

used to Mr. Sandburg's surprises. I believe, however, that there would not have been any surprises at all, if I had been wise enough to appreciate deeply in the beginning that Mr. Sandburg's poems are not an expression of eccentric individualism but that they are an honest attempt to express a richly

developed personality. That is why they are authentic poems. That is why Mr. Sandburg must discard rhyme and conscious metre, that is why he must use living "common" words. Mr. Sandburg's poems are Mr. Sandburg. They are powerful, live, brutal, gentle, and human—and so is he.

THE SEVERAL WAYS OF TELLING A STORY

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS

IN his later and more intrinsically psychological novels, Henry James "wound into his subject like a serpent", sometimes leaving his readers gasping in the coils; but in his letters he had no snake-like convolutions and said his say in straightforward fashion so directly, and in fact so emphatically, that there is no mistaking his meaning. In a letter of 1911 to a fellow novelist he remonstrated against the form in which his correspondent had cast his latest tale—"that accursed autobiographic form which puts a premium on the loose, the improvised, the cheap and the easy. Save in the fantastic and the romantic ('David Copperfield', 'Jane Eyre', that charming thing of Stevenson's with the bad title,—'Kidnapped') it has no authority, no persuasive or convincing force. Its grasp of reality isn't strong and disinterested. 'Robinson Crusoe', *e. g.*, isn't a novel at all."

Whether or not "Robinson Crusoe" is a novel at all is like the long debated question as to whether or not Pope is a poet at all, the answer to which was discovered to depend on our

private and personal definition of poetry. If poetry must be "simple, sensuous and passionate", then Pope is plainly not a poet, since he is no one of the three. But if poetry is largely and liberally defined, it will be found to include the verse of the author of "The Rape of the Lock", one of the most accomplished of craftsmen, a consummate artist in the management of metre. If Henry James could impose his definition of a novel upon the rest of us, whatever this definition might be, we should be compelled to deny to Defoe's masterpiece its rank among the great novels of the world. Fortunately for us, we are under no compulsion to abide by Henry James's contracting limitation. And we may find comfort in the words of a critic of a broader vision and a keener insight than the author of "Notes on Novelists".

In a letter which Sainte-Beuve wrote in 1860 to Champfleury he declared that in contradiction to the drama (which had long been cribbed, cabined, and confined by rigid rules),—

...the novel has remained untrammelled—so much the better for it. For all that, it has not lacked masterpieces. The novel is a vast field of experiment, which is open to all forms of genius, to all methods of approach. It is the epic of the future, probably the only epic which will be in accord hereafter with our modern customs. Let us not tie it up tightly; let us not theorize about it overmuch; let us not organize it. May every novelist on occasion set forth his ideas about it, of course, but may these expositions and apologies not deprive us of a single good novel that the author might compose while he was setting forth his theories. The best explanation that the artist can give is to keep on producing, to go forward and never to lag behind.

With all his reverence for the critical sagacity and the sensitive open-mindedness of Sainte-Beuve, Henry James would have found this a hard saying, more especially in his later years when he confessed that what most strongly attracted him to a subject was the difficulty of its treatment,—a point of view which was never taken by Defoe or Fielding or Thackeray, even if it might be held by Flaubert and the Goncourts. There is little profit in disputing Henry James's assertion that "Robinson Crusoe" "isn't a novel at all". Plainly this is a matter about which opinion is already made up against him. But there may be advantage in considering his general contention that the autobiographic form, the novel in the first person, has "no authority, no persuasive or convincing force", that "its grasp of reality isn't strong and disinterested", that it "puts a premium on the loose, the improvised, the cheap and the easy". Have these personal opinions any validity? What are the particular merits and demerits of the fictitious narrative, supposed to be set down by a central character in the series of adventures and experiences it chronicles? Is it necessarily inferior to the novel in the third person, told directly by the author himself, not hiding behind a mask and supposedly inspired by the epic

muse, who has revealed to him all the mysteries of motive and all the secrets of the human heart?

