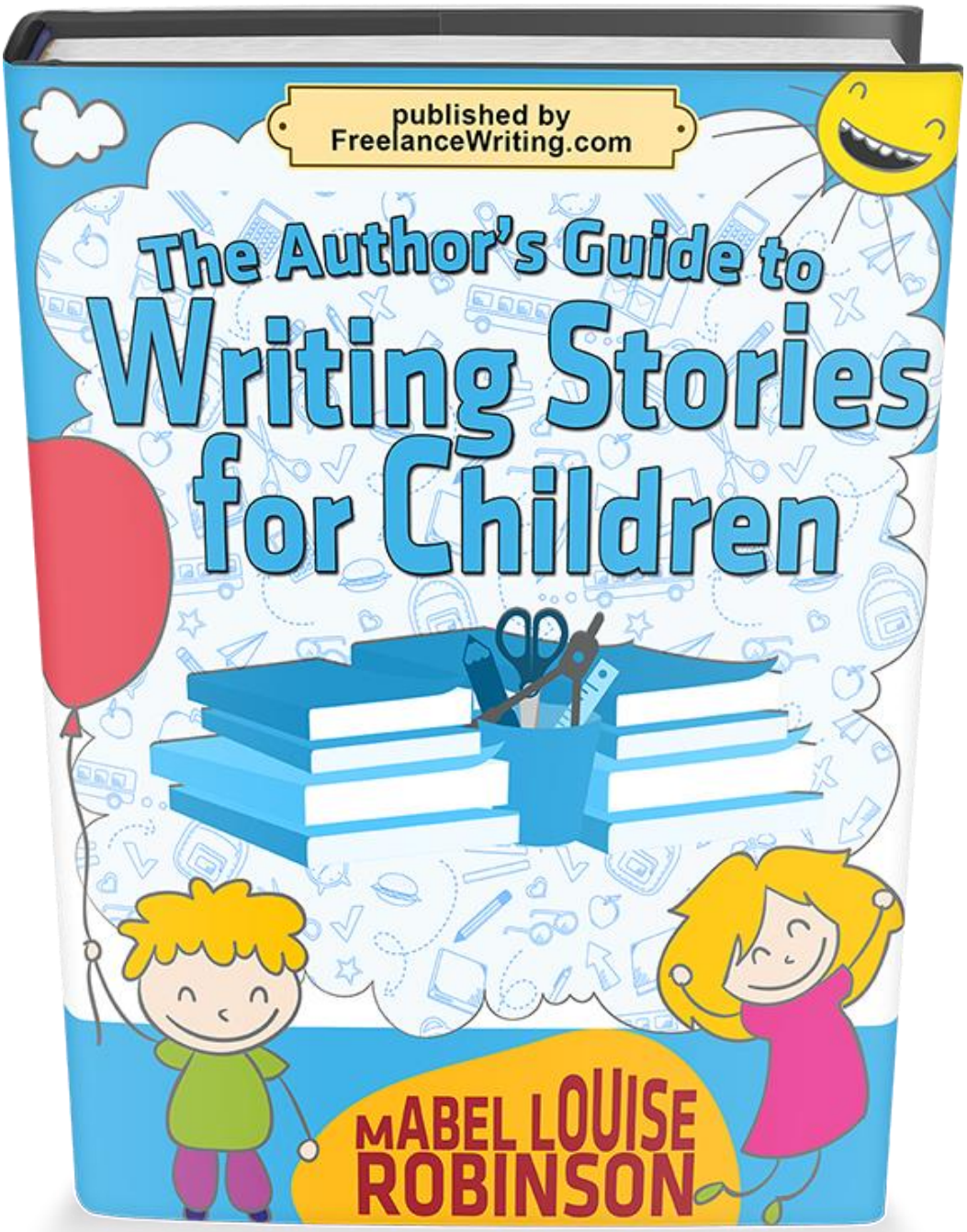

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CHAPTER 1: THE QUESTION OF WRITING FOR CHILDREN

Why a special technique?

THE question is frequently asked, "Why special training in story writing for children?" Behind the inquiry may lie either of two prevalent views. One theory holds that any person, though he lack the training, experience, and skill necessary for adult writing, is able to write children's stories; the other that anyone who knows enough to write for adults can, *ipso facto,* write for children. This classification obviously leaves no one who needs to consider special technique of writing for children. The results of the two theories appear in the output of juvenile literature. Those who do not know enough to write for adults produce a good deal of literature for children; those who can write for adults, with some notable exceptions, remain in that field through lack of interest in juvenile work or realization of inability to handle it.

The prevailing theories, however, do not take into account the people who are interested in children, who realize the difference in their psychology all along the line from early childhood through adolescence, and who feel therefore that this psychological difference demands differences in approach in writing. Writing for children becomes to this group a problem

in itself which cannot be solved by made-over adult technique. A child is not an adult, undersized physically and mentally; he is a complete human being who, on his way from childhood to maturity, has certain special needs entirely different from those of the adult. These needs reach over into his reading as elsewhere, and only the person who understands them can make adequate response.

Part of the business of growing up is acquiring experience. The child's opportunities for this acquisition are limited in many directions. Civilized man has always found some of his experience in his reading. He realizes that he has time to touch the world only in one spot at a time and in his eagerness to find out more about it, he turns to books. The child, still more limited and still more eager, follows suit. Consciously or unconsciously, he increases his experience every time he opens a book. The accretion may result in daydreams and the acquisition of a set of false standards, or it may have authentic value. Autobiography gives us plenty of evidence of both results. Since this is true, the book which gives the child experience outside of his personal limits should be carefully scrutinized in the making and in the using.

The answer, then, to the inquiry about the necessity for special technique in writing for children lies in the psychology of the children themselves. To

meet them on their own grounds we must approach them as equals, not as adults writing down to them. We must know their kind of dialogue, their demands upon action and climax, their grasp of plot complexity, their sort of humor, pathos, sentiment, and their requirements upon emphasis moral, educational, imaginative, or factual. We must know how to capture their interest and how to hold it. Above all, we must know their possibilities and use them; their limitations have long enough been the basis of their fiction.

Most teaching of adult fiction writing consists of the construction of a finished product, the story, with only an indirect analysis of the audience. Here the author is writing for people on his own level. But the problem of writing for young people is that of a relation between the book and the child. Constantly in writing for children, an awareness of the psychology of the child at his different stages of development is necessary. The writer of this book has attempted to use technique in establishing this relation between the book and the child.

Users of juvenile fiction, mothers, teachers, librarians, as well as writers of juvenile fiction, need to evaluate children's books for selection and employment. The critical viewpoint is essential to both groups. Whether technique is studied for the purpose of writing books or of selecting them, it forms the basis of critical standards which ought to call to account much

that is worthless or weak in juvenile fiction. From the point of view of the child himself, then, and his developing demands, the writer needs to know his audience and his means of reaching it.

Why write for children?

Writing for children from the point of view of the writer is an enormous amount of fun. Unlike the adult story which must sooner or later center around or reflect the effects of a love problem, the juvenile story is unlimited in the sources from which it may draw its material. Setting aside lovemaking, card playing, and golf, the pleasure giving activities of the adult are all open to the young. That is, the adult may put over on any sixteen-year-old, any experiences which were interesting, exciting, or amusing, and find that he has enhanced their fiction value. Motor boating, sailing, camping, exploring, keeping the wolf from the door, facing danger of any kind, making a success or failure of any kind, almost everything which partakes of active life can serve as the basis of a juvenile plot. Thus the author turns back to the children all the interest which he is getting out of life and all the interest which he would like to get. And he may pick and choose his material from such endless sources that his pen ought never to run dry.

Writing for children with the reader as the point of consideration is even more satisfactory. Your book will not be skimmed over to be sent back to the library or shoved into a bookcase where it will collect dust; it will not be forgotten a few days after it is read. If your book is worth publication—and unfortunately a large proportion of juveniles is not—it will be read and reread, thought about, made a model of action, developed into an influence potent enough to make modern psychologists question the value of allowing day-dreaming children to read.

Writing for children with the publisher in mind is still another point. Its place in the considering survey of the beginner is often foremost. But as a matter of fact nobody wants to write without the prospect of seeing the result in print. If there is no demand for his work when he has it done, he finds little stimulus for further effort. The first situation which the prospective writer of juveniles faces is contradictory in its encouragement and discouragement. The short story is likely to be the object of the beginner's earliest effort. But he finds when he gets his story ready to send out to magazines that curiously few of them are waiting to receive it. While in the last twenty years short story magazines for adults have increased until only a newsstand can keep track of them, the children's magazines have remained practically static. *The Youths' Companion* and *St. Nicholas* remain imperishable from one generation to the next. *Wide Awake,*

Chatterbox in magazine form, and *The Nursery* have disappeared. Now and then a women's magazine makes a half-hearted attempt to publish one juvenile a month, but the existence of the page is precarious.

With the organization of boys through Scout movements, and their increasing demands for outdoor information and stories, magazines for boys have sprung up. The girls, following along slowly in active interests, are gradually receiving some attention from editors; but their magazines are as yet negligible. Newspaper syndicates offer bedtime stories for very little children, and church and Sunday school papers publish with or without payment—the difference is slight— stories suitable for their readers. On the whole, the magazine field for juvenile writing is cramped as to its size and restricted as to the quality of the stories which may thrive in it.

If, however, the reward for the stories proves large in proportion to their scarcity, the writer who is interested in children's stories may still feel that he can afford to give them his time. The scarcity exists unfortunately only in the demand; the supply is overwhelming. Editors of children's magazines when they send back your manuscripts with the regretful statement that they are overstocked are usually speaking the literal truth. And since they rarely find occasion to raise their standards, they even more rarely raise

their prices. The writer who receives $150 dollars for a story may consider himself near the maximum; the writer who receives $50 does not need to be told that he is near the minimum, but he at least sees himself in print which is no end of stimulus to the beginner.

One is, nevertheless, inclined to look beyond to the time when he is no longer a beginner. What then? "Try adult stories," advised a magazine editor. "We can pay you three times as much for one."

"But why should you?" protested the author. "Not one of your adult readers is going to remember your highest-priced story two weeks. Only the children really care for their stories."

"They don't buy the magazines and they don't advertise,"—two sufficiently clear reasons even for an impractical author who is interested in children.

But now for the encouraging side of the situation. The very qualities which make children our best audience make them our largest buyers. Because children will read their books over and over until any parent considers the bookcase an infallible resource for rainy days and convalescence, because they are moved to live the lives of their heroes and must, therefore, have constant recourse to sources, because books are about the only thing that

will amuse a child and at the same time keep him quiet, the juvenile book is not only a profitable seller but a constant one. Some publisher has said that a good juvenile is equivalent to an old age pension for its author. The life of a book for adults, no matter how popular it may be, is rarely over a year. The life of the juvenile goes on from generation to generation. In such wise do the children reward the author who will stand by them! Inevitably much of the output is worthless. If the ground is rich enough to produce such a rapid development of crops, it is bound to bear some weeds. But the field of juvenile book writing offers on the whole an encouraging outlook for the producer.

Moreover even the least literary of parents finds it expedient to have his child own his books. Libraries are not always convenient; the story must be where it can be reached in time of need. A well-filled bookshelf is insurance of peace as well as of profit. As active in its growth as the magazine has been static, the field for children's books has expanded amazingly in the last twenty years.

Children's Week devoted to advertising, reviewing, and selling their books rounds up, once a year at least, the books and their buyers in a way that is profitable for both. Christmas season exhibits of children's books in the public libraries have helped children and their parents to get acquainted

with books and make a leisurely choice of them as they rarely can in book shops. Where a couple decades ago a child's book was both scarce and expensive, the market is now flooded with stories to suit every taste

Does this line of demarcation between the two parts of the juvenile field, the short story and the book, then, outlaw the short story writer from participation in the work which he finds to his taste? Not at all! On the contrary, it reveals to him prospects for his work which are most beguiling.

As we point out in the section on chapters, the juvenile book in its structure is a series of short stories, each of which forms a chapter. These chapters are strung like beads on the strong wire of a unifying interest, but each one, in order to hold the interest of the child, must be more or less of a complete incident within itself. The juvenile book is a series of stories in chapters bound together by a thread of unity in the form of a solution of a problem. To illustrate by the book *Forest Castaways,* by Frederick Orin Bartlett, a tale of two boys lost in the Maine woods in winter: In the Robinson Crusoe struggle for existence, the boys have many separate adventures forming different chapters, each fairly complete in its own problem and solution; the whole series is bound together by the solution of the large problem of how to get the boys out of the woods.

The young reader likes to meet a situation which piques his curiosity in a new chapter, and leaves him at the end of the chapter feeling that something has been accomplished, enough at any rate to permit him to close the book and do his lessons. Yet in the back of his mind must remain the gnawing desire about "how it is coming out," enough at any rate to prevent his forgetting to finish the book.

Thus the writer of the successful juvenile book uses constantly the technique of the short story. Through it he learns to make cross sections of life, sharp and clear, and to present them without the verbosity which characterizes so many books. He sees separate situations in their entirety and calls them chapters. He is aware of their value to each other and to the general effect of his book. He sees where to emphasize, where to withdraw, how to strengthen his product. His understanding of the one form is fundamental to his success with the other, and to the flexibility of his general craft.

The child's own choice of books

Since every writer wants his work to be read, the question is frequently asked, "Is there any way of telling what kind of stories children at different ages like best?" Immediately we realize that the child's choice of a book is

limited by at least two factors. First, the actual number of books within his reach may be bounded by the shelves of an under-stocked, poor library; second, his parents may choose all of his books for him. Yet even within these limitations, the child will exercise his own choice. Quite possibly many books which he might care for are forever shut away from him; but among those which are presented to him by the library or by his relatives, he will soon indicate the ones which really belong to him by choice. Flabby covers, frayed edges, and freedom from dust are their earmarks. His choice may be reduced to the minimum, but that minimum is important to him and to the inquiring writer.

Its importance to the child himself is something which he finds difficult to explain and adults find difficult to understand. When we finish reading a book we sometimes put it on the shelf with the mental reservation that we will read it again later. But we rarely do! The child makes his book no such promises. He does return to it times unnumbered, rereading it with all of his original appreciation mellowed into ripe critical measuring of details such as is rarely reached by the adult. He ponders about his story after he has read it, applies the theme to himself, compares himself with the hero, remodels himself to fit the standards of the hero, and identifies himself with the hero. Obviously it becomes essential to know all the details procurable about this hero-self. "Who of us anticipates the uninterrupted

hour which will permit a third perusal of a book? Is any book by any author as important to us now as our favorite book was to us in childhood? To these earliest years of childhood, we know, belongs permanence of impressions. If the book, then, is important not only to the child's conscious satisfaction, but to the unconscious life which is forming permanent patterns for him, we realize to a degree the significance of his choice of his book.

The child's own analysis of why he likes or dislikes a book is so imperfect as to be almost useless to the inquiring adult; not a surprising state of affairs to anyone who has tried to get a reasonable criticism from people much older in years and experience. Even the twelve-year-old girl will only laugh as at some delicious joke with her younger self if you ask her why in the world she liked the Araminta and Arabella stories when she was five. Our principal testimony must be drawn from ourselves, and some of us are too hopelessly grown away from our child-selves to be of any service. If, however, you can remember your favorite child book, if you are fortunate enough to be able to get a copy of it, and if you can reread it with a spirit sensitive to the old impressions, you may be able to judge something of the reason for its fascination. Then ask your friends about the books they liked, watch them take the plunge into the long quiet depths; note too the rejuvenation as they emerge!

With the help of records of careful analysis from students of juvenile literature and with the illumination of our modern psychology on the developing instincts and mental activity of children, a partial key to the child's tastes seems to be provided us.

Adults are usually egoists enough to be tremendously interested in themselves as they were, or think they were in childhood. Usually the image which they look back upon is so modified by the kind of child which maturity has led them to believe desirable that neither their relatives nor their contemporaries would recognize the product. A man's wife tells about what a fireeater her husband was when a child. We, who grew up with him, always knew him as "Mamma's apron string." The innate conviction of unusualness which lies within each human breast in regard to himself while young, leads him always to respond with interest to any interrogation about the books he liked to read. Even the dullest of conversationalists will be good for a monologue about his early likes and dislikes. Witness how a letter to the *New York Tribune* about juvenile books brought forth columns of replies filled with details about the tastes of readers. It cannot but be suspected sometimes that the adult slightly over-estimates the infallibility of his early selection. For our own part, we were satisfied with anything from Chatterboxes to old Godey's magazines in the attic, and we never shall

know whether we could have joined the elite who claimed *Alice in Wonderland* as their own at the age of six, because we never happened upon her until we were grown up. Nor, for the same reason, do we know whether we should have fallen for "the Elsie books." As for *Pilgrim's Progress,* it belonged to the college required reading shelf. The average adult, however, has immutable opinions about his own juvenile literature. The only exception we have known is a woman, now well known for wide and interesting activities, who after listening to an enthusiastic discussion of a group of friends remarked wistfully, "How extraordinary to be able to remember so well the books you liked! We were so busy on the ranch that I never seem to have read any." It is nevertheless a question with illuminating possibilities to put to your friends and to yourself: What books did you like best when you were a child? Then, why did you like them?

To check up observation of adults, one should have at hand as many children of different ages as possible. Not only will they give us the modern reaction to many of the books of our generation, but they will contribute new tendencies of choice and new authors who satisfy it.

In the first place we might as well face the fact that the ordinary child does not care a rap for good writing. Certain phrases hold him sometimes, like Kipling's inimitable combinations of words, but usually he lacks

discrimination almost entirely. Yet—and this is why we must take quality into consideration—good writing has an effect on the child, and slowly he evolves an unconscious standard by which he recognizes cheap, stale, commonplace writing, no matter how thrilling the plot. The recognition may be tardy, so tardy that it does not become a part of his equipment until he is grown, but it brings with it the same kind of assurance that stamps the speech of the child who has always heard good English. With equal inevitability an early diet of trash ruins his intellectual digestion for good food later on.

"Easy reading but bunk," a boy characterized a popular series for me. A criticism as exact as it was terse, and a matter of congratulation to him that at thirteen he had discrimination enough to make it.

Another characteristic of the child-reader, and this applies to the well-grown youngster too, is that he must have illustrations. Nor is this desire indicative of lack of intelligence. On the contrary, it is a grasp for something to develop his experience. Consider how little he has seen on which his imagination can build. We, as adults, are critical of illustrations and often wish they might be omitted, because we have stored up images of our own which we consider superior to those of the artist. The child must take his ready-made for a while.

Dealers in books for children testify that not only do children select books by appraising their interest through the illustrations, but that adults, when unacquainted with the book in question for the child, will run through the illustrations, decide whether the story "looks interesting," and thus determine the purchase. On the shoulders, therefore, of the illustrators, lies some of the burden of responsibility for the acquisition of a book. But for the future battered and beloved raggedness we must depend upon the author.

The point arises, why does a boy prefer the *Dick Deadeye* type of story to *Little Lord Fauntleroy?* Not that children do not like the young lord. The sense of inferiority put over on them by their ever-guiding elders rejoices in the skill with which Fauntleroy leads his grandfather around by the nose. But for real sport, the half-grown boy keeps a detective or an adventure story where he can read it and his mother cannot.

The key to this taste, and to much of the choice of both boys and girls, lies again in the conviction of the young that they are under and behind their elders, that sense of inferiority which, if it clings to the adult, makes him unhappy and inhibits his activities. The escape for the child is by reading stories wherein victory flavors life. He identifies himself with the victor,

whether a person, a group, an army, a tribe, or a gang, and with this identification he attains vicarious success, through their glory. The child is compensating for something which a conventional life does not supply him. That the girls lean toward love stories is probably because their idea of victory is the capture of a husband. Possibly with new ideals of society, new concepts of victory will disturb their pattern.

