



New Pocket Classics

Representative Short Stories



... and mounting the little mound of earth beside it, took off his hat, and slowly mopped his face with his handkerchief.

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PREFACE

The editors of this volume are fully aware of the many collections of short stories already in existence. Yet they have long felt the need of a collection which should present stories depicting the varying phases of American life, as well as a few foreign stories for purposes of comparison; and which should include not only narratives recognized as classics, but also some of the best stories from contemporary magazines. Only by the inclusion of such material as this do they consider it possible to arouse in the average student a dislike for exaggerative, badly constructed narratives and a corresponding appreciation for stories that are true miniatures of life.

For practical purposes these narratives have been grouped to illustrate recognized principles of short story writing. Any detailed technical treatment of the short story has been avoided, for the editors do not wish to inhibit the student's spirit of individual investigation. Introductory and explanatory notes have been omitted for the same reason.

The stories for this collection have been chosen from more than two thousand. They have been tested in the classroom repeatedly and successfully, for the varied interests to which they appeal, for their technical value, and for their power to stimulate thought. They should prove of permanent literary worth to the student and to the general reader.

A bibliography of writers on the short story has been added, and a list of good short stories has been suggested, in the hope that these may prove of ade-

¹ See Buck, Gertrude, and Morris, Elizabeth Woodbridge: A Course in Narrative Writing. Henry Holt and Company, N. Y.

quate guidance to the general reader, in the further

consideration of the short story.

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INTRODUCTION

SINCE the time of Poe and De Maupassant the short story has come more and more to be recognized as a distinct form of literature; to-day there exists a widespread interest in short narratives. Perhaps no other form of literature can better reflect our present, busy, urgent life, nor more vividly illumine its significant moments. The short story is no mere loosely woven tale, but a closely knit, finely finished narrative to be read at a single sitting; it is like a one act drama, with touches of description and exposition. This singleness of effect, this centering of our interest upon a single event, a single character, or a single scene, has been noted by Poe and later critics 1 as the distinguishing feature of the short story. In the true short story a single moment of life is seized upon and its full significance is swiftly revealed.

The short story may be discussed not only as a form of literature peculiarly adapted to reflect our modern life; it may also be studied from various other points of view: it may be viewed from an historical standpoint with an eye on its development from the early naïve tale; its effect on the emotions of the reader may be noted, and the story may be characterized as comic, pathetic or tragic. Finally, the short story may be studied as an organic whole composed of certain well-defined interdependent elements—the setting, the characters, the plot, and the theme—from any of which may be derived the chief interest of the

¹ Matthews, Brander: The Philosophy of the Short Story. Longmans, Green and Co., N. Y. 1901.

story.¹ It is from this point of view, with the structural elements in mind, that the short story is here discussed and the narratives in this volume are grouped.

A story may derive its chief interest from the setting; which comprises three elements, the time, the place, and the atmosphere, all of which are inseparable from one another as well as from the characters and from the plot. Often the mere announcement of the time and the scene of an action suggests at least a general situation from which a plot may be logically developed; as, for instance, a Virginia plantation during the Civil War, or Paris in 1870. Often the particular scene is the real starting point of the story. Stevenson, himself, says of "Merry Men," "There I began with a feeling of one of those islands of the West coast of Scotland, and I gradually developed the story to express the sentiment with which that coast affected me." ²

Atmosphere permeates every detail of the narrative of an author, who, in Stevenson's phrase, has experienced "that indescribable bite of the whole thing at a man's heart which is—or rather lies—at the bottom of a story." It emanates from every description, from the characters, from their very names, from all the action, and often from the title of the story.

In the opening paragraphs of "The Fall of the House of Usher," a scene of grim desolation is pic-

¹ For other groupings of the short story, see Esenwein, J. Berg: Writing the Short Story. Hinds, Noble and Eldredge, N. Y. 1909.

² Balfour, Graham: *Life of Stevenson*. Charles Scribner's Sons, N. Y. 1901. 2 vols. Vol. II, p. 169.