II

Perhaps it is unsafe to lay too much stress on the fact that the autobiographic form is probably earlier than any other. Story-telling is an ancient art, flourishing in the ages of savagery and barbarism; and uncivilized man is unblushingly boastful and shamelessly self-laudatory. He sees no reason why he should not vaunt his own valor and chant his own deeds of daring. "He was strong and well armed, but I overcame him in combat. I stood up against him; I smote him; I slew him. He fought bravely; yet I killed him. It was a noble fight, worthy to be sung by bards until the end of time; and for their benefit I tell the thing as it came to pass. He was a mighty man, and no coward; and now he lies with his mother earth, dead of the blows I dealt him. Alone I did it!" Thus it is that the heroes of Homer praise their own prowess and declare their own opinion of their rank as fighting men.

It must also be noted that in the earlier stages of artistic evolution, the art of narrative in the third person has not yet been developed. Monologue comes first; and then, after an interval, dialogue. The reciter of a tale informs us as to what he himself said and as to what the other man said, giving their several speeches in due sequence, each being allowed to express himself, in his own fashion and at such length as he may choose. There is little selection; there is almost no suppression of less significant utterances; and there is no effort to weave the whole into a direct and coherent discourse. Nor is this the method of primitive man only; it obtains today among simple folk;

and it is the sole means of describing an event even now available for children and for the uneducated. Listen to the chatter which falls on our ears when we are marooned in a crowd and note how "I said to her, says I" is instantly followed by "She says to me, says she".

The monologue—that is to say the autobiographic form—is apparently the original way of telling a tale; and it is only a little later, as the artistic conscience is quickened, that we arrive at alternating monologues,—that is, at elementary dialogue. And we must wait a long while before we arrive at orderly narration, properly proportioned.

But because the symmetrical and harmonious telling of a tale by a neutral narrator is a more mature method than the boldly individualistic self-revelation, it does not follow that this is necessarily better for all purposes. But it is better for some purposes. Even Henry James admitted that the autobiographic form was satisfactory in "the fantastic and the romantic", instancing "David Copperfield" and "Jane Eyre" and "Kidnapped" as examples of its appropriate employment. Charlotte Brontë's presentation of her plain and passionate heroine would lose a major part of its power if we did not see all the characters through the spectacles of the little governess; and Stevenson's story gains greatly "in authority, persuasive and convincing force" by the young hero's unconscious disclosure of his own idiosyncrasies.

"David Copperfield" may be companioned by "Henry Esmond", in so far at least as they are both autobiographies, profiting indisputably by that fact. It is evidence of Thackeray's artistry, of his instinct for the right way of doing a thing, that he made his blameless hero celebrate himself. Es-

mond's grasp of reality is strong even if it is not disinterested. But it is in "Barry Lyndon", with its superbly projected villain, that the advantages of the autobiographic form are most vigorously realized. Here is a scoundrel who boasts himself to be a fine fellow, who is our sole source of information about his deeds and misdeeds, yet who never imposes on us for a moment,—a feat of surpassing difficulty worthy in fact to stand beside Tartuffe to whom Molière has not permitted a single incriminatory aside. Thackeray told Lowell that when he had made Becky Sharp admire her strong young husband at the very moment when he was thrashing Lord Steyne and so bringing to the dust her edifice of intrigue, he laid down his pen and slapped his knee and said, "There's a stroke of genius!" He would have been justified in uttering the same remark after he had made Barry Lyndon proudly assert his wife would testify that he had never laid hands on her—except when he was in liquor. Here at least is one instance where the autobiographic form proves its ample possession of authority, persuasion, and convincing force,—in this case ampler than could be revealed by any other form.