If the athletic adventurous girl revolts against "Patty books" and "Isabel books" and "Peggy books" wherein the heroine passes through long series of girlish adventures and ends in the arms of a clean-cut college-bred man, she is thrown back on boys' stories. Even *Merrylips* in order to have real adventures had to be located in the Roundhead days and to be disguised as a boy; whereby, of course, she had boys' adventures.

The child always has the forward look. He likes to see himself older, more interesting, more beautiful, more successful. The trouble with us is that we forget how far forward children look. High school girls have already outgrown school stories; they may read sufficiently thrilling college stories, but they usually prefer the book that deals with girls old enough to be free from the shackles of education. Practically the only interests of such young persons supplied by books are those of the love story. Thus the high-school

girl through her reading steps over into a day-dreaming life peopled by herself and the surrounding lovers.

We say that children pass through certain phases. So they do, a phase usually indicating that certain developing instincts are prominent now in their growth and are dominating the interests of the child. As well try to ignore gravity as those instincts. As well try to repress a bubbling spring as to repress them. Right here comes an opportunity for vicarious experience through books which, if wisely selected, will help the youngster to tide over phases difficult to him and exasperating to his elders. If he can work off by proxy some of the demands of the harassing instincts which are temporarily stirring up and complicating life for him, he and his elders have cause for gratitude.

To illustrate a few of the instincts from the development of which the youngster is dominated by certain interests and activities: Every family passes through a period of trial when the boys and often the girls feel their oats and prance about neighing, heels up, ready for a fight. The illustration used by E. L. Thorndike to show the effect of the instinct of pugnacity is the boys' classic, *Tom Sawyer:*

"You're a fighting liar and dasn't take it up."

"Aw, take a walk!"

"Say, if you give me much more of your sass I'll take
and bounce a rock off your head."
"Oh, of course you will."
"Well, I will."

"Well, why don't you do it then? What do you keep saying you will for? Why don't you do it? It's because you're afraid."

"I ain't afraid."
"You are."
"I ain't."
"You are."

Another pause and more eyeing and sidling around each other. Presently they were shoulder to shoulder. Tom said:

"Get away from here."
"Go away yourself."
"I won't."
"I won't either."

So they stood, each with a foot placed at an angle as a brace and both shoving with might and main, and glowering at each other with hate. But neither could get an advantage. After struggling till both were hot and flushed, each relaxed his strain with watchful caution, and Tom said:

"You're a coward and a pup. I'll tell my big brother on you, and he can thrash you with his little finger, and I'll make him do it, too."

"What do I care for your big brother? I've got a brother that's bigger than he is—and what's more, he can throw him over the fence, too." (Both brothers were imaginary.)

"That's a lie."

"Your saying so don't make it so."

Tom drew a line in the dust with his big toe and said:

"I dare you to step over that, and I'll lick you till you can't stand up. Anybody that'll take a dare will steal sheep."

The new boy stepped over promptly and said:

"Now you said you'd do it, let's see you do it."

"Don't you crowd me, now; you better look out."

"Well, you said you'd do it—why don't you do it?"

"By jingo! for two cents I would."

The new boy took two broad coppers out of his pocket and held them out with derision. Tom struck them to the ground. In an instant both boys were rolling and tumbling in the dirt, gripped together like cats; and for the space of a minute they tugged and tore at each other's hair and clothes, punched and scratched each other's noses, and covered themselves with dust and glory. Presently the confusion took form and through the fog of battle Tom appeared, seated astride the new boy, and pounding him with his fists.

"Holler 'nuff!" said he.

The boy only struggled to free himself. He was crying, mainly from rage.

"Holler 'nuff!"—and the pounding went on.

At last the stranger got out a smothered " 'nuff!" and Tom let him up and said:

"Now that'll learn you. Better look out who you're fooling with next time."

A girl who was going through the pugnacious stage became enamored of *The Last of the Mohicans*. Each night she recited to a sleepy sister the hair-raising adventures of the latest chapter, rousing herself to such a state of excitement that she could not sleep for hours. In her games she scalped nearly all of the neighbors and her parents despaired of her development into a peaceful citizen of society. At present the same young warrior has built herself a bungalow in the country, reads no magazine but *The House Beautiful,* and gives serious attention to no books but furniture and mail-order catalogues. The *Last of the Mohicans* seems successfully to have delivered her of her fighting demon.

Another instinct which usually seizes upon the growing child and makes its presence felt in a passing phase is the hunting instinct. "The presence of this tendency in man's life," says Thorndike, "under the conditions of

civilized life gets him little food and much trouble. There being no wild animals to pursue, catch and torment into submission or death, household pets, young and timid children, or even aunts, governesses or nursemaids, if sufficiently yielding, provoke the response from the young." Books of game and capture, tales of the woods and of boy trapper heroes, become of deep interest for a while.

So closely allied to the hunting instinct that it usually appears along with it, is the instinct for teasing, tormenting, bullying. It accounts frequently for a boy's interest in hazing stories, slave-driving and persecution, and unless he is of brutal nature, it will usually disappear along that path.

Pleasurable thrills through play on the instinct of fear are secured from perils between covers. Strange reptiles, ferocious animals, dark caverns, even ghosts, serve to titillate emotion up to the desired point. Beyond that it sometimes plunges unexpectedly into torture, and the child becomes haunted by the source of his earlier pleasure stimulus.

Constructiveness, sometimes reinforced by the desire for self-expression, gains an audience especially among boys for books which give in meticulous detail the description and directions of the hero's constructive activity. An architect told me that his boyhood's delight was a series of books following

the detailed operations of boy carpenters, boy engineers, boy inventors. *Robinson Crusoe* and *Swiss Family Robinson* have been the inspiration of many a young castaway's imaginary struggles against nature; they furnish the favorite theme of much of the modern adventure stuff.

This, then, is the general situation for juvenile writing with respect to the authors and the readers. The stories themselves, whether long or short, divide into certain large groups: adventure (stories; fairy stories; nature and animal stories; school, college, and home stories. Naturally these varieties are not hard and fast, but slip over into each other so that any story may be two or three kinds at once. A school story may be full of adventure and include an animal complication as well. But taken as general types, these groups help to show us the possibilities of plot combination which interest children. We shall therefore begin our study of the structure of the juvenile story by analyzing some of the characteristic* common to each of these groups.

CHAPTER 2: SOURCES OF MATERIAL

THE sources and resources of material for juvenile writing have not begun to be sounded by writers. The limitations of subjects suitable for children's stories are taken for granted without enough consultation of the children. Children are classified too much as children with no subheadings of their different varieties. They are, as a matter of fact, much less homogeneous than adults. Adults reach a certain mental age, the majority of them clustering about a point which is equivalent in intelligence to a sixteen-year-old child. Since large groups of them are employed in the same kind of work—business or housekeeping or what not—and live through much the same kind of experiences, the pattern of the sort of book which they will like to read is not difficult to design. Yet a great variety of books is written for adults because of the recognized variety of "tastes." Tastes usually are somewhat influenced by the amount of intelligence. Above and below the median of the great normal group are great groups of more and less intelligent people making specialized demands on writers. Writers are always ready to recognize and respond to these demands when adults make them. And publishers, when they foresee a fair sale, will encourage the writer. A modern book store does not have a department of books for adults and one of books for children. It has its spaces divided into every variety of

books under the sun for adults with a corner, a counter, or a small room devoted to children's books. Boys' books and girls' books face each other on opposite shelves after the dancing school arrangement. Why not separate the shelves for men's books and women's books? One would say that the interests of the boy and the girl have much more in common than those of the man and the woman, a fact which perhaps accounts for the patronage of boys' shelves by girls. For obvious reasons the boys, as well as many of the girls, let the girls' shelves alone.

Another classification besides sex of juvenile stories is based on age; stories for girls from eight to ten, for boys from twelve to fourteen, etc. The chronological age counts for little with the child. His "taste" is as varied and as much a matter of intelligence and environment as that of the adult. There seems little more reason for calling a book by the general term a *juvenile* than for terming another an *adult*.

Writers for children need really be limited to no greater degree than writers for adults. Young people are ready to be interested in anything.

They have not reached the age of intolerance of ideas or action; their curiosity has not been sated in any direction; they are likely to be bored by only one thing, the "typical juvenile." Any kind of material, which interests

the author and which arises from his real knowledge and experience, is fairly sure of an audience. Suppose it has not been used before as juvenile material? So much the better. The old fields have been cultivated until they are barren. We need writers who will plant in fresh soil. Our yearly yield of books is too much like run-out crops now.

Writers provide enormous quantities of stories for children who cannot read yet or who have just begun to read. Even at this stage of development children have variety in tastes in reading. In general, this variety receives consideration; the books are of every quality, and they cover considerable ground. Between the time of baby books and adult books, children reach the peak of their accumulation of varied interests. Before they are adolescent they have often exhausted the resources of juvenile books pronounced suitable for their age. Their interests have not yet begun to narrow down but they can find nothing on which to feed them. They turn to the kind of adult books which are written in the fairly simple prose suitable for the average adult mind, and discover there the romantic theme. The single substitute for the numbers of engrossing youthful interests, it takes on an emphasis and importance which is not balanced by experience. The child is plunged into it too soon, deprived too early of childhood. Little by little the vitality of other interests yields to undernourishment, and they disappear or become reduced to vestigial remains.

A well-meaning friend who had been recommending *Dr. Tarn O'Shanter* to two girls, twelve and thirteen years old, asked them what they were reading now. "We have just finished *The Sheik,"* they replied, "and we were much interested to compare it to *One."* It seems a little doubtful if the adventures of the lady in *The Sheik* would serve to give a twelve-year old much of a grasp on the reality of life. And the older person wonders just what sort of alchemy goes on in this limited young mind to turn the problems of *One* into a twelve-year old treasure. At any rate, we cannot wonder at the distorted kind of sophistication which we complain characterizes our young girls. Nor can we blame them for choosing our adult books unless we provide them with their own kind.

One should never write down to young people. From the four-year-old to the fourteen-year-old, they all resent it. This resentment lies behind and partly accounts for the gesture of disdain which expresses itself in the older child's adoption of adult books. The writer needs to bear in mind that he is dealing here with a mind which is close to the maturity of the average grown person, with an experience which is undeveloped and with interests which are as yet unlimited in their scope and insatiable in their demands. The potentialities of material for such an audience ought to stimulate any author.

It is apparent that the person who wishes to write successfully for children has to secure for himself material which has freshness, reality, and significance. Such material can come only from the children themselves. Consequently some people are better equipped and have more resources to draw from than others. This by no means implies that the person who is surrounded by the most children is most likely to divine their possibilities and to make use of them. Any mother of six or teacher of forty will not even trouble to refute such an idea. The effect of the too abundant supply is obvious. On the other hand, the man or woman segregated by business and living conditions to an environment which never admits of a child will, even with the equipment of liking for children, find reality hard to capture.

One source of material is open to everyone, his own childhood. As an unmodified source, it has its dangers. Most of us need a little later experience with other children to interpret soundly our young selves. We like to think that we were the exception. From Charles Lamb on, childhood furnishes its elders with recollections rather more hallowed and sentimental than they are exact. "We see ourselves through the glasses of maturity and read into ourselves the things of maturity which never were at the age of five. On the other hand, much which was really important then, like dirt and noise, we have erased from our grown-up minds. Even if we

cannot quite rid ourselves of the fantasy of our poetic and sensitive childhood, it will be valuable for us as writers to discover what children are really like. "We may still cherish our conviction that we were the exception to the rule, the different child; but, for the good of our fiction, we ought to find out that nowadays children aren't like that!

This means that, even with detailed and voluminous recollections of our own childhood at hand, a checking up process of immediate observation is necessary. The sources of such observation are plentiful enough to bring help even to the most segregated of persons. Children are pretty nearly everywhere. In the city the parks are full of them accompanied by nurses who are only too pleased to have the attention of their charges engaged by someone else. In the country children are about as difficult to observe as daisies. Schools are everywhere. A visitor may drop in and from a seat in the corner refresh his memory to a considerable extent and maybe get some new points. How many of us remember just how school looked, and felt, and smelled? Or what a queer thing it really was to crowd our legs under a little desk all day and to give evidence of our entire accord with proceedings by clasping our hands on the edge if it. How many of us remember how closely the other children were crowded to us, physically or mentally, or just how we felt about the monarchical system represented by teacher? Curious recollections will float to the surface after a school visit, and the

chances are that they will be, at their first appearance anyway, undecorated by imagination. Schools and colleges are always open to visitors. A call is likely to be worth something.

Children at play are as nearly free from repressions as you will be likely to find them. From the baby to the college ball player, play acts as a divining rod, and characteristics spring out at its touch. Fortunately children will play anywhere and everywhere under all circumstances. Even the business person who lives in a single room in a spinster boarding house can see children at play on Sunday morning in the park.

The way we usually spoil our observations of children is, of course, to interpret them through our adult point of view. Then they are no longer of any use in juvenile fiction. For instance, a child of eight the other day came home from school, looked at the outside of the apartment house where she lived, decided she could not stand it another minute, borrowed a nickel from the elevator boy and went off down the subway. By ten o'clock at night the whole police force was out after her. About ten-thirty she wandered into the house, elate and unsubdued, her pocket full of trophies in the way of peanuts and powder puffs. The natural reaction of the adult is anger (always greater because it follows relief) culminating in punishment. The writer can leave such reactions to those to whom by nature they belong. He

has no parental responsibilities. His business is to see how the child herself felt about her break for freedom. Why did she behave so? How does she feel about it now?

Any observation is likely to be affected by emotion. The emotion may clarify it or may cloud it. Suppose we like a person; we give him the benefit of that kindly feeling in our interpretation of his actions; suppose we dislike a person; we again color our judgments by that hatred. Suppose we are wholly indifferent; we are not likely to observe him enough to make his action a matter of moment. The last is the most dangerous state for the writer to find himself in. He may like one child and he may dislike another, and yet they will both be grist to his mill. But if he has only indifference behind his observation, the image will never get beyond its focus on the retina of his eye. The adult with the discerning eye, the tolerant mind open to conviction, and the feeling of friendliness and interest toward children, is not likely to lack for material. His only difficulty will be selection from abundance.

More frequently than we might like to admit, our own adult experiences furnish excellent material for juvenile stories. Adventures out of doors, in travel, at home, experiences with wild animals, or with our own dogs or horses, human relations, all kinds of sport or recreation, many varieties of

adult problems in living,—any of this material will usually adapt itself to such a form as will interest young people. Not as the experience of the writer, however, but as the experience of the youthful hero or heroine of the story. This source of material is especially valuable to the author. He knows it as he knows no other story stuff, and he finds, the more he uses it, the more it drives him into fresh activity to augment his resources. The state of experiencing is much more healthful for the author than the state of having experienced.

History offers itself as a source of material for juvenile writing both as fiction and as fact. Hendrik von Loon has opened up and cultivated a whole new field in historical writing. Through the uniqueness and completeness of the pair of tools with which he works his field, he remains in sole possession of it at present. But though few people are gifted with a power to present facts clearly and entertainingly both by words and by drawings, Mr. von Loon's success in reaching and capturing his readers is bound to induce other writers to try his methods. The scope of the work is large and its need is great. It may breed us a generation of lovers of history yet.

The fiction side of history material has heretofore been its only side to interest most children. History is action and youth likes action. History develops itself along simple and large themes—at least by the time they

become history, they are simple and large. Primitive life is very comprehensible to the child. The pioneer life is the kind he would live if he had his choice. Clear motives, rapid action, actual accomplishment, emphasis on courage, daring, resourcefulness, all these components of historic fiction make for a whole which has a strong appeal to the youthful mind. If the main character is a young person like Merrylips in Beulah Dix's story of the Roundhead days, the problem becomes vital. The reader identified with the characters' lives through the periods of the past, and doubtless gets much more pleasure out of it than its real participants felt. At present a book in the class in Juvenile "Writing is being plotted around the adventures of a boy with his wonderful white horse in the days of the Ohio pioneers. Every boy likes a good horse and a plucky boy. The adventures of the pair, placed in an environment which offers every danger from Indians to rattlesnakes, have the double potentialities of good fiction and of a lasting picture of early pioneer life.

The sources of material for special kinds of stories are dealt with in the following chapters. In general, the writer may depend on his own childhood, on his observation of children, and on his own experiences adapted to children. His limitations in choice of material are slight, his potential subjects are numerous and as yet largely undeveloped.

CHAPTER 3: ADVENTURE STORIES

THE term adventure story, like a blanket-clause, is intended to cover a number of different things. Almost any good story, fairy, school, or animal, is likely to contain an adventure of some kind. Pure adventure seems to connotate a departure from protected environment into a direct struggle with the unknown and the difficult. The adventure story is the earliest, most primitive type of narrative. The Old Testament, any group of myths or folk lore stories, the *Odyssey,* all early narratives are adventurous, as a reflection of early life when so much of the world was unknown, and struggle with animals, human beings, or forces of nature made a large part of existence. *Robinson Crusoe* was perhaps the first successful realistic treatment of adventure for people no longer concerned with primitive struggle. Though various story elements entered, it was predominantly pure adventure.

For such stories the demand will never cease. Both boys and girls want them. The girls, so far, have to take their adventures twice vicariously, first by identifying themselves with the story character, and then by imagining themselves as boys. But the modern girl is beginning to have adventures of her own. When she reaches the stage of development where boys will read

about her adventures, then she may no longer concern herself about equal rights. At present many girls use only the part of the library catalogue devoted to "Books For Boys."

The writer of adventure stories has unlimited sources from which to draw his plots. If we consider for a moment the events which have given us as adults the most excitement, the most fun, the most fertile basis for stories which we like to tell about ourselves, we shall see that almost all of those events might conceivably have happened to a youngster. In fact, everything connected with our play life, sailboat, motor boat, fishing, camping, etc., with the accompanying difficulties into which they always get us, might perfectly well be put over on to the boy or the girl with enhanced value. We as adults might be expected to know how to deal with the situation, but the inexperienced young person gives an opportunity for highly increased interest.

For example, the writer was caught out in a storm in her motor boat, the engine went dead, and she with her crew was cast ashore on an island where they had to stay until the wind went down. The incident furnished excitement enough to the adult participants, but put over on to fourteen-year-old Betsey and ten-year-old Benjie of the story *All By Ourselves,* it made a breathtaking chapter for the children. Again, the writer during the

summer sleeps out under the trees in a Gloucester hammock. Porcupines climb the trees, skunks stroll down the wall, squirrels and birds become almost too neighborly, and even the deer come up to make observations now and then. This material became the basis for the stories about Little Lucia, who breaks her leg and is obliged to spend six weeks lying still in the Gloucester hammock. The experiences transferred to the four-year-old are entirely plausible and become heightened immeasurably by the youth of the heroine.

Thus the adult may not only draw upon his past experience for material for juvenile adventure material, but he would do well to go out for some fresh impressions. The demand for further Little Lucia stories, for instance, required of the author a camping trip. However, one usually meets such requirements with alacrity.

If the writer has not actually experienced the adventure of his story, he should know about it in all its details before he attempts to tell it. Some of these particulars he can easily imagine, because he has a background of adventuring, others he gets by hearsay evidence. The value of the testimony depends upon the veracity and narrative power of the relator. The writer must feel the experience himself before he can make it vivid to his reader.

Often a beginner who submits a particularly tepid story will give, as a final refutation to the criticism, the statement that the story is true, every word of it. Usually that is precisely what is the matter with it. A wide difference lies between using material which you know, and true stories. A true story may spread over too much time, may include too many people, may lack dramatic climax, may have every fault which a short story should avoid. But it may contain the nucleus of a story which the skillful writer develops into something that the adventurer himself might never recognize.

A source of adventure stories which is renewed for the writer day by day is the newspaper. For example, an account appeared of the rescue of two men who had gone duck shooting in scooters off Long Island and who had been lost in a blizzard. For one day the newspaper reader had the suspense of the search, for the next the dramatic climax of the rescue.

Another day one reads about Pocco Cosmo who dressed in proper equipment for the "West, and started out; his companions deserted him, and the "Lost" notices caught him.

