants at Lough Foyle, in Ireland, and said farewell to Europe. The company was now complete and began to draw together by inscrutable magnetism upon the decks. There were Scots and Irish in plenty, a few Americans, a few English, a good handful of Scandinavians, a German or two, and one Russian; all now belonging for ten days to one small iron country on the deep.
>
> As I walked the deck and looked round upon my fellow-passengers, thus curiously assorted from all northern Europe, I began for the first time to understand the nature of emigration. Day by day throughout the passage, and thenceforward across all the States and on to the shores of the Pacific, this knowledge grew more clear and melancholy. Emigration, from a word of the most cheerful import, came to sound most dismally in my ear. There is nothing more agreeable to picture and nothing more pathetic to behold. The abstract idea, as conceived at home, is hopeful and adventurous. A young man, you fancy, scorning restraints and helpers, issues forth into life, that great battle, to fight for his own hand. The most pleasant stories of ambition, of difficulties overcome, and of ultimate success, are but as episodes to this great epic of self-help. The epic is composed of individual heroisms; it stands to them as the victorious war which subdued an empire stands to the personal act of bravery which spiked a single cannon and was adequately rewarded with a medal. For in emigration the young men enter direct and by the shipload on their heritage of work; empty continents swarm, as to the bo'sun's whistle, with industrious hands, and whole new empires are domesticated to the service of men.
>
> This is the closest picture, and is found, on trial, to consist mostly of embellishments. The more I saw of my fellow-passengers, the less I was tempted to the lyric note. Comparatively few of the men were below thirty; many were married, and

encumbered with families; not a few were already up in years; and this itself was out of tune with my imaginations, for the ideal emigrant should certainly be young. Again, I thought he should offer to the eye some bold type of humanity, with bluff or hawk-like features and the stamp of an eager and pushing disposition. Now those about me were for the most part quiet, orderly, obedient citizens, family men, broken by adversity, elderly youths who had failed to place themselves in life, and people who had seen better days. Mildness was the prevailing character; mild mirth and mild endurance. In a word, I was not taking part in an impetuous and conquering sally, such as swept over Mexico or Siberia, but found myself, like Marmion, "in the lost battle, borne down by the flying."

Laboring mankind had, in the last years and throughout Great Britain, sustained a prolonged and crushing series of defeats. I had heard vaguely of these reverses; of whole streets of houses standing deserted by the Tyne, the cellar-doors broken and removed for firewood; of homeless men loitering at the street-corners of Glasgow with their chests beside them; of closed factories, useless strikes, and starving girls. But I had never taken them home to me or represented these distresses livingly to my imagination. A turn of the market may be a calamity as disastrous as the French retreat from Moscow; but it hardly lends itself to lively treatment and makes a trifling figure in the morning papers. We may struggle as we please, but we are not born economists. The individual is more affected than the mass. It is by the scenic accidents and the appeal to the carnal eye for the most part we grasp the significance of tragedies.

Thus it was only now, when I found myself involved in the rout, that I began to appreciate how sharp had been the battle. We were a company of the rejected; the drunken, the incompetent, the weak, the prodigal, all who had been unable to prevail against circumstances in the one land, were now fleeing pitifully to another; and though one or two might succeed, all had already failed. We were a shipload of failures, the broken men of England. Yet it must not be supposed that these people exhibited depressions. The scene on the contrary was cheerful. Not a tear was shed on board the vessel. All were full of hope for the future, and showed an inclination to innocent gaiety. Some were heard to

sing, and all began to scrape acquaintance with small jests and ready laughter.

4. Point out in the following episode exactly what it is that might interest particularly each of the following readers:

1. An ex-private of the A. E. F.
2. A former captain of the A. E. F.
3. A New York society woman.
4. A native of Texas.
5. A tailor.
6. A man who hates militarism and things military.
7. A woman who despises society.

An American woman in France meets a commanding officer in the A. E. F. He is a perfect type of commander, six feet two, bright red hair, full of fine military snap, beloved of his men. He becomes greatly enamored of her and she adores him over there; but the affair goes no further till the war is over and they return to the United States.

He calls upon her in her home. She is "old New York," of good family, with excellent upbringing in conservative atmosphere but not snobbish nor wealthy. He appears in an atrocious overcoat, gaudy yellowish brown, huge sophomoric belt, an undersized derby hat cocked on one side of his head of fire, his visiting card is printed in smudgy ink with his town address in one corner. He comes from a small Texas town, has no idea of the elements of manners or social intercourse; a perfect military man of splendid character, but his training in life has been in another sphere than hers. She realizes *how much the little things rather than the big ones count in common life*.

Do the above exercise with great thoroughness. You may well spend twenty to fifty hours just in thinking about the kinds of people you must interest.