"Robinson Crusoe" also would lose most of its directness, of its vitality, and of its perennial and universal fascination, if the mariner of York had not himself frankly set forth his struggles, his achievements, and his blundering failures. Transposed from the first person to the third, the record of these varied endeavors would be deprived of its appealing intimacy. There would be a shrouding veil interposed between the reader and the hero, who is not heroic beyond the capacity of any good man and true, who is not greatly superior to the average of humanity, but who defends himself as

best he can, setting his teeth and sturdily fighting for his life. What gives "Robinson Crusoe" its abiding quality is that it is a parable of mankind, akin to the "Pilgrim's Progress". Potentially, at least, we may, any of us, suffer shipwreck on a desolate island, where we may live for long years in solitude.

It is its autobiographic form which enhances its value and its validity as an apologue. As the mediæval "Everyman" is a morality play, so "Robinson Crusoe" is a morality story. It is moral, not only because Defoe always found it difficult to refrain from preaching, in season and out, but because his tale of adventure has transcended his intention and has become an allegory of man's life. Defoe builded better than he knew. He told his story according to the only method of narration which was compatible with this essential quality, and he showed plainly that the autobiographic form did not weaken his grasp of reality.

III

Robinson Crusoe and Jane Eyre, Barry Lyndon and Henry Esmond, may not be figures of heroic stature according to romantic standards, but they are ever the central and dominating personalities in the tales they severally tell. There are however many stories told in the first person, wherein the teller is not the outstanding figure, wherein he is little more than the disinterested recorder of the adventures of others, even if his narrative is flavored by his own individuality. Gil Blas, for example, is almost as frankly unheroic as were the voluble vagrants in the Spanish picaresque romances which served as the remote models for Le Sage's episodic sequence of satiric sketches. "Gil Blas" anticipated "Vanity Fair" in being "a novel without a

hero". Gil Blas is under no illusions as to himself or as to any other of the persons with whom he comes in contact in the course of his wanderings. He is a sharp-eyed observer of the panorama of human life, always present when anything interesting happens and yet keeping himself discreetly in the background, or at least in the middle distance. And the rich savor of the story is due to the presentation of its kaleidoscopic events through the medium of the detached, and more or less disenchanted, Gil Blas.

The "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is the best American example of the rambling picaresque romance; and it is a finer work of art than the "Adventures of Tom Sawyer", partly because Mark Twain, when he came to write the later tale, had discovered the value of his first-hand material, his memories of his own boyhood and his authentic knowledge of life up and down the Mississippi; and partly because he was inspired to let the vagabond son of the town drunkard make his own record of things seen. Huck is as shrewd and as keen-sighted as Gil Blas, even if he has deep down in him a moral sense unsuspected by himself, which was altogether lacking in Gil Blas. So it is that we are permitted to follow the Odyssey of the Mississippi, as it is unrolled before the gaze of an indigenous young American, who seems at first sight hopelessly unpromising as a narrator and who turns out to possess abundantly the vision needed for his task.

Mark Twain was more than once alive to the advantage of coloring his story by passing it through the prism of a personal narrator. "The Jumping Frog", for example, funny as it is in itself, is even funnier because it falls from the lips of the quaint bore who is apparently unconscious that

there is anything funny in it and who delays and dilutes it with matter-of-fact irrelevancies. In this case the putting of the story in the mouth of a fictitious character doubles our delight in it; but this reduplication of pleasure can be achieved only when the fictitious character is the one person who can tell the tale most effectively. To many readers it has always seemed that Thackeray was ill advised when he selected Arthur Pendennis to elucidate for us the sayings and doings of that most respectable family, the Newcomes. The device is awkward, since it diverts attention to itself. Pendennis could not tacitly claim to be inspired by the Muse; and he supplied information which could have come to him only by listening at the keyhole,—a misdeed of which we cannot but believe him to be incapable.

Kipling is more judicious in the half-dozen of his short stories which he has chosen to tell in the first person because he was a participant in the action, although never one of the leaders in it. By so doing he is able to give us the direct and immediate impression of a spectator who was on the spot at the time and who saw the whole incident from beginning to end, perhaps even himself lending a hand to bring about the climax. He adopts this method only when the story is itself simple, when it is a matter of action and reaction, when it is devoid of psychologic subtlety, and when he is sure that he can make his own presence as unobjectionable as that of Arthur Pendennis was obtrusive.