Under these lost notices appeared one day the following: "Lost—A little old black Teddy bear, of no intrinsic value but invaluable because the constant companion of her little mother; probably dropped on Joralemon Street,

Brooklyn, or in Borough Hall Station of subway, about 3.30 Wednesday afternoon. 'Inky' wore a blue plaid dress." Herein lie *The Adventures of Inky,* or the story of the little mother's search for "Inky," or any other plot which the item suggests and which would interest little children.

Another story for little children suggests itself in the youngster who left his mother's side in a Brooklyn butcher shop, parked his kiddy-car at the subway entrance, and went on an exploration trip in the subway. When the police found him, he was doing City Hall Square.

The following headlines suggest pure adventure to the older boy. "Wounded Veteran Makes Rich Gold Strike in Indian Shrine." "Canadian, Down On His Luck, Blasts Open Heavy Pay Streak in Hills Near Ottawa And Prospectors Stampede For New Klondike."

The discerning reader acquires a sheaf of such clippings which may prove their value when drought and famine set in.

In the adventure story the emphasis is on action. Yet since this action is determined by the kind of character which the hero possesses, a certain amount of characterization is essential to arrive at reality of action. Here the beginner is likely to waver. Character must be expressed by action.

Action is determined by character. The old problem of the egg and the hen! Applied to writing the solution is not difficult. The writer must know his hero thoroughly before he attempts to give him to the reader. But the author need not tell all he knows. Behind the action which he plans for the hero, lies knowledge of why the hero does it. If that understanding is clear enough in the writer's mind, it cannot escape the written word. The boy dominates his adventures; the reader knows his hero through the active characterization of the author.

Just as good characterization is essential as a motivation of realistic action, so a vivid setting localizes the action, differentiates it, gives it the individuality which places the story apart from other stories of adventure. But here as in the characterization, no space can be afforded for pure description. The reader wants to get on with the action and he will only hurdle descriptive paragraphs. The setting, if it is an interesting one, is bound to be felt by the reader through the hero's reaction to it. The hero does not have to sit down and admire the hills in order to make us see them; he has only to climb them. We do not need to be told that the desert sands are hot if we know their effect on the hero's feet as he trudges through them. In the midst of a shipwreck we do not wish to be held up for a description of the stormy waves; we realize them sufficiently if we see

them through the terrified eyes of the hero who is half-blinded and suffocated as he tries to steer through them.

Here, as in characterization, the setting needs to be clear in every detail in the mind of the author. High lights can be selected only when they stand out in relief. The effect of multiplicity of detail upon the brain of the writer should be not to swamp it but to give it a basis of choice.

An incident alone, if it has sufficient content and interest, may serve as a short adventure story. A boy runs into some immediate danger, by his sagacity or wit conceives a way out of it, and proceeds to deliver himself from it. Such a combination of circumstances, without any complication or special theme, may still serve to hold the reader by its rapidity of action, its demand on certain admirable qualities, like courage or self-reliance, or by its originality.

To the great group of boys who are destined by mediocre intelligence or less to find life a monotonous routine of incomprehensible lessons or of a dull job, the outlet of natural boy-adventurousness has largely been in the past through the cheap so-called dime novel. The setting of these old adventure stories has been in the Wild West where the boy has come in contact with highway robbers, kidnappers, Indians, gold miners, etc. The stories always

dealt with unreality, but reality itself had nothing to offer in the way of interest to these boy readers. Whether the vicarious satisfaction which they gained compensated for the loss of any possible chance of recognition of reality is the same question which we meet today.

The modern boy, however, does not even have to learn to read well enough to get his wild adventures. For a dime, he may sit in a comfortable seat and watch the proceedings go on before his eyes. The moving picture does not even demand the use of his imagination. A pair of eyes is all he needs. The modern boy knows from the newspapers that the wildest of the West has passed. But he soon realizes from the movies that the world has not been unduly tamed. So long as enough reality of setting is supplied to allow the boy to identify himself with the events, he, as well as his elders, is satisfied with the situation.

The effect of the movies on the quality of adventure story which corresponds to them is evident. The game is tied between them on the score of speed and lack of veracity. These stories, however, are probably less numerous than in the past. Whether that is an encouraging sign is questionable. The libraries, with their modern oversight of juvenile books, refuse to circulate them and the price nowadays is usually rather more than

that of several movies. The demand therefore may be lessened while the supply continues via the screen.

The use of unreality as a basis for adventure fiction is not confined to the rather hopeless group of cheap stories. A comparison of two modern books for boys illustrates the two schools of fiction, one based on the possible, the other on the highly imaginative. In both books the material is well handled.

The first book, *Two Boys in a Gyrocar,* by Kenneth Brown, is the story of how a car, made by two boys, crossed Russia and Europe, went round the world, and got in ahead of a German and a French car, meantime rescuing a Russian Princess. Here are the elements of adventure, mechanics, patriotism, racing, brigands, and love.

The second story, *Forest Castaways,* by Frederick Orin Bartlett, is the story of two boys lost in the Maine woods in winter, their struggles for existence in the deserted camp which they found, and their final return to safety with the help of a mysterious stranger whose problem is solved with theirs. Here are the elements of adventure, camp life, woodcraft, courage, and devotion to friends.

The first story deals very plausibly with an impossible combination of circumstances, the second equally plausibly with an entirely possible situation. The chances for exciting adventure in the Maine woods in winter are equal to those of almost any real location. They cannot, of course, compete with those which arise purely from the imagination. A fairy story, labeled such, is a fair proposition. Nobody is expected to believe it and anyway boys will not read it. But an adventure story so skillfully handled as to confuse the immature mind about its actual possibilities in real life, takes unfair advantage of the young reader. He is likely to have some unhappy and perhaps serious experiences before he finds out that life is not like that.

The Boy Scout movement has opened up a prolific source of adventure material in the last decade. Much of the writing might have been done by the boy scouts themselves. The Girl Scout series are equally crude and unfinished. This group of scout stories, however, serves the desirable purpose of focusing the attention of boys and girls on outdoor sports and local resources. Read by the same class of children who were, in earlier days, patrons of the Wild West novel, they react with a much more wholesome effect on the readers. The general outdoors movement is likely to go on. There is room here for some good writing.

Every new movement, every new invention, every fresh social upheaval or physical cataclysm, offers adventure plots. But events need not be revolutionizing in order to furnish adventure story material. The ordinary occurrences of our day, if they had taken place with just that slight difference of procedure which a good imagination can supply, offer endless variety and entertainment. Again, the proof is to be found in the daily newspaper. The college composition exercise which demands a daily theme has the advantage of training the student into a habit of alertness for theme subjects. This exercise requiring the construction of an adventure plot suggested by the happenings of each day would go far to open up for the writer the resources of daily life.

Since the adventure story is used in this book as the basis of the chapters on structure, further detail in regard to it will be unnecessary here.

CHAPTER 4: FAIRY TALES

ALMOST any issue of a child's magazine has at least one fairy tale; each Christmas the counters of the bookshops are piled with gorgeously illustrated books of fairy stories; nearly always in my writing class, some students will choose the fairy story as the kind best fitted for their medium of thought.

Before one decides to write more fairy stories it might be well to look over those which already exist in our literature. What do they contribute to the credit side or to the debit side of literature for children? Put aside for a moment the immediate and invariable explanation of their value, "They cultivate the imagination of the child." We can discuss that point later.

The form of the fairy tale has justified for it a high place on the credit side. The influence of stories of the "once upon a time" beginning is permanent. The dignity and beauty of diction in the old sagas and fairy tales give them value aside from their content. Consider, for example, Grimm's tale called, *The Frog King, or Iron Henry*. It begins, "In olden times when wishing still helped one there lived a king whose daughters were all beautiful, but the youngest was so beautiful that the sun itself, which has seen so much, was

astonished whenever it shone in her face. Close by the King's castle lay a great dark forest, and under an old lime tree in the forest was a well, and when the day was very warm, the King's child went out into the forest and sat down by the side of the cool fountain, and when she was dull she took a golden ball and threw it up on high and caught it, and this ball was her favorite plaything."

Notice the concrete detail: Not merely the most beautiful daughter but such beauty that "the sun itself *which had seen so much* was astonished"; the twilight coolness of the setting; the motion of the golden ball; the Biblical simplicity of the words and of the sentence structure.

The ball drops into the well and the child weeps. Then the frog appears. "Ah! old watersplasher, is it thou!" *Water-splasher,* and later, "something came creeping splish splash, splish splash, up the marble staircase," is language in the terms of childhood. Children can understand the child's disgust when the frog must eat from her little golden plate and sleep in her little silken bed. But what are they to do with the climax when the frog in her bed is transformed into a beautiful young man who the next morning drives away with her as her husband! The king's child is not a child at all, but a young woman concerned with the adult proposition of marriage. Moreover, all of the reality of the beginning which is comprehensible

through the child's own experience is gone, replaced by an utterly impossible situation which is related to the concerns of grown up people. The child remembers the color and beauty, perhaps, if the other has not obscured it; and at best, he glances lightly at the rest and leaves it.

So through the old fairy tales, the Aladdin caves of splendor, the Arabian steeds, the tiny mischief-makers of gnomes, the talking companionable animals, color, sounds, action, adventure, the child's mind selects whatever has familiarity of concept and rejects the rest.

Now for the debit side, this large remainder, which if the child is fortunate enough, he can reject. In the first place, fairy stories really have very little to do with children. Hansel and Gretel admit of no lover, but the story is in this way exceptional. The living happily ever afterward refers always to the marriage state which is the culmination of a series of more or less disturbed love experiences. Most fairy stories are obviously hand-me-downs from the adults for whom they were created, who, feeling they have outgrown such tales a bit, substitute magazine stories and pass the fairy stories over to the children. For the adults, the stories whether fairy or magazine, serve as vicarious fulfilment of unsatisfied desires. But life is not so meagre for children yet. And even if it were incredibly stunted, would a child's lack of satisfaction express itself in the desire for a beautiful wife or a handsome

husband? The interest of the child is normally with the child. A real lady with golden hair and trailing silken robes who stood around talking with a gentleman would not afford an ordinary child the slightest degree of pleasure. He would not be seen in their company two minutes; just long enough to have a good look at their general color effect. If the lady wore glass slippers, well and good. He might ask how she could bend her feet in them. But the reason for the gentleman's interest in them would make little appeal to him. The love affairs of his aunt, who may be a very personable young woman, are to him obviously dull grown-up problems in which he has no desire to participate and with which he could never identify himself. Or if the little girl becomes so far steeped in fairy lore that she does identify herself with the traditional princess, in what degree is she any better off? A little girl of seven whom I knew, after a six months' diet of fairy stories, became quite obsessed by the matrimonial fitness of all the good looking young men she saw. If, then, we are going to write fairy stories for children, why give them adult situations?

A large item on the debit side of fairy literature is the emphasis which it places on the cruel and vicious. What has *Bluebeard* to offer a child?

Or *Red Riding Hood?* The particular kind of perversity which caused Bluebeard to dispose of his wives is not likely to concern a child. Any

symbolism which lies behind the tales is not there for the child. He takes his reading at its face value. None of us wishes in a world full of extraordinary and interesting realities to contribute the kind of writing which would serve only to make day-dreamers of children. Certain psychologists are even recommending nowadays that children should not be taught to read until they have reached such age and experience as shall enable them to distinguish between reality and its substitute. Such an indefinite or even permanent postponement might not always be wise, but at least we can give the children reading matter which is not too far removed from reality.

The question comes, "Must we not cultivate the child's imagination?" There is perhaps nothing about the child which grows so thriftily without any special cultivation. A little observation of his make-believes is sufficient to convince one of that. Yet we wish to furnish him with material which will nourish and stimulate that undeniable asset to human happiness, the imagination. Fairy stories kept within the realm of youthful experience may be a source of delight and profit. Such stories exist, and more of them should be written instead of the sugary froth which makes up so many of the new fairy books.

Mrs. Lucy Sprague Mitchell in the introduction to her *Here and Now Stories* gives a remarkably sound and clear statement of the results of her

experiments with children in providing story material which deals with what is present and concrete. Her substitute for giving fairy stories, which she calls "abandoning a child in unrealities," is to provide familiar facts in new relationships. Her book is a most successful result of her attempt.

A person who contemplates writing fairy stories needs to take a bird's-eye view of the field in order to realize what he should avoid as well as where he may wisely cultivate. We find certain pervading objects reappearing in fairy stories all over the world. A few minutes of contemplation of fairy stories will bring to mind a list of considerable length:

Jewels, precious stones;
Princess with long golden hair;
Handsome prince;

Palaces or castles, usually with turrets;
Silken clothes;
Dark woods;

Monsters of various sorts;
Animals waiting to be transformed;
Ugly stepmothers;

Beautiful white horses or chargers;

Witches, gnomes;
Three wishes;
Terrible storms;
Impossible tasks to be accomplished.

Certain simple moral concepts of the childhood of the race also appear. The good person succeeds, the bad fails; punishment inevitably follows prying into forbidden matters such as locked doors or boxes; hasty words are foolish and lead nowhere as the old peasant proved with the three sausage wishes. The beginner usually follows these examples by making his naughty child fall asleep and dream especially apt punishments.

The ancestry of fairy tales through folklore, mythology, and ancient religion has given us these age-old, world-wide factors. The themes hark back to the same psychological basis for their survival, the search of the hard pressed mind to escape reality. A situation offers no human way out; therefore the sufferer from it invents a supernatural solution.

Take Cinderella, or the Valiant Little Tailor, or the triumphant youngest son, or the ugly duckling, which appear over and over in fairy tales: all are

based on the theme of the ultimate triumph of the weak, oppressed, or unfortunate through some magic agency. The same underlying scheme points toward a common ancestry of the fairy and the magazine story. A heroine suppressed, depressed; an unexpected opportunity which she grasps; the sudden development of beauty, wit, or importance of some kind; her ultimate escape from the original unfortunate circumstances usually via a charming and interesting gentleman. The Cinderella theme is made into a modern woman's magazine story which is credible enough to make the older girl believe that escape from reality is possible for her, too.

And the men are not to run away with the idea either that the sex of Cinderella is always female. If the downtrodden misunderstood clerk who, by some happy fluke of his brain, mounts to be treasured adviser of the company's president were eliminated, the pages of some of our well-known magazines for real men would be visibly depleted.

If the fairy story does not solve the problem of the heroine by an unexpected gift of beauty or wit, it sends to the rescue, through another group of legends, animals of miraculous power who help men and women. That is, the harassed person, helpless under the pressure of some burden, looks about him and sees his faithful dog, horse, or what not, anxious and willing to do anything which his master wishes. He thinks, "If my dog could

but talk, if my horse could but fly, if these wild animals could but hide me in their lairs and take care of me until this trouble is over!" Then, being somewhat of a poet under pressure, the harassed human being dreams such solutions for his problems and tells the stories to his children.

In fairy tales inanimate objects usually have the gift of speech. Any mother's child is enough like early primitive man for us to see why the youth of the race and of the individual both discuss their affairs with the oak tree or a favorite chair. They are alive, and they think of all other things as living. They speak, and they attribute to all other things the gift of speech.

Cinderella seats herself among the ashes because it was an ancient custom that those who were unhappy should seat themselves among the ashes. So the savage conditions of life determined the queer and beloved turns of our fairy tales. We have forgotten the savage way of regarding the world, but our fairy tales have not.

Because of this primitive ideality of human fancy and desire, and because of transmission by wandering and conquering tribes, we find these common denominators in fairy tales all over the world. The writer remembers her astonishment at hearing King Arthur themes from the old Turks on the Black Sea, men who could neither read nor write, and who had never been

away from those ancient isolated villages. Yet the hand clothed in white samite was part of their folk lore, passed on through the generations from the time when the Saxons came that way.

Such, then, is the old drama of human passion and hope which forms the background of this richly embroidered tapestry of fairy lore; real enough in its desires, unreal in their fulfilment; much beauty in handling, much ugliness in substance.

The poetic child will find the beauty but not all children are poets; nor is the imagination of every child stimulated by the unreal; and by certain happy combinations of fate and civilization not all children find reality difficult to deal with. The corollary follows that not all children like fairy tales. *Alice in Wonderland* is not necessarily a psychological test for the intelligence of youth. Many an adult in his heart knows that only maturity brought any appreciation of Alice. But if Alice's adventures seem strained and unreal to the matter-of-fact child, he may still like the *Wonderful Adventures of Nils,* or the *Just So Stories,* books which prove to us that the great writers could if they only would.

The humor of a child may seem rather a primitive variety to the adult. But humor or a sense of the absurd, or enjoyment of the unexpected, whatever

you may call it, makes the little child call for *Black Sambo* until he knows it by heart. It lies behind his enjoyment of the older child in *Dr. Dolittle,* a book which is a permanent contribution to juvenile literature.

One day a plow-horse was brought to him; and the poor thing was terribly glad to find a man who could talk in horse language.

"You know, Doctor," said the horse, "that vet over the hill knows nothing at all. He has been treating me six weeks now—for spavins. What I need is *spectacles.* I am going blind in one eye. There's no reason why horses shouldn't wear glasses, the same as people. But that stupid man over the hill never even looked at my eyes. He kept on giving me big pills. I tried to tell him; but he couldn't understand a word of horse language. What I need is spectacles."

"Of course—of course," said the Doctor. "I'll get you some at once."

"I would like a pair like yours," said the horse, "only green. They'll keep the sun out of my eyes while I'm plowing the Fifty-Acre Field."

"Certainly," said the Doctor. "Green ones you shall have."

"You know, the trouble is, Sir," said the plow-horse, as the Doctor opened the front door to let him out—"the trouble is that *anybody* thinks he can doctor animals —just because the animals don't complain. As a matter of fact it takes a much cleverer man to be a really good animal doctor than it does to be a good people's doctor. My farmer's boy thinks he knows all about horses. I wish you could see him—his face is so fat he looks as though he had no eyes—and he has got as much brain as a potato-bug. He tried to put a mustard plaster on me last week."

"Where did he put it?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh, he didn't put it anywhere—on me," said the horse. "He only tried to. I kicked him into the duck pond."

"Well, well!" said the Doctor.

"I'm a pretty quiet creature as a rule," said the horse—"very patient with people—don't make much fuss. But it was bad enough to have that vet giving me the wrong medicine. And when that red-faced booby started to monkey with me, I just couldn't bear it anymore."

"Did you hurt the boy much?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh, no," said the horse. "I kicked him in the right place. The vet's looking after him now. When will my glasses be ready?"

"I'll have them for you next week," said the Doctor. "Come in again Tuesday— Good morning!"

Then John Dolittle got a fine big pair of green spectacles, and the plow-horse stopped going blind in one eye and could see as well as ever.

And soon it became a common sight to see farm animals wearing glasses in the country around Puddleby; and a blind horse was a thing unknown.1

Dr. Dolittle's incredible adventures are given with the utmost gravity and convincing detail. Their imaginative leaps are unpredictable and immeasurable. No one asks if they are true because everyone knows that they are not. And nobody cares. If a story with qualities of *Dr.Dolittle* could be produced once a decade, children's literature would soon ask nothing of adults, though it might consent to lend.

It is the rare person who can write a *Dr. Dolittle*. An imaginative tale of any kind requires more than most writers are prepared to give. The fanciful

ideas are only a part. The theme behind the fancy, the diction with which to clothe it properly, the sense of what belongs to children; let the writer be sure that his story has all these supports. Then let him consider how much depends upon the illustrator. If he can draw convincing absurdities as Hugh Lofting did for his Dr. Dolittle, he has success in his own hands. Otherwise his illustrator may make or mar his story. Most of the renewed popularity of old tales has been due to the exquisite drawings with which they have been refurbished.

CHAPTER 5: ANIMAL STORIES

ANYONE who has brought up a puppy and a baby knows that the two have much in common; they get into and out of mischief in much the same ways; they run their lives through the direction of their instincts with much the same vigor. The close approximation of these common instincts during early development may be the basis of the child's peculiarly sympathetic understanding of animals. He always likes to hear stories about them, and unless he has been terrified by an unfortunate experience or by nurses' warnings, he usually likes the animals themselves.