CHAPTER XV

MARKETS AND MARKETING

You have written a story which you feel to be as good as you can produce and interesting enough to appeal to a large group of magazine readers. You want to sell it at a fair price. How go about it!

The first thing to do is to put the story out in an attractive manuscript form. The impression it makes on the editor's eye counts, especially if the impression is bad. Therefore follow a few simple rules of neatness, such as these:

1. Typewrite all MSS. and keep carbon copies of them.
2. Use only one side of each sheet.
3. Put your full name and address in the upper left-hand corner of the first MS. page.
4. Number the pages in the upper right-hand corner.
5. Put some mark at the end of the story, to indicate to the reader that it is the end and that no pages follow. A cross or the word "End" will do.
6. Double-space or triple-space the typing. A single-spaced page is hard to read.
7. Enclose the full amount of return postage.
8. Send the MS. to the magazine and not to some individual on the editorial staff, unless you have been invited to do otherwise.
9. Do not write a long letter to the editor explaining how you came to write the story or why you know it is the finest thing produced since Kipling left India. Merely enclose a business-like statement indicating the story title, the length of the MS., the price you expect (whether "regular rates" or more or less), and which rights you are releasing. (On this point I shall speak later.)
10. If the MS. has been sent out a number of times and is noticeably frayed or dingy, run off a fresh copy. The psychological effect of a thumbed MS. is bad.

So much for the mere handling of your copy. Now for a harder and more vital question. *Where shall you send the story?*

It is disconcerting to watch the manoeuvres of many young writers in their efforts to "break in." I have seen some of them draw up a list of twenty or more magazines and proceed to send each and every story they write to each and every one of them in fixed serial order. Nothing could hurt one's reputation more than this, before that reputation has become established. Why? Because the chances are no more than one in ten that any particular story thus sent the rounds will fit the needs of any magazine on the list, and the editors will soon shake their hoary heads in despair when they see another MS. bobbing up from the same strenuous but unenlightened contributor. They may even fail to give it due consideration.

Every magazine aims to reach certain definite groups of readers or certain definite interests. Every magazine is therefore open to certain kinds of stories and no others. To send your stories, one and all, to any magazine without regard to their content is a waste of good postage stamps and the editor's patience.

All of which leads to an obvious and highly profitable rule.

Study the fiction market as closely and as persistently as a Wall Street broker studies the stock market.

Learn what each magazine is trying to do, what sort of people it is appealing to, and what kinds of stories it prefers.

Do not trust too much in any published article on this subject. The editors of magazines are changing from year to year, and so are the editorial policies. The fiction market is a shifting market even as the stock market is. The wise writer keeps his eye on it from day to day and does not tie himself down to any formula about the wants of any one magazine.

To carry on such a study, you must read the magazines regularly. Plainly you cannot spare time to read all of them from cover to cover. What you must do is to read some of the leading stories in every magazine of consequence every few months.

Keep a detailed memorandum of the kinds of stories you find in each magazine. As soon as you are sure what any one editor is preferring, send him something of the sort from your own pen. But not before!

Keep a memorandum of comments which editors may make on your stories. Do not expect many such comments, as few editors have time to go into detail on MSS. which they reject. And do not expect that all comments

will be very precise. Editors in a hurry often make rather general and even vague remarks which will not stand close analysis. Nevertheless, even such are well worth recording and inspecting. If they tell you little about your story, they often tell much about the editor, and that is quite important. After all, it is the editor who buys from you.

Do not be unduly discouraged by adverse opinions. These really mean little more than that your story does not fit the market which the particular editor is bent on satisfying. They mean nothing as to the suitability of your work for other markets. Furthermore, editors often make monumental blunders in gauging the fitness of a story for their own readers. Listen to the following instances collected by a newspaper reporter not long ago:

> George Meredith, as publisher's reader to a well-known London firm, gave an opinion emphatically against the acceptance of Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne*. The loss of this mistake has been estimated at $150,000 by the publishing firm, and presuming that they had issued her other novels, at half a million dollars. James Payn declined *John Inglesant*, as reader for Smith, Elder and Co. and it became a valuable literary property in the hands of Macmillan and Co. Edna Lyall's *We Two* was rejected by half a dozen publishers.
>
> A publisher's reader pronounced W. Clark Russell's *Wreck of the Grosvenor* a catalogue of ship's furniture. It is the boast of Hall Caine that no novel of his has been hawked from publishing house to publishing house. G. R. Sims records that a short story of his, "A Pleasant Evening," was declined by the *Family Herald*, *Chamber's Journal* and *All the Year Round*. Sir Rider Haggard's *Dawn* was declined by five or six leading English publishers.
>
> When Norman Macleod was editor of *Good Words*, he arranged with a popular novelist for a serial which, on reading, he found unsuitable. The publisher, Alexander Strahan, agreed in this verdict, and paid the forfeit of $2,500, returning the MS. to its author, Anthony Trollope.
>
> The late Mr. Arrowsmith, the famous publisher who scored such a triumph with *Called Back* and *Three Men in a Boat*, made one huge blunder in his publishing career. He received a manuscript from an unknown young man in India. It was some short stories which he wanted published in England. Mr. Arrowsmith thought the young man's tone rather conceited, and, being a trifle annoyed, refused to have anything to do with

Rudyard Kipling. To the day of his death, Mr. Arrowsmith always spoke of this as the one big mistake of his life.