⁸ Stevenson, Robert Louis: Valima Letters; Letters and Mistellanies of Robert Louis Stevenson. Charles Scribner's Sons, N. Y. 1909. p. 238.

Poe, Edgar Allan: "The Fall of the House of Usher," p. 18.

Only in such an atmosphere as this, "which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall and the silent tarn," could there exist the frantically morbid Roderick and his sister, the Lady Madeleine, sick with some strange malady. Only in such an atmosphere of decay and gloom could there occur those terrible events which mark the fall of the House of Usher.

Again, the mention of Morris Mogilewsky 1 suggests the environment of the East Side, while the name of Harrison Randolph 2 brings to mind a picture of the aristocratic South. The difference in atmosphere is more distinctly felt when Morris says, "Teacher, yis ma'am,—I didn't to have no soap nor no perfumery, and my mama, she couldn't to buy none by the store; but, Teacher, I'm got something nice for you by present!"—and when Harrison Randolph says, "Mr. Lee had chosen to doubt his word, which to a gentleman was the final insult."

The atmosphere of a story is sometimes characterized as romantic or realistic, although it is difficult to draw the line of demarcation between these terms, for often in realistic stories appear romantic elements, and in romantic stories are frequently found realistic touches. Generally speaking, however, the atmosphere of a story in which life is pictured as we actually experience it in a city slum, in a mine, or in a manufacturing town, could be properly termed realistic; while that of a fairy story or a tale of adventure would tend toward the romantic. Yet whether the atmosphere be romantic or realistic, whether it be given through description or through dialect, it must always be "in its intention narrative"; it must always directly or indirectly further the action of the story.

¹ Kelly, Myra. "A Christmas Present for a Lady," p. 240.

² Dunbar, Paul Laurence: "The Intervention of Peter," p. 229.

Closely connected with environment and indispensable to the plot are the characters; in fact, the chief aim of many narratives is to reveal human nature. The means of characterization are many. An author may tell us directly what he thinks of a hero. Henry James, for instance, in picturing the character of the Prince, in "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie," says "Tall, fair, active, educated, amiable, simple, carrying so naturally his great name and pronouncing so kindly Lily's small one, the happy youth, if he was one of the most ancient of princes, was one of the most modern of Romans."

More often an author portrays character indirectly; by means of description, through action, through a person's estimate of himself or through another's estimate of the character.

Surely the following description of Tennessee's Partner suggests not only his quaint awkwardness but also the underlying seriousness and silent, inherent dignity of a man who could be loyal unto death. "For he was not, certainly, an imposing figure. Short and stout, with a square face sunburned into a preternatural redness, clad in a loose duck 'jumper,' and trousers streaked and splashed with red soil, his aspect under any circumstances would have been quaint, and was even now ridiculous. As he stooped to deposit at his feet a heavy carpet bag he was carrying, it became obvious, from partially developed legends and inscriptions, that the material with which his trousers had been patched had been originally intended for a less ambitious covering. Yet he advanced with great gravity, and after having shaken the hand of each person in the room with labored cordiality, he wiped his serious perplexed face on a red bandanna handkerthief, a shade lighter than his complexion, laid his

¹ James. Henry: "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie," p. 271.

powerful hand upon the table to steady himself and thus addressed the Judge:-"1

The loyalty and manly courage of Wee Willie Winkie 2 are impressed upon us in his every action before his rescue of Miss Allardyce, so that we are prepared for his final heroism.

It is chiefly through dialogue, through the conversation between the doctor's wife and Anna Mareea,3 that we learn not only of the old woman's complete isolation from the world but also of her romantic longing to see what lies beyond the mountain, and her fear lest this ideal should never be realized.

And the troublesome meddling of a spoiled American child, in Miss Singmaster's story,4 is humorously portrayed through the contrasting attitudes toward her of the scornful passengers and of her indulgent parents.

But no matter what method of portraiture is used, all character exposition must be "in its intention narrative," must be closely related to plot development; for, as Mr. James says, "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" 5 The moment people exist, there begins a struggle of some kind, at times between themselves and their environment, often between themselves and others, or between two sides of their own nature.