The writer who can turn out good animal stories has an insatiable audience for them. Witness the never-ending series which Thornton Burgess produces. Because much has been done in the field of animal stories and because much remains to be done, we should look the ground over before beginning to cultivate it. In some places the soil is run out; in other places it is ready for profitable crops.

Animal stories may be roughly classified into three varieties: straight animal stories, animals personified, and animals in their relations to human beings. Like all classifications this one does not hold. That is, it is

not hard and fast, since one group frequently runs over into the other. But for a survey of the field, these fences are good landmarks.

By straight animal stories I refer to the kind of plot which is concerned entirely or largely with the animals themselves. Occasionally these animals are, to a slight degree, personified in that one is told how they think and feel; and occasionally a human being has a minor part in the drama. But on the whole the struggle is between animals and its results affect the animals only.

In this group we may have three varieties of struggle from which to make a writing choice. First, the struggle for existence, which has served as the basis of so many of Ernest Thompson Seton's stories, for example, *Wild Animals I Have Known*. To write stories of this sort, one needs a background of impregnable scientific observation and knowledge. Otherwise one runs the risk of "Nature Fakir" obloquy. Stories of this sort serve often to make natural history interesting to youngsters to whom the study from its original sources would never be available.

Second in the straight animal group comes the struggle of development. This form of story is frequently pedagogical. It is illustrated by the book called *Nuova, or, The New Bee,* by the Kelloggs, which concerns itself with

the life of the bee written in more or less of fairy diction. Behind the book are the observations and records of established scientists, the authors. But the book, unlike those of Fabre and of Maeterlinck, is put into fiction form. Such a proceeding is on the whole dangerous unless the writer has the double gift of a feeling for fiction and a training in science.

The third variety of the group is the rarest of all, the kind of story which is written in the form of fantasy. Kipling's *Just So Stories* are the inimitable and much imitated illustration of fantasy handled by a genius. Parts of *Dr. Dolittle* which relate to the activities of the animals alone come in this group, and form a modern and valiant second to Kipling. Only the rare person can handle fantasy. He must have humor which is both subtle and simple, but which never approaches the slapstick variety—a prerequisite difficult enough to insure small competition to any writer who succeeds in this field.

The second classification of animal stories, animals personified, includes a great variety of stories written for little children of which those of Thornton Burgess are perhaps as well known as any. The original *Peter Rabbit* of Beatrix Potter, her *Tailor of Gloucester,* etc., are in form and substance among the most delightful and best loved of the personified animals. *The Tailor of Gloucester,* indeed, earns the right to be called a children's classic.

Like many classics, it has a reach beyond its readers in diction and substance, but like a real classic it holds and intrigues the reader until he stretches over into new spaces.

On the whole *Dr. Dolittle* belongs in this group, though no better example of the futility of classification could be afforded than by the versatility with which he fits into each group and then gets listed in catalogues under fairy stories. In each group, however, he belongs at the top.

Much inane drivel about personified animals has been written under the supposition that it was suitable for children. They read it because they will read anything. But editors and publishers should be held responsible since the children are helpless. A writer need not work on the hypothesis that his reader is feeble-minded because he is young. Quality, not quantity, needs to be emphasized in the group. Closely related to personified animals are the animals of fairy lore, such as Puss in Boots, The Three Bears, The Three Pigs, Blacky, Whitey, and Brownie, and all of the animals waiting to be transformed into their original states. The animals are usually employed to point a moral or to give a leg-up to a tale; not much attention, therefore, is given to their natural characteristics.

The great group of stories about animals is the one which concerns itself with their relation to human beings. Here for ease in our survey we may subdivide. The first variety which suggests itself is the struggle of animals *against* man. The first half of *Black Beauty* illustrates the kind of struggle in which the horse has the hand of man against it. The wild horse and wild dog stories of Charles G. D. Roberts show the struggle of the animal to hold its own against the mastery of man. Burgess now and then introduces the hunter who attempts or accomplishes damage to the animals; though any damage is always repaired immediately by Farmer Brown's boy.

Then with opposite intention writers have given us a group of stories wherein the struggle of the animals is *for* man. These stories make up the largest and best known division of animal stories. *A Dog of Flanders, Boh, Son of Battle,* Terhune's Lad and Bruce stories, my own *Dr.Tarn O'Shanter,* are among the numerous illustrations of this sort of animal story. Writer and reader both like the theme of faithfulness and service to man. The devotion of animals to their masters offers endless variety for fiction material.

The struggle of man against animals is usually connected with pioneer tales or hunting and trapping stories. The writer attempts no characterization of the animal and has no interest in him except as prey. The main interest of

the story is in the struggle of the pioneer to gain his foothold or of the hunter to make a living.

The struggle of man for animals has not many exponents. Now and then the human being makes some real sacrifice for his animal friend but on the whole, man is the lord of creation. Such a story as Samuel Derieux's *The Trial in Tom Belcher's Store* is an achievement in this field. Davy's bitter struggle for the hound dog, Buck, has in it enough reality to make it extremely moving.

Considerable diversity in the way of plot possibilities offers itself to the writer of animal stories. In all of the varieties the same temptation entices and frequently entraps him, the temptation to become sentimental. In writing about children and animals the best of authors is likely to slip from sentiment into sentimentality. Animals are, of course, sentimental but their natural tendency scarcely justifies the amount which is put over on them. Animals are not always noble, nor are their lives always a series of heart-wringing episodes. On the contrary their youth represents the art of play perfected, and almost any specimen, in its early stages at least, can provide the complete antidote to melancholy. Just as the stories about children have had to evolve from the Little Eva variety to the reality of the modern

child, so stories of animals are passing out from sentimental ancestral influence into their own delightful reality.

Another tendency of the animal writer is to endow his dog, horse or hen with human characteristics enough to make of it a fairly valuable citizen. Animals have enough generic as well as individual characteristics to make them interesting material without investing them with the human variety. Anthropomorphism becomes with some writers almost as deadly as it sounds.

No writer should attempt an animal story, no matter how dramatic a plot he may have evolved, unless he has an intimate knowledge of the animal whereof he speaks. If he feels he must write a dog story and lacks that intimacy, let him go out and acquire a dog for a period long enough to learn that its psychology is very different from that of a cat. Along with this knowledge will come enough practical hints to make of his story a more convincing thing than it would have been with a theoretical basis. The potential animal writer, fortunately, is predisposed toward his choice of material by his affection for it and his understanding of it. An animal story written by a class as an assignment soon reveals which members have had the advantage of animal friends.

Certain tests of animal stories, while they may not prove infallible, will perhaps help to decide the special merits of an animal story from the critical standpoint whether of an author or of a reader.

Is the plot based on something which is real or has it the illusion of reality? Select the particular details which carry conviction.

Has the story emotional value without sentimentality?

Does it give the reader the feeling of having known the animal? Of wishing to know more of him?

Does the reader feel that the characterization is really that of an animal or of a human being in disguise?

Perhaps one of the first details which catches the baby's attention about an animal is the noise which it makes. The dog is the Bow-Wow, the cow is the Moo Cow, the sheep the Baa-Baa, while the horse which so rarely makes a noise in the hearing of the child is plain horse. Again, this sound detail is the one which first captures him in the oral story. What is the climax of the toe drama? Indubitably the "Wee! Wee! Wee! I can't find my way home!" Certainly the predicament of the lost pig is not the thing which excites

appreciative squeals but the accuracy with which the narrator can imitate "Wee! Wee! Wee!"

For the next half dozen years the child will give immediate and sympathetic response to the concrete detail of a story which deals accurately with the animal's form of speech. Perhaps he is keener to hear the overtones and interpret them since so much of his own language is limited by the inhibitions of the animal. In any case he has opened for himself a channel of sense observation which writers would do well to deepen and widen for him. So many channels become closed by the time childhood is over.

Like all other juvenile stories, the animal story must have a successful beginning to insure the continued attention of the reader. A descriptive beginning is usually interesting to the child to the degree that the author has been able to make it active description. For example, the opening of *How Spot Found a Home* gives a fairly detailed description of the cat and her environment, but by moving the animal through her surroundings an active kind of description is secured.

Once there was a eat. She was a black and white and yellow cat and the boys on the street called her Spot. For she was a poor cat with no home but the street. "When she wanted to sleep she had to hunt for a dark empty cellar.

When she wanted to eat she had to hunt for a garbage can. So poor Spot was very thin and very unhappy. And much of the time she prowled and yowled and howled.

The opening of *Nuova; or, The New Bee,* on the contrary, is pretty solid description and unless the child is eager for knowledge, it may baffle him.

The expository beginning offers much the same difficulty as the descriptive. An explanation of a situation rarely interests a young reader. He cares little about the past, and his interest in the present lies in its being the time setting of the very story which is about to be unraveled. So why stop at the beginning to explain it? If the story is well handled, the situation develops itself as it goes along. *A Dog of Flanders* is an example of the older form of story which was likely to use exposition for its serious beginning.

The direct beginning offers as great a security as any that the reader's attention will be captured. It may be in the form of the narrative of action, a beginning which occurs most successfully in many of the animal stories of Samuel Derieux. *The Destiny of Dan VI* opens thus:

The baggage man slid open the side door of the car. With a rattle of his chain Dan sprang to his feet. A big red Irish setter was Dan, of his breed

sixth, and most superb, his colour wavy-bronze, his head erect and noble, his eyes eloquent with that upward-looking appeal of hunting dog to hunting man.

The writer may secure a dramatization of action by giving his opening to the reader like a scene on the stage, with action and dialogue together. Here the stage business helps to illuminate the situation and a touch or two gives the immediate setting.'

In general, the writer of good animal stories has a very good chance of seeing his stuff in print. The public, young and old, enjoys the appearance of an animal on the stage, on the screen, or in a story. Nothing pleases an audience more than to see a dog or a horse enter the drama. Even if his part is too insignificant to be classified with speaking parts, he has the immediate and absorbed interest of his audience until he leaves the stage or screen. A good animal story is always in demand for publication in almost any magazine. But a good animal story must always be the outcome of real experience with animals and a genuine understanding of them.

CHAPTER 6: SCHOOL, OR COLLEGE STORIES

THE field of school stories is a favorite place for beginners to congregate. In it are produced some of our best juvenile stories and many of our worst. A large proportion of the good ones are boys' stories and a large proportion of the poor ones are girls' stories.

The boys' stories are likely to deal with real situations. The struggle is often in athletic terms with good sportsmanship interwoven for a theme. Sometimes it is a moral struggle of which any school career offers plenty of material. Then the boy has to work out the right or wrong of the case and make his ultimate decision. Again the struggle may be mental as in work, competition, striving for honors, etc.

Or the boys' school story may concern itself with straight development of character as in William Heyliger's *High Benton,* in which High goes through a small town high school where experiences which might befall any boy serve to bring him to a kind of steady maturity. Friendship between boys, sane and lasting because built on a real foundation, often serves as a school story theme. Almost always the relation between boys and the school authorities enters somewhere in the story. But compare the treatment of

that relation with the way in which the writers of girls' stories usually manage school authority. In the boys' stories authority, as it is ordinarily represented in the real school, is treated much as it is met with there, sometimes with obedience, sometimes by rebellion. Issues are likely to be met squarely and fought out as reasonable issues. The boy reader recognizes the possibility of such things happening in his own school and he may find the outcome more or less constructive.

But with the girls' boarding school stories the authorities partake usually of the harpy variety. They stand as types representing almost any undesirable characteristic and their relation to the girls is usually that of tormentor to victim. The girl, of course, always succeeds in defeating her unpopular enemy.

In girls' stories the favorite plot is concerned with breaking rules and the narrow escapes from punishment. The rules are sometimes such as might be conceived adequate in a reform school and they are likely never to occur in the school experience of the reader. Since there is no reality behind them, there can be no reality in the situation which they cause or in the methods by which they are combated.

Girls in boarding schools seem largely occupied with fudge parties, breaking rules, and fascinating college boys. They deliver themselves of much sentimental twaddle about "Life," and graduate in a state of incomparable loveliness.

Just why a boarding school for boys and a boarding school for girls should connotate such utterly diverse standards is difficult to understand. Girls know, and so do writers, that the high school offers no such opportunity for the play of the imagination. Its only advantage lies in the opportunity for sentimental relations with boys. On the whole, however, these are not sufficient to place the high school on a par with the boarding school as a popular setting for the school story.

The college has suffered somewhat the same difficulty in its use as the basis of girls' stories. The college girl, of course, never reads the college story. She is far beyond its lure and safe in the fold of English literature. Besides she knows now that college is not like that picture, anyway. The girl who reads college stories is still in the prep stage, perhaps more or less insecure as to the result of this preparation, perhaps with no intention of ever testing the plausibility of the tales. The college stories are apparently written down to her immaturity and on the plane of her inexperience. She, therefore, can read them with great ease and enjoyment.

A real college story, written with honesty and integrity of purpose, might not turn out to be a juvenile at all. It might even be a story of high adventure, of grim struggle, or of tragedy. But such a story has yet to be written.

The school story, in general, offers the writer considerable variety in plot as its basis. The struggle may be in class terms such as the rivalry of Freshmen versus Sophomores with, of course, certain outstanding individuals to direct it. Or it may be between groups bent on the same object of success as illustrated by the struggle between football, baseball, basketball teams. Stories of this sort carry standards of good sportsmanship and teamwork to the boys. Girls' stories tend to avoid athletics, possibly because of the inexperience of their writers.

When the struggle is between individuals it may be based on social differences such as the poor versus the rich as in many American stories, or family and station by birth versus the lowly born, a favorite English situation. The unpopular person may struggle with the popular rival and through unsuspected ability win out. The stupid versus the clever, the younger versus the older, the teacher versus the student, all sorts of problems and struggles come to mind as soon as one considers the general

state of the boy or the girl in school. Right versus wrong usually underlies these struggles though the problem may manifest itself in many ways.

The college story teems with college spirit against which disloyalty is held as a cardinal sin. This strong herd spirit pushes itself back into the boarding school stories for younger boys, as in the story, *For the Honor of the School,* by Ralph Henry Barbour, or *Deering of Deal* by Latta Griswold. Griswold's story illustrates, too, the way in which the schoolmaster may be permitted to partake in the school activities as a friend rather than an enemy.

School stories which have a setting abroad seem to be winning a place in the favor of the American reader. The boys have had for their classic, of course, the Tom Brown books, and *Tom Brown's School Days* with *Tom Brown at Rugby* have given many an American boy an honest picture and lasting impression of English school life. Kipling's *Stalky and Co.* has a certain realism to which some parents object, but Kipling takes boys, like adults, as he finds them. The school life in other countries than England has been very little handled as material which the American boy might read. *Archag, the Little Armenian* by C. H. Schnapps gives glimpses of the Armenian boy in the native school, but the story does not deal primarily with school life. If a writer has the experiences of education abroad in a boys' school, or first hand contact with it, he has an opportunity to make a

real contribution to juvenile fiction. Since the war the interest in matters of foreign setting and action is no longer confined to the small proportion of wealthy children who have the prospect of a trip abroad. The father of any child may have been a soldier. Europe has come nearer to the mind of youth than geography or history have ever brought it. The boy and the girl who have listened to the foreign tales of their relatives have a background of perception and appreciation of stories which will coincide more directly with their own experiences. School is the great common experience of youth. Within it develop the great common characteristics of youth. And youth recognizes them even when they are in foreign disguise. Now when the disguise itself has become familiar, writers should take advantage of the increasing familiarity and interest and give the boys and girls their own material.

The girls are faring better than the boys here. Angela Brazil, an Englishwoman, has written several books of English school life which are enormously popular in England. One of the best of these is *A Popular School Girl,* which, while it has some class snobbery, is on the whole much like its illustrations, simple, direct, genuine, and limited to school situations with no hint of outside sentimental complication.

Katherine Adams in *Mehitable* and L. S. Porter in *Genevieve* both deal with the adventures of the young girl in the French school. While the emphasis in *Mehitable* is on American characters and American standards, the French setting and the French companions serve to give the foreign flavor and understanding of foreign school customs which our girls want. My own stories of college life in Constantinople where all races congregate have served as the basis for the adventures of different representatives of these races during their common school experience. Such a polytypic school, of course, affords especially rich material for foreign school fiction.

One finds a small amount of fiction either in books or short story form which deals with school stories for little children. In the form of the story for adults about children, the experiences of the beginner in school serve as a basis of some of our most enlivening and enlightening stories. *The Madness of Philip,* J. D. Daskam's incomparable satire on the kindergarten, Myra Kelley's East Side school stories, *Emmy Lou,* make diverting and profitable reading for anyone who has a sense of humor and a feeling of responsibility toward children.

Stories of early school life for the children themselves are scarce, and behind their scarcity may He the lack of a demand for them. To children below the school age, school stories are of no use since they have as yet no

concepts of school experience to which they may attach the new impressions. To children who are just going through the first school years, the experience often seems the least dramatic and interesting part of life. They are not yet old enough to be interested in school ideals and problems, and the real action for them begins when school is out. They are just at the age, too, when they are beginning to have the forward look and to identify themselves with older, more powerful, and interesting beings. For this reason, therefore, they may not care much to read about their own state.

The kind of school story which could hold and serve the younger child offers an intriguing possibility to the writer. It needs careful thought and some experimentation with young children. If one of their favorite games is "playing school," school ought not to be a tabooed subject in their stories.

Once the writer has decided on the plot and theme of his school story, he would do well to consider carefully the question of scene arrangement. His particular school should stand out as an individual school with its own peculiar characteristics. Yet he by no means wishes to attain this effect through description which he knows no one will read. First he, himself, must see the school clearly, as clearly as if he were looking at it on the stage.

Here, as in most scene arrangement, safety lies in the direction of a limited number of scenes. If the writer can stage his action for a short story in two scenes rather than six, so much the better. Sometimes the plot demands as part of its expression a long series of scenes. For example, *A Few Diversions,* one of Miss Daskam's Smith College Stories, is the tale of a girl converted through her varied experiences to a belief in the variety which college offers. To develop the theme of the plot, that college offers versatility of experience, one scene rapidly follows another; house party, railroad station, Kingsley's, Ursula's room, golf links, Boyden's, steps of music hall, Boyden's again, the lake, senior play, Ursula's room, parlor, vespers, drive in tally-ho, spread in girl's room, hotel room. One has only to read the list of scenes to be convinced that the point is proved.

As a short story, however, *A Few Diversions* is not so dramatic as the story called *Emotions of a Sub Guard,* which uses exactly one scene for its development. But the reader is left at the end of it with a vivid impression of the college gymnasium during a basketball game.

When the writer has determined the scenes which shall make the setting of his story, he is confronted by the dilemma which escapes the dramatist, of how to make his reader see what he sees without blocks of description. Suppose he arranges his scene on the stage of his mind and stands off to

view it. How does the thing make him *feel?* If it affects him, what about it accomplishes the effect, and how does it manifest itself in his feelings? Let him select certain details of his scene and analyze their effect on him. Then try to make the reader feel the same reaction toward them.

Theodora looked up for the first time and saw, as in a dream, individual faces and clothes. They were packed in the running-gallery till the smallest of babies would have been sorely tried to find a crevice to rest in. A fringe of skirts and boots hung from the edge, where the wearers sat pressed against the bars with their feet hanging over. They blotted out the windows and sat out on the great beams, dangling their banners into space.

She found a crowd of jostling, chattering school girls, unformed, unpoised; many of them vulgar, many stupid, many ill-bred; overflowing a damp, cold hall that smelled of wet, washed floors; reciting, in a very average fashion, perfectly concrete and ordinary lessons from text books only too familiar, to business-like, middle-aged women, rather plain than otherwise, with a practical grasp of the matter in hand and a marked preference for regular attendance on the part of freshmen.