The same method is most skilfully employed by Poe in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the first detective story ever written and perhaps still the best; and it has been borrowed by most of those who have trod the trail blazed by Poe—notably by Sir Arthur

Conan Doyle. In Poe's two tales of mystery solved, the teller is anonymous; and in Doyle's many detective stories, he is an otherwise unimportant Doctor Watson. It is by means of this transmitting narrator, that Poe and Doyle contrive to convey clearly and sharply the impression made upon them by the swift and unerring deductions of Monsieur Dupin and of Sherlock Holmes. Here indeed Poe displays his more consummate artistry, in that his unnamed and unidentified "I" who puts us in possession of all the facts and who describes the feats of Monsieur Dupin, is represented as at first a little doubtful of Dupin's soundness of mind, whereas Doctor Watson is always abasing himself in an attitude of adoring admiration, which tends to detract from the reader's wonder at Sherlock Holmes's ultimate triumph over an apparently insuperable difficulty.

IV

When all is said, however, that can be said in favor of narration in the first person, it must be admitted that Henry James is right in thinking it inferior, more often than not, to narration in the third person, not by one of the characters of the novel but by the author himself. At least we can support this sweeping assertion by a consideration of the novels which have been accepted as undisputed masterpieces. In most of them the author himself holds the pen. Don Quixote and Tom Jones, Doctor Primrose and the Master of Ravenswood, Mr. Pickwick and Uncle Tom, Madame Bovary and Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Anna Karénina and Silas Lapham, Leatherstocking and Kim are not their own biographers. The deeds and the misdeeds of the creatures who start into life and who march in procession

across the pages of "Notre Dame de Paris" and "The Three Guardsmen", "Vanity Fair" and "The Scarlet Letter", "Smoke" and "The Tragic Muse", "Sapho" and "L'Assommoir" are registered not by themselves but by their several creators.

This way of telling a tale is the simplest of all; and for the immense majority of novels it is the most satisfactory. It has no creaking machinery to distract the reader's interest; it does not put any premium "on the loose, the improvised, the cheap and the easy"—although of course it does not forbid easy cheapness and loose improvisation. While we are reading a story told by the author himself, we do not ask any questions as to the source of his information. We know that he has created his characters; and we credit him with a complete understanding of their mental processes and of their moral standards. "The poet", so Sir Philip Sidney asserted more than three centuries ago, "never maketh any circles about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true what he writes. He citeth not authorities of other histories, but ever for his entry calleth the sweet Muses to inspire him a good invention." By "the poet" Sidney meant the epic poet, whose estate has now been inherited by the prose novelist.

Turgenev, perhaps the master craftsman of all the novelists of the nineteenth century, once bestowed upon a novel in the third person certain of the advantages of the tale told in the first person. In his beautifully composed story, "Smoke", he begins by making us acquainted with its hero; and then he presents to us all the other characters in succession as they appeared in the eyes of this hero, who perceives them as we apprehend the diversity of creatures we meet in real

life—changing his opinion about them as he comes to know them better, and as they inadvertently disclose characteristics which he had not at first suspected them of possessing. This was an ingenious way of keeping us guessing and of sustaining the interest by letting us find out for ourselves the key to all these other characters, who are only glimpsed momentarily when we first meet them and who slowly round themselves out until we see them at last for what they are.

This variant of the narrative in the third person was utilized by other novelists after the Russian story-teller had made evident its possibilities. Howells, for one, took over the formula of Turgenev in "The Coast of Bohemia"—although he abandoned it in the later chapters. Of course, this method is advisable in the construction of a few exceptional stories only; but as the author never calls our attention to the way in which he is telling his tale, the vast majority of his readers will not be aware of it and will not be annoyed if he does not persist in employing it to the end.

