THE DEVELOPMENT

OF

THE ENGLISH NOVEL

BY

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TO

M. FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE

This Book

IS INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR

NOTE TO THE SEVENTH IMPRESSION

It is now five years and more since this little book on the novel was first printed. Some minor errors — inevitable where there are so many details — were corrected for the second impression in December, 1899. In the interim have come to my notice other mistakes, some of which are rather amusing. Mr. B., for example, of Richardson's *Pamela*, was twice misstyled Lord B.; and the "lone cottage" of Smollett's *Count Fathom* was converted into a robbers' cave. For permitting these and similar slips to stand so long, I now offer frank apology. They are corrected in this edition. In rereading the prophecy at the end of the book for the immediate future of the novel, I am surprised that it has come so near the truth. The estimate of Kipling has proved, doubtless, too enthusiastic; but the dominant note in recent fiction has been, as was anticipated, "a love of adventure and an exaltation of the strong man."

W. L. C.

YALE UNIVERSITY,
Feb. 20, 1905.

INTRODUCTION

THIS book aims to trace in outline the course of English fiction from Arthurian romance to Stevenson, and to indicate, especially in the earlier chapters, Continental sources and tributaries. I hope that the volume may be of service to the student as a preliminary to detailed investigation in special epochs; and of interest to the general reader, who may wish to follow some of the more important steps whereby a fascinating literary form has become what it is through modifications in structure and content.

The apparent law that has governed these changes is the same as is operative in all literary development: the principle of action and reaction in the ordinary acceptation of the terms. This law has a psychological basis. We are by nature both realists and idealists, delighting in the long run about equally in the representation of life somewhat as it is and as it is dreamed to be. There is accordingly no time in which art does not to some extent minister to both instincts of human nature. But in one period the ideal is in ascendency; in another the real. Why this is so we have not far to seek. Idealism in course of time falls into unendurable exorbitancies; realism likewise offends by its brutality and cynicism. And in either case there is a recoil, often accompanied, as

will be noted, by unreasonable criticism, even by parody and burlesque. The reaction of the public is taken advantage of by a man of letters; it is enforced by him and may be led by him. Fielding was such a man, and so was Thackeray. And if, as was true in these two cases, the leader is a man of genius, he can for a period do what he pleases with his public. Now what is the procedure of the man of letters who has assented to a reactionary creed? He reverts to some earlier form or method, and modifies and develops it; in the language of science, he varies the type. Not to go for illustration beyond the two novelists just cited, Fielding set the Spanish rogue story over against Richardson; and Thackeray professedly took Fielding as his model in his reaction against Dickens. Both were, according to their light, realists; but their works are different. No one would confound the authorship of 'Tom Jones' with that of 'Vanity Fair.' Why? Besides the strictly personal element, there are differences in literary antecedents and divergences in public taste. For realism, Fielding had behind him, for the most part, only picaresque fiction and the comedy of manners. Thackeray had behind him not only Fielding, but a line of succeeding novelists — romancers and realists. For example, between Fielding and Thackeray is Scott; and with what result? There is no history in 'Tom Jones'; if 'Vanity Fair' does not have a background in actual historical incident, it has at least the show of history. There is thus never a full return to the past; romance learns from realism; and realism learns from romance. In this way literature is always moving on, and to something that can never be predicted. In the

details of my work, in determining the antecedents of a writer and what he added that is new and original in form and content to the art of fiction, I have found that there are modes or processes of change and development best expressed in the terms that natural science has made familiar, — modification, variation, deviation, persistence, and transformation. These are perhaps only analogies. That the material of literary history can be treated with the exactness of science I have, after some experimenting, no disposition to maintain.

The terms 'romance' and 'novel,' which in themselves are a summary of the two conflicting aims in fiction, require at the outset brief historical and descriptive definition. The former is in English the older word, being in common use as early as the fourteenth century. Our writers then meant first of all by the romance a highly idealized verse-narrative of adventure or love translated from the French, that is, from a romance language; they also extended the term to similar stories derived from classic and other sources, or of their own invention. For a verse-narrative approaching closer to the manners of real life — its intrigues and jealousies, — the Provençal poets had employed the word *novas* (always plural); for a like narrative in prose, always short, Boccaccio and his contemporaries were using the cognate word *novella*. Of stories of this realistic content, many were written in English in the fourteenth century, but they were called tales, — a word of elastic connotation, which Chaucer made to comprehend nearly all the different kinds of verse-stories current in his time.

During the two centuries following Boccaccio the Italians continued to compose books of *novelle*, and in very great numbers. In the age of Elizabeth they came into English in shoals, and with them the word 'novel,' as applicable to either the translation or an imitation. It was a particularly felicitous make-believe designation, for it conveyed the notion that the incidents and the treatment were new. It however had a hard struggle to maintain itself, for the Elizabethans preferred to it the word 'history,' which they applied to all manner of fictions in verse and prose, as may be seen from such titles as 'The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet' and 'The History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.' This, too, was a happy designation, for it implied a pretended faithfulness to fact. Richardson and Fielding, after some vacillation, settled upon the word 'history' for their fictions, though they both refer to them as novels. From the invention of printing down to this time the word 'romance,' by which our mediæval writers denoted adventures in verse or in prose, had not been common in the titles and the prefaces of English fictions, though many romances had been written. But when in the last half of the eighteenth century wild and supernatural stories came into fashion, the word was often placed upon title-pages. At this time Clara Reeve, in an exceedingly pleasant group of dialogues, drew the line of distinction between the romance and the novel. She says in 'The Progress of Romance' (1785): —

> The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance, in lofty

and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend or to ourselves; and the perfection of it is to represent every scene in so easy and natural a manner and to make them appear so probable as to deceive us into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses of the persons in the story as if they were our own.