Mr. Arrowsmith, as is now well known, was not alone in his misjudgment. Kipling went the rounds of the New York publishers with his precious sheaves, only to be told by some of the most famous of them that his material was too exotic, too fantastic, too everything else but popular with American readers. Many another author has had similar experiences.

The more original your work is, the more likely you are to suffer thus for some time during your novitiate. Just as in the vegetable market, the stock market and the real estate market, so in the story market; the buyers get into the habit of taking certain standardized commodities which "go" and of supposing that nothing else will meet with favor. The innovator has to break down this mental twist at his own expense.

SHALL YOU EMPLOY A LITERARY AGENT?

Ten years ago, there was much less reason for resorting to a literary agent than there is today. The rise of the motion picture has changed the situation materially. In the old days a writer had much to gain in dealing personally with editors. The mere interchange of letters was a great help in getting one's bearings in the story market. About all that the agent could do that was of special value was to take off the writer's hands the drudgery of the mailing list, the agony of drawing a stack of rejection slips, and the legitimate self-advertising that most writers have to indulge in. All this, to be sure, often proved well worth while, but it could not be counted as a great or an indispensable service.

All this is now changed. *The motion picture rights of stories having dramatic and pictorial value are worth from four to fifty times as much as the magazine rights. But it is much harder for the individual writer to secure a fair price or even fair treatment from many motion picture buyers. And the motion picture market is such a rapid one that the ordinary method of offering a manuscript by mail to all producers is altogether too slow as well as being unsafe. For this reason it is advisable to resort to a good agent as soon as you have begun selling stories containing even slight motion picture possibilities.*

While the motion picture industry has, in the past five years, made long strides in the direction of honor and decency, as well as efficiency, it still falls far short of the standards we find in most older businesses, barring only a few of the outstanding firms. Most of the shortcomings which many observers have complained about most bitterly can be traced to two facts:

one is the history of the industry, and the other is the peculiar way in which stories are utilized in making motion pictures. As for the first of these, I shall say little, for each advancing year makes it less important. Like most new and alluring opportunities, this industry attracted instantly a horde of adventurers and crooks such as the old Klondike and Cripple Creek once knew. Probably there never was a choicer collection of unmitigated scoundrels brought together in the space of a hundred acres than the movie promoters, the fake directors, the patent peddlers, and the self-confessed great actors who infested the hotels and offices around Times Square, New York, ten years ago. The hapless author who submitted his precious efforts to one of that crew was engaged in the exciting but unprofitable business of feeding sharks. Lucky for him if the sharks did not eat him alive in the process! Every form of ingenious dishonesty known to the devil was freely practised on the author in those days.

That crowd is no more. But many members of it still survive here and there, notably in the smaller and the weaker companies, and are just numerous and active enough to warrant taking every precaution against their wiles.

What these wiles are every writer should know. In the main they are wiles of stealing ideas and wiles of under-paying for such as have to be bought.

Not one short story or novel in a hundred is fit for straightforward translation into a motion picture. In an earlier lesson I have told you how great the differences are between the written and the pictured story. Turn back and reconsider them for a moment. You will then see how it is that *usually it is only one scene or one character or one tense dramatic moment in a written story that the motion picture producer values highly enough to pay money for. More than half of the ordinary written story is thrown away and new matter substituted which is suited to the screen.*

What is the effect of this? Do you not see that the unscrupulous buyer or the underling in the motion picture office who is not above stealing does not care for your whole story but only for one precious ingredient in it? And that it is appallingly easy for a clever fellow to steal that one ingredient and dress it up and camouflage it so completely that you might not recognize it when you saw it on the screen? This has been done many a time; I had it happen to me in 1913, and I have known several writers who have been through the same experience.

A wide-awake literary agent can do much to protect you against such knavery. He will come to know the crooked men in the business and keep

his MSS. away from them. And, to make doubly sure, he will take MSS. around for inspection personally, get receipts for them from the reader who passes on them, and in some cases will even go to the length of having every page of a valuable story witnessed and signed by a notary public. You, the writer, are not in a position to do all this. If you do not do it, you take risks out of all proportion to the small economy of being your own salesman. So I advise you, if your stories have any pictorial quality whatever, to place them all in the hands of an agent whose standing is of the highest. And be sure to investigate the agent! There are a number of people who claim to be literary agents and are doubtless honest folks, but not specially competent.