V

There is a third way of telling a story, which was widely popular in the eighteenth century and which went out of fashion long before the beginning of the twentieth, probably because of its indirectness and of its temptation toward repetition and redundancy. This is the epistolary method, the author himself not appearing in either the first person or the third, but letting the various characters reveal themselves in the letters they interchange. As the correspondents write immediately after the event and before they have time for second thought, the reader is likely to have opportunity to see the several situations from two or

three diverging points of view,—sometimes almost diametrically opposed, one to the other.

"Clarissa Harlowe" is the most famous of all epistolary romances. Once upon a time it drew tears from all sorts and conditions of women; but long, long ago the fountains were sealed. Richardson's massive masterpiece is now read by title only. It may still stand upon our five-foot shelves but solely to gather dust upon its uncut pages. It is one of the classics which everybody is supposed to praise and nobody is required to peruse. Today we are overmuch in a hurry, which disinclines us to toil over the interminable outpourings of the wronged heroine. We have become accustomed to a swifter narrative with a soul-searching analysis less tediously insisted upon. We may admit that "Clarissa" is indisputably one of the greatest of novels; its author could lay bare the secrets of a woman's heart when it was beating most tumultuously; but for our modern taste he performs this operation too cautiously and too lingeringly.

Fiction is a finer art today, as Howells used to insist,—although this does not imply that latter-day novelists are more richly endowed than their renowned predecessors. It is in its technique, in its processes, in its craftsmanship, that the art is finer, not in the insight and inspiration of its practitioners. We are bored by the laboriously protracted letters which we have to wade through to sympathize with the woes of Clarissa; and we are annoyed not a little by the clumsy insertion of irrelevant tales which interrupt the current of "Don Quixote" and "Tom Jones", the "Roman Comique" and the "Pickwick Papers".

Taste was changing even a hundred years ago when Scott was improvising

the "Waverley Novels". He did not take the task of story-telling over seriously; he spun his yarn as best he could from day to day, often not knowing how or where he was going to find material to bring it to an end. He was so close to the eighteenth century that he had no hesitation in beginning "Redgauntlet" in the epistolary form, only to decide when he had thus written the first of his three volumes that this was not the proper method, whereupon he dropped it without apology to finish the book in the third person narrative, which he could handle with a more rapid ease.

In so doing he anticipated Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who used a medley of letters and telegrams to make us believe in the existence of the non-existent Marjorie Daw, relapsing at last into simple narrative to bring his delightful tale to its unsuspected conclusion. Aldrich in his turn may have supplied a model to H. C. Bunner for his "A Letter and a Paragraph",—the single letter setting forth the ideal condition which its writer wilfully dreamed himself to occupy, and the curtly appended paragraph, cut from a newspaper, baldly recording his actual circumstances.

While the epistolary form is felt to be unfitted for pathos, it can still be bent to the purposes of humor,—or at least to the satiric treatment of a small group of contrasted characters entangled in a complication and strenuously misinterpreting one another's motives and desires. It is thus that it is used by Howells in "Letters Home", a story which failed to make any deep impression, perhaps because the reading public refused to be attracted by a tale told in correspondence. It is thus also that it was employed by Henry James in "A Bundle of Letters", one of the earlier short

stories in which he analyzed the misunderstandings natural enough where persons of different nationalities are brought into intimate contact.

VI

Closely akin to the letter is the diary, which may be classified as a letter written by a person to himself, to remind him later of his feelings and his thoughts, his words and his acts in the half-forgotten past. The poignancy of Goethe's "The Sorrows of Young Werther" is due in a measure to his own analysis of his situation set down from day to day as he becomes more and more involved in the sentimental complication from which he can release himself only by suicide. That he does kill himself Goethe has to tell us in a few final lines of plain narrative, since Werther could not himself supply us with his own last dying speech and confession.