The plot, then, from which is frequently derived the chief interest of the story, cannot exist without characters to take part in the struggle, and is often closely connected with the atmosphere. Of all the

¹ Harte, Bret: "Tennessee's Partner," p. 3.

² Kipling, Rudyard: "Wee Willie Winkie," p. 252.

³ Tiffany, Esther: "Anna Mareea," p. 217.

⁴ Singmaster, Elsie: "The Steamer Child," p. 293.
⁵ James, Henry: "The Art of Fiction." In Specimens of Modern English Literary Criticism. The Macmillan Company. N. Y. 1907.

elements of a story, however, the plot is the most important; for it is the framework of the "conflict of forces," it is the very structure upon which the whole narrative is built. To work out the plot of a story is, then, to give in brief the main events that lead directly to the final outcome.

To enable the reader to understand what happens in the story, to comprehend the plot, there must usually be an explanation of what has taken place previously to the beginning of the main action; the situation must be made clear. This so-called "antecedent material" may be presented at the opening of the story, a method often followed by Mr. Kipling. More often the curiosity of the reader is whetted by a bit of dialogue or by the account of an incident, at the beginning of a narrative. Under such circumstances, the "antecedent material" is introduced after the story has begun; the "explanatory prologue" is inverted. An excellent illustration of the "inverted prologue" occurs in "The Sire de Malétroit's Door." 1 Not until some time after the unexpected welcome of Denis de Beaulieu by the venerable Sire de Malétroit do we fully understand the situation that makes the story possible—the discovery by her uncle of Blanche de Malétroit's attachment for a gallant young captain.

Again, bit by bit all through the narrative, more and more "antecedent material" may be suggested until not before the middle of the story, or, at times, toward the end, is the whole preliminary situation made clear. This last method of presenting "antecedent material" is subtle and difficult but exceedingly effective. In Kipling's "The Man Who Was," for instance, we are by degrees made to understand what had previously happened to an officer of Her Majesty's White Hussars; little by little, to our horrified

¹ Stevenson, Robert Louis: "The Sire de Malétroit's Door,"

amazement, is unfolded a tale of supreme suffering which took place before the opening of the story; only toward the end of the narrative do we fully grasp the barbaric treatment of the former splendid soldier, that has turned him into an abject being, the wreck of "The Man Who Was."

Since every story centers around a conflict of forces, there must be one event to begin the struggle. In Stevenson's "Markheim," for instance, the murder of the antiquary begins the story. After this event the struggle goes on to the point where one force is seen to be the indisputable victor; where, in the story just cited, Markheim's better nature begins to triumph over his inborn capacity for evil. This event or turning point in the narrative is called the climax. In "The Sire de Malétroit's Door," 1 the climax occurs where Blanche asks Denis to marry her, for after that point in the story, the reader feels assured of the hero's final victory. In "Tennessee's Partner" the climax occurs where his "Partner" vainly attempts to save Tennessee. Some critics term the culminating event, that point toward which every incident works, the climax of a narrative. The culminating point in "The Sire de Malétroit's Door" is Denis's declaration of love for Blanche de Malétroit. The culminating event in Bret Harte's story is the death of Tennessee's "Partner." Often in very short stories these two points, the turning and culminating points, coincide. Such is the case in "Our Lady's Juggler," 3 where the juggler is discovered performing tricks before the Virgin to do her honor. And in "England to America" the peculiar behavior of his English friends is first made comprehensible to the young American in the intensely dramatic moment when Lady Sherwood says, "No,

¹ Stevenson, Robert Louis: "The Sire de Malétroit's Door," p. 105.

² Harte, Bret: "Tennessee's Partner," p. 3.

France, Anatole: "Our Lady's Juggler," p. 72.

dear lad. You can never tell Chev, for he is gone." 1

The end of the story, the final outcome of the struggle, for which the whole narrative had its being, is of vital importance. For whether or not a child has been recognized as a valorous man in the making, or a boy has been irrevocably perjured, never again can life be what it was before: a real change has been effected in the lives of the characters; something has happened; the reader has been led to see the immediate, or even the remote consequences of a deed, the real outcome, the full significance of the whole story.