Scott was a disturbing element to the critic's classification, for he combined the novel and the romance as defined by Clara Reeve. What name shall the amalgamation bear? It was at this time that the word 'novel' became the generic term for English prose fiction. But while this is mainly true, our nomenclature continues somewhat uncertain. In a not very precise way the novel and the romance are still brought into an antithesis similar to Clara Reeve's. That prose-fiction which deals realistically with actual life is called, in criticism and conversation, preëminently the novel. That prose-fiction which deals with life in a false or a fantastic manner, or represents it in the setting of strange, improbable, or impossible adventures, or idealizes the virtues and the vices of human nature, is called romance.

The expression 'the English novel,' in common speech, means the novel written in Great Britain. For reasons that will appear very obvious, I shall regard the novel written in the United States as a constituent part of English fiction.

All dates placed in parentheses after novels are of publication. Where a novel has appeared as a serial and afterward as a whole the date of the latter pub-

lication is given, unless an express statement is made to the contrary. Such a date as 1871–72 for 'Middlemarch' means that the novel was published in parts during those years. Title-pages in most instances are of necessity much abridged. Immediately after the main text I have placed a list of twenty-five novels which will show the general progress of English fiction. This in turn is followed by bibliographical and other notes for the use of more advanced students. In both instances I have indicated recent editions available to those who do not have easy access to large libraries.

It would be impracticable to enumerate here the sources drawn upon for this volume. J. C. Dunlop's 'History of Prose Fiction' and Professor Walter Raleigh's 'English Novel' should be expressly mentioned, for, in guiding my reading down to Scott, they were of great aid. Though I cannot hope to have detached myself from opinions and estimates now prevailing, I have striven to gain a new standpoint; consulting to this end, from Scott onward, current reviews of novels as they were appearing. As so little has been attempted thus far in the history of the English novel, I have been able to present in outline considerable new material: the far-reaching influence of Spanish fiction from Fielding to Thackeray; the historical romance as an offshoot of the historical allegory; the relation of Richardson and Fielding to the drama; the beginnings of the Gothic romance in Smollett; and the immediate source of George Eliot's ethical formula. Access to the library of the British Museum has also enabled me to put the origin of the novel of letters in a new light. What has most im-

pressed me is the intimate connection between English and French fiction. This might be expected in the centuries immediately following the Norman Conquest. The relationship, however, is very close from Richardson to Hardy. So far as I have been able I have given organic treatment to my subject. The book is not a series of independent essays, but one essay, divided here and there for convenience.

While the volume has been passing through the press, I have received much aid from two students in the graduate department of the University, — Mr. A. H. Bartlett and Mr. J. M. Berdan. To Professor Charles Sears Baldwin, who has read all the proof-sheets, I am greatly indebted for unsparing criticism. I have also to thank Professor Henry A. Beers for the encouragement he has given me from the beginning of the work to its publication.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL

CHAPTER I

From Arthurian Romance to Richardson

1. *The Mediæval Romancers and Story-tellers*

Norman England came into possession of an immense body of fictitious narrative. Learned societies have edited and published some of it, but there still remain unedited hundreds of manuscripts, for a knowledge of which we are compelled to have recourse to imperfect bibliographies. The heroes of these tales were taken from Teutonic, Celtic, French, Classic, and Eastern tradition. It was especially around Charlemagne, Arthur, Alexander the Great, and the siege of Troy, that epic and mythological incident gathered, assuming the form of histories and biographies, now called cycles of romance. On their appearance first in French and then in English, these adventures were usually in verse, composed by minstrels and trouvères for recitation and reading at court and in the castles of the nobility; later they were turned into prose. First in popularity and first in interest to him who is seeking the antecedents of the modern novel are the legends of King Arthur and the Round

Table; the scope of which is represented, though not in its fulness, by Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King.' As early as 1139, there was circulating a curious hero-saga, written in Latin by Geoffrey of Monmouth and professing to be a translation from the Welsh. This famous 'History of the British Kings,' reflecting vaguely the struggles of Roman, Celt, and Saxon for supremacy in Britain, becomes in its later parts a splendid romance of Arthur's ancestry, marriage, coronation, conquests, and passage to Avallon to be healed of his wounds. This so-called 'Celtic matter' proved most attractive to the French and Anglo-Norman poets, who reared upon it a vast superstructure. Thus, as might be illustrated by many similar examples,[1] fiction freed itself from the restraint of fact, and the **romance** came into being. Long after this event had taken place, a certain Sir Thomas Malory made a graceful redaction of the stories about Arthur and his knights in a book entitled 'Morte Darthur' (1485), which is for the general reader the first easily accessible prose romance in English.

The Arthurian romances do not consist merely of improbable adventures. It is true that they sought to interest, and did interest, by a free employment of the marvellous, fierce encounters of knights, fights with giants and dragons, swords that would not out of their scabbards, and the enchantments of Merlin. But these romances were also analytical. In those brilliant assemblages of lords and ladies at the Norman and French courts of the twelfth century, conversation turned for subject to the nature of love, and the proper conduct of the lover toward his mis-

[1] 'Epic and Romance,' W. P. Ker, Lond. and N.Y., 1897.