Wilkie Collins was over fond of interspersing his narrative with passages from the journals of his characters and even from formal statements; and the result of his arbitrary artificiality is to disenchant his readers by the airless aridity of his method. Perhaps Collins's machinery was made more obvious because his tales of mystery were highly involved and unduly distended. The use of the diary, like the use of the letter, is fatiguing in proportion to the length of the tale,—and possibly also to its temper. That is to say that a tragic story can best be presented in straightforward fashion, whereas a comic story may even gain in effectiveness from the ingenuity of its mechanism. Aldrich's "Marjorie Daw" and Henry James's "A Bundle of Letters" profit by their employment of the epistolary form.

Many years ago H. C. Bunner and I collaborated in a short story called

"The Documents in the Case"—these documents being letters, telegrams, newspaper clippings, advertisements, play bills, and even pawntickets! There was absolutely no narrative; and yet, by the combination of these disparate communications, we were able to set before the reader a continuous action. Of course, this was only a stunt; the merit of our little effort was in such dexterity as we might display in our utilization of an unprecedented way of conveying information. The incidents were invented to be adjusted to the documents of different kinds which we impressed into service; and the characters were subordinated to the necessities of our enterprise. We tried to keep the reader wondering what we would do next,—or rather how we would do it, how we would find our profit in all sorts of unexpected instrumentalities. In a full-length novel this would have been a wearisome strain on the attention, and our readers would have deserted us long before the lovers were landed in the haven of matrimony.

Ours was a hazardous venture; and such measure of success as we may have attained must be ascribed chiefly to its brevity. "What seems hazardous, and is not," said de Retz, "is nearly always wise." In the long run, any parade of ingenuity, of invention for its own sake, is not wise, because it tends to focus the attention on the difficulty overcome, thus distracting interest from the story itself, from that portrayal of life and character which is ever the prime function of fiction. Whenever the story-teller compels us to consider his paraphernalia, he is likely to obscure his meaning. The best told tale is that which hides from us the art of the author,—which is told as it is because there is no other way in which it could be told so well.

VII

Besides the epistolary, the narrative, and the documentary methods there is one other which demands a briefer consideration. The very clever Frenchwoman who has disguised her identity behind the pen-name of "Gyp" is the author of many novels in dialogue, in which she has suppressed both description and analysis. She makes us know her characters only by what they say, informing us in infrequent asides and stage directions what they feel and what they think. They exist for the sake of talking; that is the reason of their being; and we must judge them solely by what they say. This may seem hazardous; but, if we may judge by the circulation of "Autour du Mariage" and its many sequels, Gyp was wise in doing as she did.

She was followed in France by Henri Lavedan and by a dozen or a

score of others. She was imitated in England by "F. Anstey" whose "Voces Populi" showed that he was as clever in his own way as Gyp was in hers. Rudyard Kipling, always keen in his appreciation of the possibilities of different forms of story-telling, once wrote a novel in dialogue, "The Story of the Gadsbys", which has a wider range and a solidier substance than Gyp or Lavedan had aspired to bestow on their satiric compositions. Conscious of its narrow limitations, Kipling has not of late returned to this form. It is a virtue of the novel in dialogue that it is exactly what it is here entitled; it is a novel and not a drama; it does not pretend to be a play; and therefore it is not to be classed with that bastard hybrid, the closet drama.

After all is said, it may be well for us to remind ourselves that "there are nine and sixty ways of constructing tribal lays, and every single one of them is right."

EFFICIENCY AND ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

BY JOHN CARL PARISH

IT has long seemed that the efficiency methods of the business man could be applied with profit to various other professions which are today highly inefficient. Particularly is this true of the profession of literature. If it be possible to systematize and bring up to high business standards the methods of collecting material and the daily functioning of writers of high-grade ability, there is hope of the literary

output assuming a place in the world equal in quality to the product of the expert business man. And if these principles enable the author to eliminate waste in production by arranging his working hours and methods on a scientific routine basis, there is an unlimited field for development. Possibly under those circumstances the profits might become sufficiently great—due to more rapid production—to at-