Compare these details of the college as they impress themselves on the student in Miss Daskam's Smith College Stories with the following extract from *Two College Girls,* by Helen Dawes Brown:

The long shadows of the June sunset lay across the lawns, that with gentle slope and undulation stretched away to the pines on one side and down to the glen on the other. Everything told the youth of summer: the new green of the trees, shading away from the soft tints of the elms to the somber depths of the pines; the fresh scents of the wholesome earth; the good-night twittering of the birds as they made haste home to their nests. There were other unmistakable signs of the season, though these were not laid down on the almanac. On the circular lawn that formed the center of the garden, the tennis courts were already established, and the click of croquet balls filled the air. Outside this grass plot were flower beds in three concentric rings, protected by a high hedge of arbor vitae. The large beds were again divided and so on for a hundred words more. No particular detail in this block of description is peculiar to a college scene. The writer aims toward such a characterization by relating later the activities of the girls. No detail is suggestive of an effect on anyone, no detail is essential as a revelation of the place to the reader.

The characterization of the college student is the next problem of the writer. If he can characterize his college he can probably manage the student. Miss Daskam could:

She was a wholesome, kindly creature, with high principles and no particular waistline. She drank a great deal of milk and was a source of great relief to her teachers, her recitations being practically perfect. From her sophomore year she had been wildly, if solidly, addicted to zoology, and to her, after hours spent in the successful chase of the doomed insect, the grasshopper was literally a burden, for she slew him by the basketful. She rendered the surrounding territory frogless in her zeal for laboratory practice, and in her senior year it was rumored that stray cats fled at her approach. "She'll cut me up in my sleep," said Martha, gloomily, "and soak me in formaline in the bathtub—the idiot!"

And Miss Brown manages her student much as she does her setting.

Rosamond stood leaning her elbow on the mantel, and pulling to pieces a pink rose whose petals she munched thoughtfully. People had difficulty in determining whether or not Rosamond Mills deserved to be called a pretty girl. Some were shrewd enough to discover that the matter depended almost wholly upon her dress. Frankly, had she worn limp brown calico, her

mouth would have been large, her nose not aristocratic, and her elbows prominent; whereas under the excitement of a becoming pink or blue her color deepened, her eyes sparkled, and her fluffy hair was a prettier gold than ever. . . .

Writers, fortunately, are beginning to realize that it is not the golden hair and blue eyes of the heroine which are interesting, but the effect which they produce on beholders. "By their deeds ye shall know them," is as sound in fiction as in fact. In no better setting is revealing action afforded than in the school or college.

The school or college offers itself to writers as a field of productive possibilities in fiction. Its resources, far from being exhausted, have in many promising portions remained almost untouched. School is a permanent part of life for the boy and girl; it is the background for a large proportion of their experience; it not only affords interest while they are in its grip, but sometimes even more regard when they have finished with it. For many years it more or less regulates their activities by its demands upon them. While school is a real and durable factor, it is by no means an unchanging one. The modern writer must know modern school activities; his own youthful experience is not sufficient. Educative processes change slowly enough, but they do change and, what is more important in fiction,

the attitude of those who are being educated changes toward the processes. Herein lies one difficulty at least with girls' stories. The modern college girl or high school girl or boarding school girl has not been dealt with fairly. She needs representation in fiction as she really is in her thought, feelings, actions, not from the point of view of the old graduate, or the tired schoolmistress, or the idealistic lady writer, but from someone who can get the girl's own point of view and interpret it to herself. Writers for boys have handled school material with a sufficient degree of success to make us hopeful that writers for girls will recognize the reality of theme and will begin to deal with it honestly and adequately.

CHAPTER 7: THE USE OF DETAIL

HUGH LOFTING in an article on books for children says: "Another outstanding feature of most books for children is the rigid omission of detail. After all, it is detail which makes fiction convincing; and no one loves it, in pictures as well as in stories, so much as does a child." If Mr. Lofting's statement needed proof, the success of his own inimitable detail in the pictures and story of Dr. Dolittle would furnish it.

Children, as a matter of fact, find in detail the nourishment on which their growing minds feed. Did you ever try the experiment of showing a young child a wide view? He looks about as you bid him, is interested if you can point out his own house, and falls to picking the daisies at his feet while he waits for you to start back. The expanse before him is too much of a generalization for his present state of development. He sees the detail which he knows, just as a dog in the same situation would ignore the landscape but concentrate keenly on another dog barking in the valley.

What sort of things does a baby notice! The detail closest to him. He reaches for his mother's eye, for the bright flower on the window sill at his elbow; but he does not admire eyes in general nor gardens in the large. The

baby does not change all at once into a detail-ignoring young person. When the little girl begins to notice and express the effect which another human being makes upon her, she does not generalize about appearances. Her comment is not, "Emily is beautiful," but, "I wish I had curls like hers." The half-grown boy can give the most minute details of any machine or instrument in which he is really interested.

Gradually from infancy the child grows to include more details within the scope of his interests, but details are still what he is after. Through them he is getting his experience with life. While they are new he is most absorbed in them. He puts all of his senses on the job. He may not see large views but his eyes are serving him every minute they are open in his collection of visual detail. He tastes, he smells, he listens, he feels, he is greedy for experience with life. But of all his senses, his sight is the only one which he is allowed to use freely. Of them all, it is the only one which is in a way passive. He runs no risks, in looking at things, of the inner discomfort which tasting may bring, of the annoyance to elders which hearing his own noises may bring, of the burned fingers and scraped shins which feeling may bring, of the destruction to fragile objects which the close proximity necessary for smelling may bring. No one tells him not to look at things. "You may look but you may not touch, may not smell, may not taste, etc.," is a rule with which he becomes familiar in his earliest explorations. By the

time he is grown is it any wonder that the adult sense upon which he depends is his sight? That his other senses have atrophied into a condition of dullness, of vagueness, which makes him scarcely conscious of them most of the time? Someday, when schools believe that part of their function lies in teaching us how to keep alive, children will be trained to cultivate their senses. A full use of these avenues of approach to life might serve a man as well as his multiplication tables.

The reason why children demand illustrations for their stories is based upon their hunger for details. They pore over the pictures to supply themselves with the important particulars which the author has neglected to mention. They have not had experience enough themselves on which to build the new conceptions. They need guides. We elders, who no longer have much of any stimulus toward curiosity from our dulled senses, and who feel, quite justly sometimes, that our own experience can construct for us a more adequate picture than that furnished by the illustrator, are more often than not relieved by lack of pictures. The child, never. He may not like the kind of pictures which the illustrator has given him, but he likes them better than nothing. They give him detail.

What do we as adults demand of a stage setting? Enough realistic detail to make us believe in the truth of the play. The play must be made to seem

authentic by surrounding it with a convincing environment. The designer of the stage setting takes utmost care to select telling details for his scenes. Though limited largely to an appeal to the sense of sight, he stimulates the other senses whenever possible. The sounds of the wind whistling, the thunder rolling, the voices off stage, a rooster crowing, a man whistling, vicarious taste as the audience watches the actors eat real food; these two senses are called upon often to persuade the audience of the reality of the situation. If the designer could only get the smell of freshly baked bread or cookies over the footlights, he might score another point. These appeals to the imagination all aim to heighten the emotional reaction of the audience, to put them in a mood in which the play will strike home as the playwright intended, to start associations in desirable directions. See how easily a misplaced detail will ruin an effect; a stray cat wanders across the stage in the middle of an impassioned plea of the hero, the revolver which was to shoot the villain refuses to go off. Nothing can prevent the audience from watching the cat or from suspecting the villain to be still alive.

In earlier days, as in the movies now, a type drawing-room, library, or kitchen sufficed. Now the scene designer works for a room which will express the individuality* of its owner, which will add to the illusion of reality of the characters in their particular situation. And the movement is in the right direction. An assembling of details which gives the audience a

sense of being at one with the situation as soon as the curtain goes up has gone far to help the playwright out in the theme.

The most modern designers attempt to use suggestion rather than the Belasco method of exact imitation. They choose a few significant details and construct the scene on that basis. The fog scene in Anna Christie carries with it complete illusion. One can almost smell the fog, feel its dampness, and hear it drip on the deck. The management of the detail is a triumphant illustration of the power of the selected significant details to construct a situation. The writer does well to note that faithfulness of cataloguing is often not so effective as this kind of suggestion.

Good fiction detail is much like good stage detail. Its function is to convince. Its source is in the experience of the writer. Its value depends upon his skill in selection and his vividness in expression. The beginner at writing would like to know if he has any of these qualifications and if he can develop them into more active service.

The first requisite is to take an account of stock, to find out just how well developed at the present moment are the senses and the power to use them. The following mental imagery tests should help a person to decide some of these questions.

1. Think of your breakfast table as you sat down to it this morning; call up the appearance of the table, the dishes and the food on it, the persons present, etc. Then write answers to the following questions: Are the outlines of the objects distinct and sharp? Are the colors bright and natural? How does the size of the image compare with the actual size of the scene?

2. Can you call to mind better the face or the voice of a friend?

3. When "violin" is suggested, do you think first of the appearance of the instrument or the sounds made when it is played?

4. (a) Can you call to mind natural scenery so that it gives you pleasure? (b) Music? (c) The taste of fruit? (d) The odor of flowers?

The next test is for power and quickness of association, for consciousness of association, and for keenness of one sense over another. Write down the three headings. Take down the first object, fill out under the second column the association which the word brings up immediately in your mind. In the third column note the sense which was stimulated to give the association. For instance, the word *rose* might call to mind the sight, the smell, or the feeling of the rose. Leave a blank if you do not get an actual association at

once. Do not use unparticularized associations such as *violets—spring;* or conventional associations such as *tuberose—funeral.*

OBJECT ASSOCIATION SENSE

Warm pine needles
Camp in Maine Smell
Fleshly ground coffee
Wet pavements reflecting light
Violets
Sleigh bells
Newly sawed lumber
Licorice
Picture of George Washington
Varnish
Fog horn
Pussy willow
Hot tar
Church bells

The variety of associations which one word may suggest is illustrated by the following which came from one class in response to the word *varnish:*

Floors, paint-shop, overalls, library with rug rolled up, dead canaries, moving day, drug store where I worked, my Dinah doll, canoe, two chairs, ship at sea, stairs at home, house cleaning, golden oak furniture, new house, sliding in dance hall, Christmas day.

Make fresh headings of Object, Association, Sense. Fill out for yourself as many objects with associations as suggest themselves in five minutes.

Restate the following generalizations in concrete terms:

GENERALIZATION CONCRETE DETAILS

Example
It was hot
White glaring sky

Motionless leaves
Clouds of dust along country
roads

Dogs panting in shade
Smell of hot tar from walks

Smell of dank air from cellar

Crowds around soda fountain

Horses wearing straw hats

Feeling of pounding pulse in

head

Feeling of damp clothes

Feeling of parched throat

Sound of locusts

Silence of birds

Wail of babies

Whirs of electric fans, etc.

It was cold

The kitchen was always untidy

John found his new book

Uninteresting

Elsie was a pretty girl

The children got very tired

The city was noisy

Employ as many senses as possible in the expression of your concrete terms. When you have finished the exercise, check up the senses which you

have used. Note which one you depend upon chiefly. Continue the exercise, supplying your own material until you find that you have formed the habit of observing in concrete detail.

The material of the following exercise which' was designed for a New York class can be easily replaced by local equivalents.

Try using one sense only for accounts of the following; to develop the other senses, eliminate details of sight, using only details of sound, touch, or smell:

Ferry boat coming into slip.
Fifth Avenue at sunset.
Shuttle at 5.30 P.M.
Child's restaurant at noon.

Columbia University reading-room in library just before mid-year examination.

Mood is an influential factor in the determination of what a person sees and hears. Consider the difference in the details which would impress you on a subway trip if, first, you were on your way to an editor who had just

accepted your story; or, if, second, you were going to get the story because it had been pronounced worthless.

Physical condition is equally important in the selective process of our senses. The sight of a good dinner affects very differently the person who is suffering from indigestion and the hungry boy. Remember Mr. Polly on his stile after his mixed pickles and cold suet pudding.

He sat on the stile, and looked with eyes that seemed blurred with impalpable flaws at a world in which even the spring birds were wilted, the sunlight metallic, and the shadows mixed with blue ink. . . .

I do not know why the east wind aggravates life to unhealthy people. It made Mr. Polly's teeth seem loose in his head, and his skin feel like a misfit, and his hair a dry stringy exasperation.

The beginner needs to differentiate between the pathetic fallacy and choice of detail which is given as it actually appears to the observer under certain circumstances. Rain and howling wind are not necessarily correlated with distress of mind. As a matter of fact, sunshine and gentle breezes are more powerful in their ironical contrast to bring out the unhappiness of the observer. But this point of choice of detail which will express the mood or

physical condition of the person is rather different. The external situation presents exactly the same aspect no matter what the state of the observer. His mind attends to the selective process which goes on all the time. If he is coming down with a bad cold, his senses are directed to the observation of the irritating details only of the situation. If he has just had a good dinner with a stimulating companion, he is unaware of the influenza-colored details and selects instead those which correlate with a contented stomach and stimulated mind. The writer needs to make use of such simple psychology in his search for reality. The mind or physical condition may be strong enough to serve as a motive for important action. Note how skillfully Dorothy Canfield relates the action of "Understood Betsy" first to her state of physical under-development and mental terrors, and then to her health and stability.

The following exercise may help the writer: Compare the effect of your own room, (1) when you are in bed with a severe illness; (2) when you have waked up from a refreshing Sunday morning nap. Or again: (1) Of a trip on the train, in answer to an alarming telegram; and (2) of the return trip when all anxiety has been removed.

Certain phrases or combinations of words have become so associated with the thing which they describe that they form a pattern by which the

observer cuts out his actual observation. That is, he not only uses accepted terms in his speech and writing, but he sees things in accepted terms. Blue waters dance, skyscrapers tower, crowds surge, noises roar, odors sicken or refresh, etc. He wishes a handsome hero for his story and he at once sees the clean-cut college youth; or he needs a beautiful heroine and supplies his want with the peculiar type demanded by the times.

Ready-made phrasing has been handed out to children, often because the writer himself was unaware of the tailored variety, sometimes because the writer believed that the ready-made would be much more likely to fit any and every child, or that children are unconscious anyway of the niceties of careful workmanship. Again children have brought this state of affairs upon themselves by their insatiable hunger for stories. If they will read the stories anyway, why this concern? The answer, of course, depends upon just what the writer wants to do. If he wishes to record beauty and truth in a permanent form for the children, he must develop his own peculiar sensitivity to impressions.

While illustrations of this power of individual observation and expression are easy to find in books for adults, like *Main Street, Eric Dorn, Miss Lulu Bett,* Katherine Mansfield's stories, and in much other adult fiction, it is an

indictment against our juvenile literature that illustrations there must be sought with diligence and patience.

Kipling's details, whether he is writing for adults or for children, are always his own, drawn from his experience, given as they impressed him. In the following description of the bazaars, from *Kim,* note the details of sound as well as of sight; note the activity of the description—not a passive detail.

The hot and crowded bazaars blazed with light as they made their way through the press of all the races in Upper India, and the lama mooned through it like a man in a dream. It was his first experience of a large city, and the sight of the crowded tram-car with its continually squeaking brakes frightened him. . . . Here were all manner of Northern folk, tending tethered ponies and kneeling camels; loading and unloading bales and bundles; drawing water for the evening meal at the creaking well windlasses; piling grass before the shrieking wild eyed stallions; cuffing the surly caravan dogs; paying off camel drivers; taking on new grooms; swearing, shouting, arguing, and chaffering in the packed square.

In *Dr. Dolittle* the chapter about the voyage to Africa gives in detail the effect of the weather on the animals.

As they sailed further and further into the South, it got warmer and warmer. Polynesia, Chee-Chee, and the crocodile enjoyed the hot sun no end. They ran about laughing and looking over the side of the ship to see if they could see Africa yet.

But the pig and the dog and the owl, Too-Too, could do nothing in such weather, but sat at the end of the ship in the shade of a big barrel with their tongues hanging out, drinking lemonade.

Dab-Dab, the duck, used to keep himself cool by jumping into the sea and swimming behind the ship. And every once in a while, when the top of her head got too hot, she would dive under the ship and come up on the other side. In this way, too, she used to catch herrings on Tuesdays and Fridays, when everybody on the boat ate fish to make the beef last longer.1

Note the effect of the choice of drink for the animals, of the selection of exact days for fish, etc. Contradictorily enough, the reality heightens the absurdity. Mr. Lofting makes any situation gravely possible by his choice of details. His drawing of the horse having his eyes tested suggests all the paraphernalia of an oculist's office by the lettered chart and the extra pair of spectacles on the stool. The horse staring through spectacles at the letter which Dr. Dolittle indicates suggests the whole process of the eye

In the following sentences from "Eben's Cows," of the *Here and Now Story Book,* notice the different senses which are appealed to in the picture of the barn.

The two children peered into the big dark barn. The unmistakable cow-smell came to them strong in the dark. Stretching down the whole length was stall after stall, each holding an impatient cow. The children could see the restless hind feet moving and stamping; they could see the nicking of many tails; they could feel the cows pulling at the stanchions. On the other side were the stalls of the Little Sisters—(calves). They too were moving about wildly. Over above it all rose the deafening sound of the plaintive lowings.

Beatrix Potter, in *The Tailor of Gloucester,* has given the kind of detail which children like to quote.

Simpkins opened the door and bounced in with an angry "Gr-r-r-miaw!" like a cat that is vexed; for he hated the snow, and there was snow in his collar at the back of his neck. He put down the loaf and the sausages upon the dresser and sniffed. . . . "Oh, dilly, dilly, dilly!" sighed Simpkins.

The effect of the concrete detail in *Heidi* is to give the reader a picture of Alps and Alpine life such as few adult books have achieved. Yet as is often the case with translations, the specific details are stiffened and conventionalized by their exchange from one language into the other. In spite of this drawback, *Heidi* is full of color and vivid life. It is one of the imperishable books of childhood.

Poetry has much to contribute to the art of writing prose in vivid detail. An essential quality of good verse is its clear definite concentration. Mother Goose rhymes are exact in their expression, particular in their images. The injuries of Jack and Jill were healed by vinegar and brown paper. Little Miss Moffet ate curds and whey. The House That Jack Built is a gradual accumulation of details.

Walter de la Mare in his collection of verses called *Peacock Pie* writes with exactness, humor, and charm of children's affairs.

POOR HENRY

Thick in its glass

The physic stands,

Poor Henry lifts

Distracted hands;
His round cheek wans

In the candle light,
To smell that smell

And see that sight!
Finger and thumb

Clinch his small nose,
A gurgle, a gasp,

And down it goes;
Scowls Henry now;

But mark that cheek,
Sleek with the bloom

Of health next week!

Robert Louis Stevenson speaks of the cold wind that "burns my face and blows its frosty pepper up my nose." And of the summer sun, which,

Though closer still the blinds we pull
To keep the shady parlor cool,
Yet he will find a chink or two
To slip his golden fingers through.

Poetry written for children may serve as a stimulus to a writer in its collection of imagery supposed to be suitable for the child's mind. But for practice in the use of the exact word instead of the vague or decorative phrase, writers should read from poets like Robert Frost, Richard Aldington, H. D., Carl Sandburg, if they care for modern poetry; any real poet furnishes illustration of this point.

The writer in his earnest desire to express an effect often seizes upon modifiers for his instrument. He relies upon adjectives and adverbs to such an extent that they form a considerable proportion of his text. A good exercise is to go through a finished story underlining each modifier. In a juvenile story, *very* should be underlined twice, and *little* three times. The appearance of the manuscript will be sufficient comment. Let the nouns and verbs do more work. Their power of suggestion, their innate force, are

weakened by the smothering effect of modifiers. Only when you have exhausted the potentiality of your strong foundation word, need you consider bolstering it up with modifiers. And by that time, you will probably have attained your effect without them.