Another element inseparable from the setting, the characters, and the plot is the theme of the story, the underlying thought, the central idea, which is an expression or intimation of the author's belief concerning some universal problem, or his point of view toward a particular type of character or toward a particular action. In "The Birthmark," Hawthorne makes clear the tragic futility of any human endeavor to realize perfection. In the opening paragraphs of "The Man Who Was," Mr. Kipling unmistakably indicates the theme of his story, when he says, "Let it be clearly understood that the Russian is a delightful person till he tucks his shirt in." The particular narrative which follows is a forcible illustration of the idea, that the acquired charm of the Russian too often conceals a savage cruelty of nature.

Interest in the theme of a story may be quite subordinated to interest in character or in plot. In tales of mystery and adventure, like "The Gold Bug," or "The Sire de Malétroit's Door," the theme is incidental, is of such relative unimportance as to be for all practical purposes non-existent; the reader of such tales cares only "to know how the story will turn

¹ Montague, Margaret Prescott: "England to America," p. 396.

out." In "Miss Gunton of Poughkeepsie," the alert reader may, after careful consideration, discover a central idea in the narrative, that it is impossible, in points of view, to reconcile Americans and foreigners; but he is more likely to ponder over the contrasting qualities of Lily and the Prince.

In other stories, however, where the theme is of distinct importance, interest in it, in the characters and in the plot may be equally maintained throughout the narrative. In reading De Maupassant's "The Piece of String" we follow intently the events subsequent to Master Hauchecorne's trivial act, the picking up of a little piece of string, keenly alive to the old man's simplicity and helplessness. His pitiful end so deeply impresses us that we cannot fail to see the central idea of the story, the importance of a trifle in shaping a man's destiny.

The theme is indeed often so vital as to suggest the point of departure for a story. The thought that family traditions may rise and fall probably suggested to Selma Lagerlöf the point of departure for her story of "Uncle Reuben." In certain narratives which derive their chief interest from the theme, it is often explicitly stated at the beginning or at the end of a story. The custom of thus making the main idea obvious is frequently followed by Mr. Kipling. In "Thrown Away," he begins with the statement that the "sheltered life theory" of rearing a boy often leads to disaster, and tells the story as an illustration or a proof of his thesis. In other stories, especially in the more recent narratives, the underlying thought is often implied, is merely suggested. Some critics believe this method to be more artistic, and more effective in its subtle challenge to the intellect: the more imaginative reader is pleasurably thrilled with a sense

¹ Lagerlöf, Selma: "Uncle Reuben," p. 346.

of his own power when he discovers for himself the implied theme of a story. "The Best Bait for Mosquitos" would, perhaps, lose much of its force, were we directly told, at the end of the story, Mr. Canby's central idea, that a practical knowledge of the game, as well as mere theorizing, is needed for success in fishing and in politics.

There is yet another type of story in which the theme is of such supreme importance that interest in it quite overshadows interest in the characters or in the plot. A failure to grasp "the underlying meaning" of such a narrative results in a failure to understand the story itself; the narrative is wholly without meaning when the reader cannot comprehend the idea which the characters through their actions symbolize. It is often difficult for young students to appreciate stories of this kind. The philosophy in them at times transcends the experience of youth; and the narrative may seem so strange that not even interest in the action is aroused. For instance, the average student is mystified by Hawthorne's "The Minister's Black Veil." Only the more imaginative reader may discover at the end of the narrative the underlying meaning of the whole story, that the black veil of the minister symbolizes a mask of unrevealing expression which men assume to hide their thoughts and feelings. Many of Hawthorne's stories belong to this class, of what might be termed symbolic narratives.

Since many stories are but the concrete working out of a general thought, it follows that different narratives may center around the same general idea, while in the stories of one author may be found great diversity of theme. Although written from strikingly different points of view, "Tennessee's Partner" 2 and

¹ Canby, Henry Seidel: "The Best Bait for Mosquitos," p.

² Harte, Bret: "Tennessee's Partner," p. 3-