Literary agents follow two practices with their clients. Some of them insist upon a yearly contract with the author, whereby the latter binds himself to turn over his total output for the period to the agent. Others do not care for such a contract. They feel that they wish to be free to drop an unpromising or obnoxious author at any time and do not object to an author dropping them.

The regular commission charged is ten per cent. of all proceeds from the sale. You must understand that this applies not only to the first sale of a story to a magazine but also to all subsequent sales in book form, for play purposes, or to the motion picture producer. Taking everything into consideration, this commission is altogether fair.

Some of the shrewdest agents believe in selling a beginner's first few stories for any price they can get from the editor of a good publication. I advise you to acquiesce in this practice. In the long run, it is sound. The wise agent will be quick to detect the success of stories thus sold and will firmly advance the selling prices of your later contributions. There are, to be sure, some agents of low business ability who go on selling stories to the higher grade of magazines at absurdly low figures. I have records, submitted to me from time to time by former students, of some such persons who have sold for fifty dollars stories of average length to magazines whose ordinary minimum rate to professional authors is $250. This skates perilously close to downright dishonesty. If you have the misfortune to fall into the hands of such an agent, break loose as fast as you can.

There is no reliable rule you can hold your agent to in the matter of motion picture prices. At present the custom is to regard the motion picture rights of a story in a high grade magazine as worth *at least four times as much* as the magazine pays for first release rights. That is, it is worth this much if it is worth anything at all as a movie plot or idea. Should a

magazine pay you, for example, $250 for a story with movie values, you have a right to expect $1,000 for the movie rights.

If a magazine offers you much less than this for the assignment of motion picture rights, beware of dealing with that editor!

There are today three customs followed by different publishers with regard to motion picture rights. Some of them require you to assign to them all rights, magazine, book, dramatic, and motion picture, when you sell to them, but they agree to assign back to you without charge all these same rights except those of first magazine publication, whenever you request them to do so. There are many good legal reasons for this practice, and it is adopted today by the very best concerns. So long as you do not sell these secondary rights, the publishing concern holds them and, as you must readily see, protects them more securely than you can do against possible misappropriations. There are not many literary thieves who will dare to steal copyrighted stories from a great national magazine for motion picture or dramatic purposes.

A second custom is the opposite. A few publishers still buy only the magazine rights ("first release" or "first serial," as these are sometimes called). This procedure is perfectly fair, so far as the author is concerned, but it is going out of favor and probably will not survive much longer.

A third custom is that of requiring the assignment of all rights to the publisher but without any agreement to reassign motion picture or dramatic rights to the author. In some cases the publisher says nothing whatever as to these other rights when he purchases your story, and the result is that you are left wholly at his mercy, should your story prove valuable for the screen or stage. Unhappily there are a few large publishers enjoying national reputations which they little deserve who buy on this basis and, to put it quite bluntly, cheat unsuspecting authors out of their rights. I have collected evidences from authors that completely expose at least three such firms. Unfortunately the libel laws make it impossible for me to publish their names here, much as they deserve to have them made known. Most concerns using this general procedure do so more honestly, though with a degree of sharp dealing that leaves little to admire in them. They take over all rights with the agreement to pay the author a certain small amount in the event that they sell the secondary rights. This amount usually is much less than the publishers themselves receive for these rights. I have investigated some cases in which the authors received one or two hundred dollars for motion picture rights which brought the publishers thousands of dollars. Legally

there can be no redress for the author. He has sold with his eyes shut, and he must pay through the nose.

The moral of all this is

When you write a story, write as an artist. But when you sell it, sell as a business man.

Too many writers, even some who have been at the game a long time, are so fond of seeing their names in print that they sell at prices which, when measured in terms of the hours spent on their work, are far below the wage scale of street car conductors. This willingness to do coolie labor is one of the serious weaknesses of the writing profession. It is being combated by our best writers and by such organizations as the Authors' League. You should help in this cause. Have the same self-respect that any honest craftsman should. Believe that if a story is worth toiling over for a week or a month, it is worth an honest week's or month's pay. If you take this attitude and stick to it, even at the cost of missing a few early sales, you will not only benefit in the long run, but you will help many another author.

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Transcriber's Notes

A small number of changes have been made silently to spelling and punctuation to achieve consistency.

The sequences of asterisks (* * * * *) are assumed to represent elisions and have been altered to a fixed length.

[The end of *How to Write Stories* by Walter B. Pitkin]