In the following lists, the first column consists of simple nouns and verbs which have in themselves the power to suggest. They are chosen with a view to their suitability for juvenile writing. The second column gives the equivalent of the single word in modified words. A brief trial in sentences of the concrete word and the modified word will convince the writer of the weakening effect of the modifiers:

Mumble	speak thickly
Snivel	lament whiningly
Whack	a resounding blow
Brawl	quarrel noisily
Bungle	clumsy performance

Chuckle	suppressed laughter
Gang	intimate companions
Grudge	sullen malice
Gulp	swallow eagerly
Hodge-podge	a great variety
Inkling	a slight knowledge
Makeshift	temporary arrangement
Nudge	a gentle push; push gently
Plod	walk slowly
Bump	boisterous rough play
Scrawl	careless hasty writing

Scuffle	rough struggle
Shred	a long narrow fragment
Tang	a sharp specific flavor
Tussle	a hard struggle
Uproar	great noise
Flicker	a faint unsteady light
Jeer	speak scoffingly
Jolt	snake irregularly
Heave	lift with difficulty
Spurt	run fast for a short time
Shamble	walk unsteadily

The writer who struggles for uniqueness of phrasing, merely, will inevitably fall into fine writing. But his empty phrases will never trouble the children because they will never read them. If, however, the writer is after vividness of experience, his style will improve because he is working for the exact phrase which will express the thing he wishes to say. He sees, feels, listens, borrowing the only method by which experience is gained, that of concrete sense stimuli. The discretion of his sharpened senses in receiving impressions heightens his discretion in selecting significant details to give back to his readers. He realizes that generalizations have no imaginative power either for him or for them; that faithful cataloging of details which anybody might observe is deadening both to writer and readers; and that the only salvation for him or his book lies in his capacity to select that which holds an imaginative appeal and to present it in simple, concrete form. Words are but a means to an end, and without the end they are empty. Fitness of style arises from the union of its components, sincerity, emotion, and accurate sense of the thing to be said. Nobody recognizes the ultimate perfection resulting from these essentials more quickly than the child. His native sincerity meets yours, he responds to your emotion, he adopts for his own your apt expression. He is unable to analyze the reasons, but he is one with you. Your book is a success.

CHAPTER 8: CHARACTERIZATION

THE previous chapter on concrete detail was devoted largely to the consideration of the choice of material from the principle of interest. To gain the young reader's interest in our story, we need to give him reality, concreteness, significance, not alone in the details but in the fundamental substance of the story. The details are the brushstrokes by means of which we set the picture on the canvas. Action and characters make the picture we work to present. Never can the writer escape from the problem of characterization, once he engages himself in this business of story writing. For his basic material is always and inevitably the conduct of people, the actions of boys and girls, men and women, children. Animals, you say? Even there, the writer handles his material in terms of characterization; he interprets the animals in human terms; he attempts to individualize the dog and the horse of his story. People, animals acting as people, insects—the writer can in no possible way escape this absolute necessity in story writing. If he tackles a story of an inanimate object, like the old "autobiography of a penny, or a clothes pin," which we were urged to write for the third grade English lesson, even there he must personify the object, or, in brief, treat it as a character.

This condition being true, the business of characterization takes a place of importance in the technique of fiction writing. Plot itself is easily seen as a version of characterization, since it is merely the conduct of the characters of the story in whatever ticklish place the writer has managed to set them. And conduct, as we shall see, is the highest type of characterization.

The term characterization means briefly the setting of people in the story with a sufficient degree of visibility and plausibility so that they may for the reader emerge from the flat page as more than shadowy names, and possess, for the time at least, the rudiments of personality. Since action cannot take place on fiction grounds without people, the moment that action starts, characterization starts. Sometimes, to be sure, the people of the story stay flat and two-dimensional upon the printed page, never rising into reality. They are merely names, or types of story people: villains, heroes, and princesses without individuality. But to the degree that the characters possess individuality, just to that degree also may the story gain originality and personal flavor, to say nothing of reality and conviction. In the matter of improved character drawing rather than in the matter of pure plot, lies much of the change in fiction writing daring the last fifty years, in juvenile quite as much as in adult stories. The dismaying statements that the few possible plots have all been written may have less discouragement for the beginner if he once realizes that while formal plans for action may

be few, the variety in character is infinite, and that character combined with old story plans often is the source of that desirable quality, originality.

Characterization in fiction may run the gamut of all the differences between a mere statement that John is a bad boy because he spills his soup, and the intricate analysis of motive in modern realism. The latter type of characterization, naturally, has no place in juvenile writing. The first type, the unqualified statement, may frequently have place in the story for the young child. For characterization, like plot, varies with the age of the child for whom the story is intended, and must attempt to approximate the child's own possibility of recognition of motives and qualities. But only for the very tiny child need a character be nothing but a name; children begin earlier than their elders like to think to appreciate human qualities, and they begin by the same token to enjoy some presence of human qualities in their fiction.

There is, then, a gradual development of the amount of characterization necessary in the story for the child, a development which at the upper level of the juvenile story slips into the requirements of adult fiction. The greatest difference anywhere along this rising curve is perhaps a difference in the amount of simplification necessary for the young child. Some simplification of character is always required in the short story, since the

aim of the story is for a single effect, and the quality of the hero which bears upon that effect is the quality which must be stressed. This statement does not mean that the hero must be ironed out into a character like those in the old Miracle plays, merely personifications of abstract qualities; it means rather that out of the many contradictory impulses which a person in real life seems to possess, the writer must choose those which serve his story end.

Characterization is, after all, the application of directed, penetrating detail to a particular end. The value of concrete detail is never better illustrated than in its effect of making a fiction character a real person. The hero takes on reality only as the writer builds him up by the choice of significant detail about his appearance, speech, conduct. Then in turn the hero gives life to the story because his individuality has a plausible connection with the plot. The reality of the whole story is tied up with the reader's feeling that the people in it *would* do the things which the writer has them do. In life a person has many contradictory impulses, at least on a surface inspection of his moods and action. Put him into a story, and those impulses, instead of contradicting each other until they tend to produce a negative result of things pulling in opposite directions, must work together to sharpen the reader's sense of the kind of person who directs the story.

If the reader knows his character thoroughly, he will feel toward him as if he were a real person, a unit. His reactions will hang together. The reader will think, "Now isn't that just like Tom!" because the writer has succeeded in making of Tom a unity of effect and emotion. A story type is a lay figure made up of characteristics belonging to dozens of persons; an individual is his own original combination of characteristics. The child recognizes the latter and calls him "the real thing"!

Just what does it mean to know the character of your story thoroughly? Much the same thing that it means to know a real person well; with this difference, that the knowledge of the character which you create may be unlimited, while the knowledge of any other human being may go only so far. Consider some person of whom you can say, "Oh, yes, I know him very well." Let us see what this phrase implies as over against the statement, "No, I don't know him very well." What are some of the things which you know about the person of whom you make the first statement? Immediately a great mass of confused characteristics pours in upon the mind, a habit of thought here, a taste for mince pie there. Perhaps the most orderly way to sort oat these characteristics is to take them in the order in which you probably obtained them. Your reader, who is about to meet your hero, is in your original situation and will have to go through your same process of learning to know a new person.

The first characteristics which one is likely to notice about a person are the physical points, features, coloring, bearing, clothes, mannerisms if they are fairly obvious. You receive a certain impression from the appearance of the person. Later you may find you were wholly or partly wrong, and you will have to revise your impression in the light of a deeper knowledge. The" reader in his approach to your hero should not be confused by the necessity of revision. Nor is there any necessity since you have the makings in your own hands. If your hero is a boy of mental alertness, you may give him the look of mental alertness without the obscuring effect of adenoids which might deceive the observer of a real boy. If your heroine is poor, she may wear suitable clothes though in real life she might bewilder the observer by borrowed garments. That is, you have the privilege of creating your character to fit the place for which you intend him; you can make the reader's first impressions sound.

Usually the next thing which happens in your acquaintance with a person is that you hear him speak. Speech has many revealing qualities. The voice itself from first acquaintance becomes so much a part of the person that you can recognize him by it though you cannot see him. Part of this characteristic quality lies in the tone and volume, part in the enunciation. Both of these characteristics are difficult to convey by means of words. Try

to tell why you know a voice which you have not heard for years in such a way that a stranger to it will recognize it. Such is your problem when writing of voice. The question of enunciation is often solved by phonetic spelling of the dialogue. The more subtle characteristic of speech, enunciation, then becomes a question of pronunciation. And usually the whole struggle of expression resolves itself into a form of dialect. Dialect is difficult for children. They have little recognition of speech differences among themselves; a missing *ing* or extra *r* never haunts them. Unless the manner of speech is quite extraordinary the child is much more interested in what a person has to say than in how he says it. Add to lack of interest in" manner of speech the difficulty of ferreting out the meaning of strangely spelled words, and we have sufficient reason for avoiding pronounced dialect in stories for children.

But a characteristic of speech which does reveal and which is within the scope of the writer lies in the vocabulary of the speaker and his use of idiom. Consider the revealing effect of the speech of a richly-dressed woman whom you pass in the street just as she bursts into cheap slovenly talk. Your reader listens for the first speech of the hero. It may locate the boy in the country, in the city, as a young foreigner, as the child of the streets or of educated parents, as a good fellow or a sissy. Children soon learn in their own terms for what speech stands.

Among the first things which you find out directly or indirectly about a person in whom you are interested are the conditions of his environment. What is his job? Where does he live? How does he play? His work, and whether he likes it or not, help you to understand him. His home and his relation to it give you his background and the likelihood of his staying in it. What he likes to play and how he plays it are perhaps the most revealing of all. His work may be thrust upon him, his family he did not choose; but his play lies in his own hands and partakes of his own flavor. As he plays, his real self grasps the golf sticks, takes the helm, swings the racquet, chooses the theatre; and from the action of that real self comes much illuminating data. Thus, as you give your hero to his reader, you can disclose him best at his work, at his play, in action in his own environment. It is after all not what anyone tells you *about* a person which counts for the final impression, but what you see the person do, what you learn through his conduct.

This conduct, as you come to know your friend better, adds new subjects to the course of study which it offers. It begins to include certain habits; at first habits of action, later habits of thought. Personal idiosyncrasies we call mannerisms and recognize as an easy way of characterization. On the stage a mannerism becomes so identified with the actor that it comes to stand for him like a symbol. The mannerism method of characterization from its

simplicity is in danger of being carried far enough to become caricature, or to supersede in importance through emphasis the character himself. The result is parody instead of characterization. Little children, however, are less likely to appreciate subtlety and more likely to be pleased with repetition. They will not usually be critical of the number of times Grumpy reveals himself as a person of undesirable tastes and habits, or of the limited repertoire of Sunny in proving her enviable qualities. The older or more developed the child, the closer he approaches a critical estimate of the value of selected and significant indicators of character. To him habits of thought are revealing and interesting in his hero. He comes to know pretty well what such a boy would think about such a proposition, just as he could predict fairly accurately what his friend Sam would think about some unfamiliar situation.

Older people come into the visual radius of the child largely by their peculiarities of habits. Ask about the teacher, and you obtain an impersonation of some of her idiosyncrasies of action rather than a statement of her efforts in behalf of her school. The effect of the adult on the child is likely to be limited by his casual observation of habits. William Bowen illustrates this point when he introduces Aunt Amanda to Freddy in his story *The Old Tobacco Shop*. He gives the effect which Aunt Amanda's

pin habit produces on Freddy, the observer; and in one paragraph Aunt Amanda had become a real person to the reader as well as to Freddy.

Aunt Amanda put a hand to her lips and drew out of her mouth a pin and stuck it in the bosom of her dress. She put her hand to her lips again and drew forth another pin and stuck it in the bosom of her dress. She drew forth another and another and stuck each in her dress. Freddy's eyes opened wide; did this lady eat pins? Her mouth seemed to be full of them; didn't they hurt? It didn't seem possible she could eat them, and yet there they were. No wonder she couldn't talk plainly. There seemed to be no end to the pins, but there was, and at last her mouth was clear of them so that she could talk.1

As time goes on and we become better acquainted with a person, we find that we have built up our opinion of him by putting together the pieces of knowledge which we have gained through observation of his conduct under different conditions. Serviceable as conduct is to us in giving us a sense of knowing a person, to a child it is the final criterion by which he judges the person, and forms his conclusive opinion of him. An adult may be influenced by extenuating conditions, or convention, or reason, or another's opinion, or a dozen other factors. The child is not troubled by many subtleties in his estimate of people. Bob has a bad reputation in school, he

gives his parents no end of trouble, but he can swim across the river and back on a dare and he is a good sport. A neighbor appears amiable and kindly, but the child sees him kick the cat down stairs, and says he is mean. Another person is a bully, a sneak thief, a jim dandy fellow; something in broad, definite characterization. The child may form his opinion out of a series of small acts on the way to school; or he may shape his judgment from a piece of more crucial conduct in which the action is more important because the situation is more dramatic.

Our analysis of the process of knowing a person well shows us that a great variety of factors enters into the process; that by the time we have reached a state of intimate knowledge of another, we have collected much data. The writer who has gone through the same process with his fiction character has assembled evidence of even greater variety and amount. He is aware that he cannot use all of these character traits unless he intends to write a biography. Selection becomes as important and critical an obligation as creation. The choice depends upon the kind of story which the writer wishes his character to motivate. Any human or fiction character has the potentiality of action in more than one direction. If our story is to have sharp outlines, swift movement, and credible outcome, we must select the characteristics which will pull in the one particular direction of this one particular story. Another set of characteristics may make another story for

us some day but except as they give us a real background for our writing they are not necessary now.

In stories for children the writer has to use character traits of which the child is supposed to be aware at that stage of his development. For instance, in the story of the three pigs, Whitie represents greediness, Blackie, laziness and love of dirt, while common sense and neatness appear in the person of Brownie. Often character traits which adults think children ought to have, like obedience, honesty, form the basis of moral stories. Lucy Sprague Mitchell makes character traits in the stories for young children not so much moral as the curiosity about life which a small child has. Her stories are not so much reaction between character and event as just discovering things. As children grow older, character traits become more significant to them. School stories take on a more personal flavor as they illustrate bravery, cowardice, loyalty, and so forth. The way the characters act in the baseball game, clown the well, with an overturned canoe, settles finally what the reader thinks about them,

If by this time we know as much about our story characters as we know about the person of whom we can say, "Oh, yes, I know him very well," and if we have selected certain of the character traits as revealing and interesting, we are ready to consider effective methods of making our

readers feel the personality. The writer of the book has, of course, more time and space to work out his problem than the writer of the short story. The book may incorporate all of the different methods of presentation before it is finished, but the short story must limit itself to brief and telling procedure

The old-fashioned way of characterization was alike both for the long and the short story. Through description the reader learned how the characters looked, and by exposition he discovered any other information which the writer felt pertinent. Such method encouraged the presentation of types rather than of people. Stories had types of pretty girls, types of naughty boys, typical backgrounds for them, and typical fates in store for them. The characters handled in this way never became individual and potent enough to work out any plots for themselves. The author, consequently, managed the job for them, and set them up to any typical situation which he considered suitable to emphasize his point. Almost any grown person can recall books and stories of this kind which belonged to the period of his youth.

The writer of the modern story must take his lesson from those of the older writers who succeeded in creating stories of permanent value to children. On their methods of success he must build his own contribution as he

comes to a recognition of the needs of the modern child, and as he realizes his individual system for meeting them. The same needs may indeed have existed always, but now the child demands their satisfaction and it behooves the writer to take notice of them.

The beginner who talks *about* his characters instead of making them live their own stories, is likely to fall into blocks of descriptive material. Logically such pieces of description are bad. When the child watches action, he takes in the appearance of the actors only as an aside; his mind is on the action. If on the stage the actors were led in front of the audience, and it was told to observe their eyes, hair, teeth, dress, etc., we can readily see that the dramatic effect might suffer. In short story writing where we aim at a single dramatic effect, we are likely to weaken it in much the same way if we stop, draw attention away from the action, and point out the appearance or the household furnishings of our actor.

Yet the child usually wishes to know how his story character looks. Like most adults, he wishes the writer to give him a visual image to start with. Illustrations should help; sometimes they do. Since, however, writers and illustrators seldom consult over their cooperative products, the writer would do well to depend upon himself. In the short story where the emphasis is on dramatic unity, appearance should come to the attention

naturally, as it does during the observation of real action. Casually, a word here, a phrase there, correspond with that random acquisition of appearance which is the experience of the observer of any interesting situation. His attention remains focussed on the action, but at the same time he is gradually acquiring a realization of the appearance of the actors. In the book the writer has time to stop for more detailed description. Yet even here the description must be active, connected with the action of the characters. The following description from Dorothy Canfield's *Understood Betsy* suggests the activity of Ralph and his effect on Elizabeth Ann.

Ralph had very black eyes, dark hair, a big bruise on his forehead, a cut on his chin, and a tear in the knee of his short trousers. He was much bigger than Ellen, and Elizabeth Ann thought he looked rather fierce. She decided that she would be afraid of him and would not like him at all.

Such a description really characterizes. The bruise on the forehead, the cut on the chin, and the tear in the trousers, indicate action which springs from the kind of disposition that might well terrify Elizabeth Ann.

If there was one thing Freddie loathed, it was to be called pretty; he had heard it before, in the parlor at home, when he had been trotted out to be

inspected by female visitors, and he had tried many a time to scrub off the rosy redness from his cheeks, but he had found it only made it worse.1

The unskillful writer would have told his readers that Freddie was a pretty boy with red cheeks. But this bit of characterization from William Bowen's *The Old Tobacco Shop* shows the effect of Freddie's appearance on outsiders and the reacting effect of their admiration upon him.

The following descriptions of the principal characters in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden,* all convey personality.

When Mary Lennox was sent to Misselthwaite Manor to live with her uncle everybody said she was the most disagreeable looking child ever seen. It was true, too. She had a little, thin face and a little thin body, thin light hair, and a sour expression. Her hair was yellow and her face was yellow because she had been in India and had always been ill in one way or another.

A boy was sitting under a tree, with his back against it, playing on a rough wooden pipe. He was a funny looking boy about twelve. He looked very clean and his nose turned up and his cheeks were as red as poppies, and never had Mistress Mary seen such round and such blue eyes in any boy's face. And on the trunk of the tree he leaned against, a brown squirrel was

clinging and watching him, and from behind a bush nearby a cock pheasant was delicately stretching his neck to peep out, and quite near him were two rabbits sitting up and sniffing with tremulous noses—and actually it appeared as if they were all drawing near to watch him and listen to the strange low little call his pipe seemed to make.

The boy had a sharp delicate face the color of ivory, and he seemed to have eyes too big for it. He had also a lot of hair which tumbled over his forehead in heavy locks and made his thin face seem smaller. He looked like a boy who had been ill, but he was crying more as if he were tired than as if he were in pain.

Mary's appearance is tied up with her disposition, Dickon's with his power over animals, Colin's with his illness and nervous depression. The action of each of the three children is dominated by the characteristics which lie behind their appearance and which are suggested by it. Such description has an active function in helping to motivate the drama.

The question of the importance of dress in conveying appearance and in characterizing the wearer usually puzzles the beginner. Dress should be revealing. Rebecca's starched calico dress placed her both as to locality and worldly situation. Lord Fauntleroy's clothes became so closely tied up with

his character that numerous mothers adopted the one hoping to induce the other. The choice of any current style of dress for a character, however, is dangerous in so far as it dates the story. The girls of Smith College may do much the same things that Josephine Dodge Daskam's girls did, but they no longer wear golf capes. As far as dress reveals and sets off the child, through its texture, its state of cleanliness, condition of wear, as a frame, etc., it serves its purpose in characterization. But the writer as he uses dress should subject it to severe tests for its usefulness.

As our chapter on dialogue emphasizes, conversation is a method of characterization which is familiar to the child in his own life and which he can most easily interpret in fiction life. Booth Tarkington almost always characterizes his children through their action in dialogue. As the children talk, the event develops. They go ahead about what they are doing, and as they do it, they tell you about it. A writer in his use of revealing and active dialogue has a most effective tool for his work on characterization.

The character of a person is often clarified by the author's revelation of its effect on other people; the way her family or friends think about her, what they say about her, how they treat her. Or the writer may use the reaction of his story character to her environment; her struggle against poverty, riches, loneliness, hard luck, or good luck. Here the setting becomes not only the

necessary background, but an active factor in the development of the character.

Action beyond everything else is a revealing method of characterization. In building up the character, the writer prepares for important action in the story by indications of the disposition in response to small things, discomforts, disappointments, praise. The reaction may be shown in facial expression, or in what the child says, or the way he acts in regard to these things. Then when the important action comes, it comes as the natural expression of the sort of character which the author has portrayed. Here, in brief, lies the relation of the character to the plot. Whether one holds that the character is the outgrowth of the plot or the plot the outgrowth of the character is a question of precedence which may be decided either way. If the writer invents his plot first he must have with it a character who will motivate the action with reality; if he finds the character developing first, he will of necessity connect the character with a congruous plot. Whichever seems to come first, no plot will be authentic if the action is not adequately motivated by the character. As the character motivates the action, the action in turn reveals the character. Thus the two are one if the result is the kind of unit which we hold to be the standard of a well-written story. Just as we noted in our process of becoming acquainted with a person that conduct was the final test, so in the story, action is bound to speak louder

than words. A plot after all is conduct in a crisis. The way a character behaves in a difficult situation is the thing which determines the story; at the same time, conduct in a difficult situation is the final proof of the sort of character in the story. The consideration of the kinds of problems which are the final stage in characterization is part of the discussion of plot in stories.

CHAPTER 9: DIALOGUE

DIALOGUE is the one part of a juvenile story which the author may be sure is going to be read. Description may be skipped entirely, exposition may be brushed over sufficiently to glean the idea necessary to the plot, but conversation will be read. Lewis Carroll makes Alice express the feelings of the usual child when she sits on the bank peeping into the book her sister was reading. "But it had no pictures or conversation in it, and 'what is the use of a book,' thought Alice, 'without pictures or conversation?'"

The immediate reaction of children to 'dialogue proceeds from the inevitable attempt of the child to make contact with something which he knows. In conversation youth recognizes its own familiar mode of self-expression. Through action and through speech, a child seeks to impress his own individuality and to discover the individuality of others. When a character in a book talks, he meets his listener on a plane of equality, he uses the equipment which nature gave them both. He may, therefore, feel pretty sure of his audience. The experienced author recognizes the soundness of this method of getting his real and imaginary children *en rapport,* and takes advantage of it.

Not only is conversation the natural method of communication but from its mere technical form and arrangement, it appeals to the eye of the child. The broken line is easy to follow, the spacing separates the thoughts. A child who is beginning to read will do much better on a page of conversation than on a page of narrative, no matter how interesting it may be. Beading goes along faster; the reader feels as if he were getting somewhere; he acquires a sense of satisfaction in accomplishment which attaches itself to the sight of the printed page and may stay with it for a long time. Through dialogue the story moves more quickly and the child's mastery of the story quickens; action, which strikes the keynote of the child's primitive self-expression, is being yoked to this extremely passive form of amusement, reading.

Just as two boys find out all about each other through conversation, so in fiction the dialogue reveals the characters to the readers. Real conversation, uncensored, unselected, uncut, is extraordinarily revealing of personality to anyone. We as adults about our business listen to the description of a person's attributes, we ask questions about him and receive what we know to be honest answers, but what is our last word? "Bring him out. We should like to talk with him."

Wherein does the value of the personal interview lie? Somewhat in a chance to see the person, but not to see him speechless like a portrait. He must reveal himself by talking with us. We will not take him on as a friend, or a clerk, or a candidate for a Ph.D., until we have done more than look at him.

Just what does he give us through his speech! Unquestionably the voice of a person has influence in his effect. Therein stage dialogue has the advantage over book dialogue. You do not have to be told that one character has a mellow contralto voice, that another spoke gently, asked instantly, answered roughly. The actress flutes her words gently, instantly, with her mellow voice, and the audience listens with no need of interpretation.

One reason why children of all ages like to have stories read to them is that they gain through the reader some of the dramatic interpretation which the stage gives to the written line.

Dialogue in a story, of course, must not only be characteristic of the speaker, as in real life, but it must also serve to carry the action of the story ahead. This double purpose lies at the root of the difficulty in writing good dialogue. Phonographic reproduction may possess faithfulness to life, but it fails of the necessary adaptation to the art form of the story—an adaptation which gives the effect of naturalness by some artificial devices. These two

functions of dialogue, characterization and action, demand separate consideration.

The juvenile book has the problem on its hands of an audience, not wholly unlike a large proportion of adult readers, which is too immature and inexperienced to read into the dialogue the significance which comes through a speaker. A certain degree of development is necessary in order to read to oneself with pleasure the lines of a play. Most of us have had the experience of astonished realization of content when we have reread a play after having seen it acted. This situation brings us to the problem of the management of dialogue. How shall we make our young readers understand the mood of the characters speaking sufficiently to give the dialogue its full significance? How shall we carry on what must become so large a part of our story without the monotonous repetition of the word *said?*

The beginner is likely to have a very real sense of the way his characters feel when they talk, and with it a conviction that his reader will not quite get that important emotion unless it is pointed out to him. The obvious thing to do, then, is to explain with each speech of the dialogue the way in which it was uttered. For example, in a story which I read the other day, the first eight sentences were dialogue coupled with the following eight explanatory

terms: she said abruptly, I answered politely, I added involuntarily, she answered quickly, I said vaguely, she asked instantly, I answered gravely, she said abruptly. In the writer's desire to make her reader acquainted with the inflections and spirit of the characters who were opening the story, she caught at the easy method of the explanatory adverbial modifier and used it with monstrous repetition.

The adverbial phrase is a close relative of the adverbial modifier with many of the same family characteristics in its effect on writing. I said with a laugh, with a sigh, with a nonchalant air, tells the reader how I said it but gives him little concrete detail. The unstinted use of the adverb modifier is usually the earmark of the beginner. He hears his heroine speaking her lines soberly, happily, doubtfully, and he wants to be sure that his reader attaches these same emotions at the proper places in the dialogue. So with simple directness he mentions after each *said,* the necessary *how* she said it.

Our main objection to this method of speech interpretation is its monotony. If we assume that style is a desirable addition to the equipment of the writer of juvenile books—and we have too little encouragement for that assumption—we must bar the overuse of the adverbial modifier. Any

beginner would do well to go over his manuscript and underline all of his adverbs used as conversational modifiers.

The next step is to find a substitute for adverbs which will help the reader to understand the subtleties of the heroine's feelings as she talks. The adverb lacks the concrete detail which stimulates imagination. A special verb which conveys the combination of *said* plus action is much more likely to visualize in the reader's mind the heroine's slant toward her own speeches. These special verb substitutes for *said* are varied in number and value. Probably at the present time Eleanor Hallowell Abbott has the world's record for the size of her selection. The following list' is collected from two chapters of her story *Half a Hill.*

bailed acknowledged mused gloated

urged begged singsonged challenged

labored shivered agreed stammered

besought rejoiced murmured plunged

whispered laughed gasped hailed

triumphed	rallied	quizzed	flushed
questioned	essayed	insisted	explained
ordered	snapped	affirmed	interposed
pointed	confided	persisted	conceded
flared	jerked	admitted	bristled
reflected	frowned	expostulated	intercepted
repeated	grinned	calculated	scowled
mimicked	lied	admonished	parried
confessed	prompted	yawned	acquiesced
kindled	began	puzzled	bridled
bowed	bantered	deduced	protested

ventured added prodded queried

puzzled argued blurted

The obvious objection to seventy-one substitutes for *said* in two chapters is the artificial effect. The reader becomes absorbed with the enormous possibilities of the writer's vocabulary and follows her agile efforts with somewhat the interest that he bestows on a dictionary of synonyms. Thus the very struggle for vividness places the emphasis away from the substance of the speech, which after all is where most readers like it.

The special verb has, however, a decided advantage over the modified *said*. For economy and significance, "she bantered" is better than "she said banteringly"; "she protested" than "she said protestingly"; "she persisted" than "she continued persistently." Facility in management of dialogue amounts to more than trick agility. Real skill avoids monotony of mannerisms without losing the exact simplicity which may use the unmodified *said* or vary it with a sharper word.

The combination of dialogue with bits of stage business often affords vivid detail to help in the interpretation of speech. Probably the use of the action

of a person to indicate that he is the speaker affords as subtle and complex a way of managing conversation as any. Yet it has a peculiarly valuable function in juvenile writing in that it gives the young reader the effect in a single brush stroke, even though that stroke had to be applied with infinite pains by the artist.

"A pretty good crop of potatoes." Benny straightened up for a moment from the endless row of bug-specked leaves. Compare with, "A pretty good crop of potatoes," said Benny cheerfully though wearily as he straightened up.

Or, "What sort of noise was it?" The guide appeared unmistakably interested; compared with, "What sort of noise was it?" asked the guide with unmistakable interest.

The use of the phrase which gives the effect of speech on the hearer may make for brevity and force; the voice sounded, manner was, etc.

"Drop it, Jake!" Henry's voice came loud and clear. Transpose into *Henry said loudly, Henry called out, Henry shouted*. Or, *"I'll drop it." Itwas hardly above a breath;* transpose into *he said softly* or *he murmured*. The substitute lacks the simplicity and exactness of the original.*Said* becomes unnecessary. The reader sees the action of the speaker or hears the voice

even as the character speaks, and by this immediateness gets a more photographic effect of the situation.

The youngster, whether he is reading the book or having it read to him, usually wishes to be told who is talking. It is difficult for him, unless the rendering is unusually dramatic, to select from a group the speaker by his speech alone. For that reason the dramatic method of handling dialogue is obscure for the inexperienced reader. For example, the following page of dialogue from Barrie's *Margaret Ogilvy,* while it is masterly in its self-revealing content, could hardly leave the ordinary child reader clear at the end of it as to the identity of the separate speakers.

In an hour or so I return, and perhaps find her in bed, according to promise, but still I am suspicious. The way to her detection is circuitous.

"IH need to be rising now," she says, with a yawn that may be genuine.

"How long have you been in bed!"

"You saw me go."

"And then I saw you at the window. Did you go straight back to bed?"

"Surely I had that much sense."

"The truth!"

"I might have taken a look at the clock first."

"It is a terrible thing to have a mother who pre-varicates. Have you been lying down ever since I left?"

"Thereabouts."

"What does that mean exactly?"

"Off and on."

"Have you been to the garret?"

"What should I do in the garret?"

"But have you?"

"I might just have looked up the garret stair."

"You have been redding up the garret again!"

"Not what you could call a redd up."

"O, woman, woman, I believe you have not been in bed at all!"

"You see me in it."

"My opinion is that you jumped into bed when you heard me open the door." "Havers." "Did you?" "No."

"Well, then, when you heard me open the gate." "It might have been when I heard you at the gate."

This form approaches the stage so closely that the writer who uses it quite often slips from play writing to story writing with equal success, such is his habit of thought in regard to dialogue. Not that he will necessarily fail in his appeal to children, but he usually needs a Maude Adams as a medium for his success. A Peter Pan between the covers is a much less fascinating chap than a Peter Pan who actually flies all around the room.

When a writer is so filled with the emotional value or the swift action of his story that it floods method and drowns it in content, he carries his reader, young or old, along with him and neither he nor his reader is aware of the way of transportation. Interpretation reads itself through the lines. Suppose Kipling told us how Little Tobrah talked; would you respond more quickly to that stark child tragedy? Quite true Little Tobrah is for adults, but what of Dr. Dolittle? He and his animal household carry on conversation

concerning all sorts of conditions with inimitable reality conveyed usually by a simple *said*. Their ship strikes something and gives every evidence of going to pieces. "We must have run into Africa," said the Doctor. "Dear me, dear me! Well, we must all swim to land."1 Would even a five-year-old need illumination about how he said it?

The perfection of this art of Kipling's and Lofting's lies not in the management of the dialogue so much as in the writing of the dialogue itself. For after all, ways of managing one's dialogue amount to little if one cannot write revealing dialogue.

Suppose you are writing a story in which two girls figure. In real life if these two girls were talking together, it is quite likely that the conversation of one would so closely resemble that of the other that the casual listener would say, "All girls talk alike!" In a story, however, we do not transcribe the complete conversation of our characters. We must select. Listen again to your two girls. Now and then comes a phrase and if you know the speaker you will say, "That's just like Sally!" In other words, that phrase has revealed some familiar characteristic of Sally. But you must know your Sally in order to select, from the ordinary girl banalities, her characteristic phrases which give her individual bent toward the subject in hand.

The writer who does not know his own particular Sally inside and out, better than he can know any Sally alive, is not going to write revealing dialogue. His Sally and Jane can exchange phrases equally well and the reader will be none the wiser. Such a writer will very likely be driven to blocks of exposition and description by his own realization of the inadequacy of his characterization through dialogue.

A writer's knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of the character which he has created must be such that he knows instantly her reaction to given circumstances and how she would express that reaction in spoken words. Otherwise he has not really created her and she never will be alive either to him or to his reader.

If dialogue is to reveal personality, it is obvious that it must be natural. Artificiality of dialogue makes the reader uncomfortable in much the same way as affected conversation between two people. Sometimes the writer to give an effect of lightness attempts the introduction of a kind of type bantering. This dialogue may represent his idea of how college girls or college boys talk to each other, but if it is of a type sort, it usually misses entirely the spontaneous sharp shooting of tongues when such people get together. Such dialogue as that of Owen Wister's boys in *Philosophy Four,* is an achievement of reality. It has none of the stilted phrasing of the

grown-up writing down to the youngster, nor any of the irrelevant emptiness of the youngster trying to reproduce his own speech. Any author knows that he cannot afford to write down to his readers, but his difficulty arises, of course, in the fact that he does not know when he is writing down to them. The reader recognizes it, however, in the feeling of discomfort which artificiality gives him, and in the sense of being thwarted in this means by which character is usually revealed to him.

Here we are brought up short by the question which constantly arises in juvenile writing. What is the writer to do about: (1) ungrammatical speech; (2) slang; (3) dialect? All of these conditions belong to the natural speech of many children who will serve as subjects of stories. Shall we ignore them or use them? Careful mothers often refuse to read books which contain any evidence of these flaws of speech on the ground that the imitative child will copy them or at least be confused as to their value. It is a point to be considered since with the elders lies the choice of the book.

"But," the writer protests, "I can't write the dialogue of farmers' children and spell it as I should the speech of a professor's child. Not if I am to write natural dialogue!"

The solution of this problem varies with the age of the reader. And the child himself supplies the key. While he is very young, passing through the formative period most critical to his speech habits, he seems to have little perception about the constituents of phrases. You may express an idea grammatically or ungrammatically. If he likes the idea it is all one to him; if he does not like it, he will not listen anyway. But he does not need dialect or incorrect grammar to bring it home to him. Therefore, since your form is immaterial to him, and peculiarities of speech with which he is unfamiliar would only serve to confuse him, he may be trusted to apply his own touchstone of naturalness directly to the idea expressed. And you may be sure it will be thumbs down for the writer who cannot compass that inherent naturalness.

Even older boys and girls are likely to object to dialect as "too hard to read." It does not amuse or interest them that "Johnnie wisht the hoss wud git done with hayin'." Translation is too much like school work. But Johnnie's peculiar forms of wit, slang, or otherwise, are not wasted on them, and if they decide to take on "Gosh all hemlock!" for awhile, only a purist could object. Slang, like dress-styles, has a way of dating an author's work, and he who would keep his story ageless would do well to avoid the introduction of slang of the period.

Many adults and almost all children refuse to read dialect when the words, through spelling or unfamiliarity with colloquialisms, become too specialized. Touches of speech peculiarities, grammar, dialect, slang, or idiom, enough to give individuality to the speaker and make him amusingly real, may add a flavor to dialogue. But the flavor needs a certain amount of experience for appreciation which little children lack. One is usually safe in writing for them to aim for simplicity and clearness of diction in dialogue as well as in any other part of story telling.

Probably Louisa Alcott took the most radical step in changing the dialogue of children's books from the stilted formal phrases of the earlier stories to those which at least approximate real conversation. Much of her dialogue may seem preachy and unnatural to us now, but it was a revelation of delight to the girls of her time. An old lady tells about her memory of the Christmas morning when she and her cousin ran down the street each with *Little Women* under her arm, exclaiming, "Why, they are real girls! They are bad like us! They talk just like us!"

Since so much of the juvenile story is likely to be given in dialogue, it is even more essential than in the adult story that the action of the plot should be carried ahead by it. The writer may become so absorbed in making his dialogue natural and character-revealing that he forgets it must always

travel forward. Sidetracked by pride of spirit in his humor or his philosophy or his cleverness of characterization, his dialogue becomes a stagnant pool covered with unprofitable scum. Freed from self-consciousness, definite in its aim, his dialogue flows along swiftly and surely, carrying with it the understanding and sympathy of the reader.

Often, in narrative, a certain amount of preliminary exposition is necessary to explain the situation when the story opens. The child wants the present in fiction. Past history delays the action of the story and concerns him as little as a genealogical tree. It is the business of the writer to present anything essential to an understanding of the story in as active a form as possible. Through dialogue he can handle his exposition by means of suggestion, he can dramatize it in form, and he can make it alive through the speakers. Dialogue puts the past into the present as it were. Such handling of preliminary exposition is by no means simple. It is only too easy to slip into the old stage method by which two characters recite between them, or the old servant gives, through monologue, all the necessary background. Blocks of informational conversation are as impossible in fiction as on the stage. The stilted and unnatural effect is the same. Dialogue demands a certain casual quality to appear natural. For this reason one cannot depend upon it too completely to carry the entire preliminary exposition. In the adult story the writer tries to be suggestive

and subtle, and not to reveal that he is giving the situation. With the child he has to be simple and straightforward. If the circumstances, therefore, demand an involved explanation, usually the writer finds it expedient for clarity and brevity to give that explanation in part at least in straight narrative. If the reader does not need an immediate possession of facts as a clue to the story, and he rarely does, dialogue serves as a more active agent of presentation.

As the story goes on, the writer needs to bear in mind that dialogue is not merely for the purpose of allowing the characters to talk. It must tell the story as it goes. It is as active as any other form of action and its goal the same as that of the rest of the action of the story, to solve the problem. The author must constantly curb the natural tendency of characters toward over loquaciousness and make them talk to the point.

The use of dialogue demands careful selection of its material. The writer looks ahead and chooses a scene in which the action is interesting and significant enough to be given on a large scale. Dialogue is life-size in scale, and it needs life to motivate it.

Sometimes in the story the writer finds it necessary to telescope a scene. It is not important enough or it is too involved to be given in full and yet its

introduction is required by the story. A snatch of dialogue will give a sense of immediacy to the rest of summarized scene, will amalgamate it to the whole story, and give the reader the sense of unity.

Thus through the whole story, dialogue functions actively. With so many obligations to fulfil, it should never be encumbered with meaningless prattle. Nor should it, through the author's sense of responsibility toward its duties, be thrown into stilted and formal mould. Dialogue is a form of writing taken directly over from the child's own vehicle of self-expression. As such it must carry with it the characteristics which mark the original form on which it is modelled.

For the beginner who finds dialogue difficult to handle, a good exercise is to transpose a well-told short story which gives him a sense of the personality of the characters and of swift action within a limited period into a one-act play. If he can make the dialogue do all the work, he will be fairly sure of mastery over it when it has to shoulder only its own share in his story form.

CHAPTER 10: PLOT

THE construction of plot in story writing for adults is based on certain definite principles applicable to the adult story in general. Plot is plot whether applied to the humorous story or to the tragedy. Degrees of complication exist, but in general the form is that of dramatic struggle. In its development, the adult short story has reached a point where it usually centers about a certain kind of conflict which the student can analyze as the plot. He studies its principles and proceeds on this basis to construct plots for himself.

The writer of children's stories is not able to look upon plot as a problem which, once understood, can be applied equally well to any story that he may construct. The variability of stories for children between babyhood and adolescence discounts any homogeneity of plot principles. Yet plot, if taken in its simplest definition as *plan,* appears in elementary form from the beginning and evolves through rather a complete series of stages into the adult form before it leaves the precincts of juvenile writing.

Plot applied to the construction of a child's story means the kind of plan which gives the material the quality of being a unit. It becomes the scheme

by which a writer can take something out of the flux of existence and make it separate and self-dependent. Substance which was vague in outline becomes, through plan, definite in form. It approximates a beginning, a middle, and an end. Plot applied in this sense becomes obviously a thing about which one cannot generalize. The kind of plan on which a writer would build a story for a two-year-old must of necessity differ from his plan for an eight-year-old or a sixteen-year-old.

The little child has the constant problem of understanding and assimilating the varied and enormously puzzling world which surrounds him. His power of attention is intense rather than wide; since so many things are strange, he must devote himself to one small thing at a time. He has little knowledge of the mysterious law of cause and effect; that is one of the many things he must come, slowly, to recognize, but on the way to such knowledge he is concerned with small isolated objects or actions. Furthermore, and this must be a gracious means of self-protection, he is likely to give his attention to such things as have in them some familiar quality. He is a stranger in a strange land, and his experience has something of the experience of a lonely traveller who overhears a phrase in his own language, or sees in some foreign market-place a bit of costume of his own land, or a Standard Oil sign. These three characteristics of the small child are all of importance in the stories which he is to hear. Events which seem slight and ordinary to his

elders have interest for him; repetition, which allows his attention to hang intensely to one thing instead of demanding a shifting and progressing, fits his psychology; the story which concerns itself with familiar material such as his breakfast, his walks, the few animals he knows, gives the child more satisfaction than the story unrelated to his own experience. And finally, for the plot value of the child's story, since complicated relations have no meaning for him, since his conception of causal relation is slight, his story must have simplicity of plan.

The simplest form of plot appears in the stories which a mother first tells her baby. These are usually the "Pat a Cake" story, and the "This Little Pig" story. The Pat a Cake story is perhaps the most elementary form since in this case the action of the child, "pat it and pat it, roll it and roll it," illustrates to him what the mother means by the words. In the little pig story he has to imagine a situation outside of himself. The chances are that "This little pig went to market" means very little to him at first, since he may never have seen a pig or a market, and the phrase connects itself simply with the tweaking of his toe. But at any rate, here is a story of action a little further outside of himself than the Pat a Cake. The repetition comes in to give the form of the story, and the unity; the alternation of action, going, staying at home, having roast beef, having none, keeps the plot from taxing the child's attention by splitting into too many issues; and the climax

of enjoyment appears with the predicament of "Wee, wee, wee, I can't find my way home!" It can, however, scarcely be called the climax of a plot since the five incidents have much the same value and each one is fairly complete in itself. Plot, as a matter of fact, has as yet so indefinite a beginning, middle, or end that the casual glance reveals almost none at all. lYet the particular material in use is segregated from material in general and does resolve itself into a unit not entirely nebulous in structure' and limitation.

Very soon the identification process begins in the baby's mind. He likes to feel himself the hero of the story. A friend who has three children tells me of a story which her mother invented for them. It begins, "Once there was a little boy and his name was John." John catches his own name and looks up, interested. "One day John's mother said, 'John, would you like to go for a walk?' John said he would like to go for a walk. So then John's mother got his cap and tied it down over his ears—" Here the grandmother always made the tying motion—"and she got his coat and buttoned it up," and so on through the getting ready process. "Then John went out-doors with his mother. Pretty soon as they were going along they saw a cow. The cow said 'Moo!' to John, and then John said 'Moo!' to the cow. They went along a little farther and they saw a dog. The dog said—" and so on until the grandmother grows tired and withdraws John from his walk.

The characteristics of this story are those of most stories for the young child. Evenness of interest; a continuous flow of slight action; the possibility of an end where the grandmother finds an end desirable; the possibility of being stretched to cover a long period. The child's story has a beginning, but no identifiable middle, and no predetermined end. Unlike the story for older readers, it has no rise in interest, no inevitable conclusion. It has a plot more like that of the old picaresque romance, a single thread— John's walk in this case—upon which any number of beads may be strung. The very qualities which make this story interesting to the child would ruin it for his older brother.

In the Mother Goose stories which are likely to follow the previous stories, the simple statement of the plot is the whole thing. Jack and Jill will serve as well as any other to illustrate.

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown

And Jill came tumbling after.

Up Jack got and home did trot

As fast as he could caper,
Went to bed to mend his head
With vinegar and brown paper.

Jill came in and she did grin
To see Jack's paper plaster.
Mother, vexed, did spank her next
For causing Jack's disaster.

The plan of the story is developed by straight action. Each line gives a fresh impetus to the movement. The plot moves rapidly to a climax which is followed by what to Jill at least must have seemed a denouement. The Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe illustrates the same directness of action in her arrival at the solution of her difficulty. Old Mother Hubbard's problem is stated with equal brevity. Then the story goes on with her attempts to solve it from one incident to another until the pair is left with honors divided evenly in,

The dame made a curtsey,
The dog made a bow,
The dame said, "Your servant!"
The dog said, "Bow wow!"

Little Black Sambo captures his readers while young and holds them indefinitely. The charm of the story lies probably as much in its detail as in its plan. The child will return again and again to read about the "Lovely little Pair of Purple Shoes with Crimson Soles and Crimson Linings." The action, however, involved in the gradual loss of all of Little Black Sambo's enchanting details and the increasing action involved in their recovery, add much to the value of the tale. As a still further asset, repetition appears in the presentation of the plan to the child. Almost everything in the story appears more than once.

Repetition seems entirely to replace plan or even detail in the Arabella and Araminta Stories, which hold young readers enthralled. The plan is apparently based on intention to have Arabella and Araminta do something all the time. What they do does not matter, nor how many times they do it, except that each repetition affords additional enjoyment to the reader. "Arabella picked a daisy and Araminta picked a daisy, and Arabella picked a daisy and Araminta picked a daisy, and Arabella—" is the kind of refrain which comprises the plan of the story. Form rather than content lies behind any attraction which the story may have.

Fairy stories are pretty completely furnished with plot. The plot is, indeed, so well formulated that it is often used as a type or symbol for a certain kind of story plan, as the Cinderella plot, the Ugly Duckling plot, etc. Many fairy tales approximate the adult story in plot. They consist of incidents continuous and interlocking, instead of merely casual. They proceed from a situation which is given at the beginning to some very definite conclusion. Each incident produces the one which follows it until they work up to the solution of a given problem. In addition to the main line of interest as directed by, for instance, Cinderella, a fairy story often presents a subordinate line of interest as brought out by the struggle of Cinderella's wicked relatives. A' fairy story is much more likely to embody a complete plot in the adult story sense than many of the short stories of adventure which interest older boys and girls.

Such stories may be entirely lacking in subordinate interest, thus classifying themselves as incidents rather than as short stories. The plan consists of the character's attempt to solve a simple situation. He gets into a difficulty and gets out of it. This one line of interest may be entirely absorbing up to a question of life or death, and as it becomes more elaborate it supplies the reader with substance enough to make of it a good juvenile short story. A boy slips unexpectedly into the old well of a deserted farm. He has no one to help him out, and his own wits and strength must save him. The plan of the

story is based on his predicament and struggle, which may be made as stormy as the author wishes; but as long as no other line of interest is involved, the boy's exigency remains an incident. Many of the brief magazine stories are of this character.

A juvenile story which approaches the structure of an adult story, as most stories of any pretension for adolescents must, is supplied with a complication or second line of interest. If, for instance, our hero in the well has an important message to deliver before a certain time, and failure to do it spells destruction for someone else, his accident becomes a second line of interest which weaves itself into the main story about the message and its concomitants. The plot has now arrived at the adult story stage with its salient feature, a conflict. The kinds of conflict and the methods of dealing with them are again limited by the young reader's experience. For that reason they are usually concerned with action. Conflict in children's stories is rarely psychological; it is seldom entirely social, though elements of both types of struggle may be present. Usually, the conflict is on a physical plane.

The kinds of conflict resolve themselves into a variety of combinations. Many adventure stories are largely conflicts between the hero and forces of nature, giving us sea stories, aeroplane stories, castaway stories, the Robinson Crusoe theme, etc. Or the element of conflict between groups of

people may enter as a basis for war stories, Indian stories, football and college stories. Often the struggle exists between persons and animals. It may be a person and animal versus an animal, as a boy and his dog versus a wolf. Kipling's *BikTi Tikki Tavi* is a good illustration of this sort of conflict. The child and his mongoose are pitted against the snake, the mongoose fights the snake and wins safety for them both. Or the conflict may be a person and animal versus another person, or versus some difficult situation, as in London's *Michael* and *Jerry,* or Terhune's Lad stories. Conflicts directly between the character and an animal are less common and are limited usually to hunting and trapping stories. A struggle between animal and animal gives the type of struggle of Thompson-Seton's *Wild Animals I Have Known*.

Variety within variety might be analyzed but after all the author does not go at his story in that way. Such classification may help by suggesting combinations, but it seldom stimulates creative power. A writer does not think, "I will now invent an animal versus person story." He comes upon a real or imaginary situation, considers it, says, "This ought to make a good story," and proceeds to bring to bear on it all of his skill until he is satisfied that he has accomplished his end. Then someone may tell him that he has written an animal versus person story, and he will agree.

Such a survey of the field is of help to the beginner. With its aid he becomes aware of the possibilities open to his endeavor. He may find himself interested in a particular combination suggested, and by reading some good stories of that kind, acquire a background and trend of thought in which will germinate the kind of story he wishes to produce. A' new writer is often unaware of the particular form of juvenile fiction in which he will excel until he has gone through a period of experimentation. A student who will declare that her métier is school stories and that it is impossible for her to write a fairy story will sometimes find on trial that it unexpectedly affords her a most adequate vehicle of expression.

Suppose, in order to illustrate the essentials of plot and to make concrete its theory, we create an adventure story, analyzing its parts and their relation to each other as we go along. The main issues presented will hold true as they are applied to the other groups of stories. Except for a few points, however, plot is so intimately tied up with anything else in the story which is living tissue that its separate analysis is much like the dissection of the heart without any demonstration of its connections with the rest of the body.

In an adventure story we must have the adventurers who acting in character will supply the motive of the story; their struggle, which will give

the action of the story; the solution of their problem which will give the outcome of the story.

Let our adventurer be Jerry Flynn. Suppose we have him, while he is prowling about in his father's old fishing boat, discover an abandoned silver mine on an island, the title of which has always belonged in the family though the island is worthless. Jerry comes upon signs of recent excavations which he proceeds to investigate. He finds rough men on the island and evidences of their working the mine with profit. In his conflict to regain the silver mine for its rightful owners, the struggle of the plot develops. In the final satisfactory solution of Jerry's difficulties we arrive at the outcome.

Meantime within our story of Jerry comes the complication introduced by the particular difficulties of one of the miners, a boy of Jerry's age, who is depending upon the returns from the mine to help him escape from an otherwise hopeless situation. In solving the difficulties of our complicating character, we must not draw the interest away from Jerry. The threads of the plot complication must run into the strands of the main plot, serving to strengthen it and to set off its pattern.

Let us begin with the first essential of a plot, the motive, which is supplied by a person acting in character. Here we have in a nutshell the relation of characterization to plot. The character determines the plot. Out of Jerry Flynn's character must come our plot if it is to be of any authentic value. Reality which is demanded by the juvenile reader above everything else comes from adequate motivation of the character. Jerry goes about his problems as only Jerry Flynn could; he attacks them with the vigor and originality of Jerry Flynn and no other. Always Jerry Flynn is acting in character and thus giving reality by adequate motivation of the plot.

The second characteristic which we may expect by a good characterization of our Jerry is unity. The juvenile reader is not so conscious of this desirable attribute as he is of reality. But he misses it as sharply if it is not there. The unity of the whole plot comes from our conception of a character as a person. If Jerry is a real person to us, as we put him through the trials of his story, we are bound to attain unity of effect and unity of emotion. All of his reactions will hang together instead of splitting off into reactions such as Tom, Dick, or Harry might have had.

The third point which we should attain by our characterization is interest. Unless Jerry Flynn is presented not as a story type but with individuality, your young reader will have little interest in him. You may have determined

beforehand that you wish to do a courageous boy, a strong-willed boy, a hot-tempered boy, any particular type of a boy, but you must bear in mind above everything else that you are doing Jerry Flynn. If he is hot-tempered, it is because he has inherited this trait from his father's side and you know all about it. Thus although you may not take your reader into your confidence about the origin of Jerry's hot temper, you present it to your reader as Jerry's particular brand, not in any wise to be confused with typical tempers.

If then your story is to have reality, unity, and interest, the plot must be motivated by a Jerry who will act in character. If you impose such a rule upon yourself, it is obvious that you must know Jerry from the inside out, more thoroughly than ever a parent knew his child. But of no human being can you possibly have the complete knowledge which is in the back of your mind as you write about the character of your own creation. Most of this knowledge, it is true, is strictly private, but it lies behind the action of your hero, and gives him the power to motivate a plot which is sound in its reality, firm in its unity, and strong in its interest.

Suppose, then, that you have thought about Jerry Flynn until he is the most completely real person you know. Of all this information which you have concerning him, how much does the opening of the plot need to make

clear? Whatever you give your young readers, it must be something which will interest them at once. Preliminary exposition is not for them. A good opening can contain an amazing amount of material pertinent to the plot without having in the least the appearance of being over stuffed.

Jerry Flynn rolled up the wheel of the old motor boat for the tenth time; then he sat back on his heels while he drew an oily sleeve across his forehead and stared into the unresponsive interior of the engine.

"Regular Flynn outfit," he grinned. "Guess I might as well go ashore and get a swim. Here's Flynn's Folly right handy."

He pulled an oar out from under the thwarts and with a few muscular strokes paddled himself into a cove of the island.

What are some of the points which such a tentative opening as this would give us? In the first place, you have the name of the person concerned. The young reader likes handles to take hold of at once. The kind of name is important, too. Parents labor under the disadvantage of naming their offspring while they are still in the dark as to the idiosyncrasies which may make the name highly inappropriate. The author has no such excuse for

misappellations. He knows what sort of a person he has created and the name should be no gamble for him.

Jerry Flynn suggests Irish ancestry with the possibility of dare devil inheritance which will not hesitate to tackle any adventure that we have in mind for him. Shiftlessness emanates from the condition of the motor boat and the name of the ancestral island. Good nature seems to lie behind the grin which greets his failure to start the engine. A husky physical outfit is necessary to roll up a motor boat wheel ten times and to paddle such a boat ashore with a few strokes. The station of life is evidently somewhere near the plane of poverty. The setting of the story is, for the first scene anyway, on an island.

Let us test the opening of our plot to see if it fulfils its function. Does it in the first place interest the reader? Boys usually like the idea of running a motor boat, even if it will not go. They are likely to smell adventure in the possibilities which may arise from landing alone on an island. Brawny Jerry Flynn sounds like "something doing."

The "something doing" is the second test which our opening must pass. Does it start action? The hero certainly is moving toward the center from which one may expect action to emanate.

Third, have we succeeded in striking the keynote of the story? To do this we must have begun our characterization of Jerry, we must have given the setting for his action, and must have begun our theme.

In presenting a person in character to a juvenile reader, the writer may make use of a piece of description to open his plot. Suppose we began our story:

A small motor boat lay motionless in the middle of the bay. At the wheel, struggling to start the engine, was a strong, muscular looking boy named Jerry Flynn. He had a good natured grin as he worked. Near at hand lay a small island which belonged to his grandfather and which because of some worthless silver mines was called Flynn's Folly. It had several good coves—etc.

Obviously such an opening does not grip the interest to any great degree. Description, when we use it to open a juvenile story, must be description in action. Passive description is not for the young, especially if of the male sex.

If, on the other hand, we present our character in action at once, we must be careful not to rely too much on the child's interpretation. The older the

reader, the more you can leave to him. Anyone who has taken a child to a play knows how difficult it is for him to grasp immediately what the characters are doing. In the same way, the dramatic method of unexplained conversation which demands immediate inference may fall short of the child's comprehension.

In any case if we bear in mind that we wish to open with something vital to the plot, we shall not allow ourselves to wander into wordy description or to clip the speech of our characters into unintelligible jargon.

If we have satisfactorily supplied the first essential of our plot, its motive, by creating a Jerry who will act in character, the next point to consider is how to present this action which makes the plot in the most dramatic vivid way. If you ask a beginner to outline to you a story which he has in mind, he will at once attempt to tell you *about* the story. He seldom, until he is well in training, sees action in scenes. Until his story1 formulates itself into clear-cut scenes locating and concentrating the action into limited space much as scenes are set on the stage, the effect of the tale is likely to be diluted through the admixture of much telling.

In a short story the question arises as to the wisdom of changing scenes often. Some of the most able short stories for adults are given to the reader

in one scene, the cross section of an immediate situation. With skill the author is able to imply enough past and future to illuminate the moment sufficiently. Such descriptive details as he has, gather added power because they are applicable to the whole story. His decks are cleared for pure narrative.

Like any cross section, however, in science or in art, some interpretation by the observer is necessary. The zoologist who examines under the microscope the cross section of a frog's egg gathers the significance of its present state because his cytological experience has taught him the general significance of cell development. The child, however, has rather a limited life experience as yet to call upon. Over-conciseness requires too much of him in the way of inference. He needs to be led more gradually to the climax, to see the steps by which it has come.

On the other hand, if the writer changes his scenes too often, he runs into the weakness of telling *about* his story rather than giving the story. As a matter of fact, the length of time covered by the short story somewhat limits its scenic effects. It is bound to be more or less telescoped. Even if intervals of time are necessary between the beginning and end, they are somewhat assumed rather than described. Many years elapsed before the Pope's Mule compassed his kick, but neither the kick nor the story suffered.

The story of Jerry Flynn can scarcely be attained in one setting. Much could be done with this first island scene, but it is possible that Jerry will have to make connections with the mainland and his family on the farm before we can arrive at an adequate solution of the plot. Or even if you as the author wish to make Jerry the arbiter of the entire story, as he well might be, he can scarcely manage so complicated an affair at one sitting.

Suppose we give Jerry one scene on the island in which he finds the evidence of the reclaiming of the old silver mine and becomes aware of the dangerous character of the intruders. If we decide not to let his engine work, he may have, as a corollary of this scene, a secret night interview with the complicating boy, who might swim out to the motor boat where Jerry plans to spend the night. As a result of this interview Jerry may find it expedient to make a quick getaway which, considering the difficulties and the darkness, may become the setting of a very dramatic scene.

The student can now see that the arrangement of the further scenes depends upon the development of the future action. If the author wishes Jerry to work this difficulty out without help, the scene structure is nearly over. If someone else is to enter the conflict, the plot will require further setting.

The writer, as he plans a story, would usually do well to make a list of scenes which seem essential to him to bring out the action of the story. Then as the story progresses, he should cut out as many of the scenes as possible. Almost always the author cuts instead of expanding. The story concentrates as it becomes definite in his mind. Instead of filling the receptacle with a pale blur, it precipitates and takes form in clear crystals.

Selection becomes almost as important as creation. The writer, who feels that he must make use of every good point he has thought of, is being economical after the fashion of the housewife who saves everything. He will achieve much the same cluttered effect. Real ideas ought never to be thrown away—they are too rare!—but selection of those pertinent to the theme and capable of heightening it is an essential of story writing. Scenes and details need to be sorted over carefully before the final choice is made.

The way in which the author manages the selection of details is a decisive factor in whether he can present the action of his plot in the most vivid way. Two things are obvious: he cannot give all the details, and he cannot compress them into a summary because either method would bore his reader.

Economy of detail is a fairly safe suggestion, much may be left to the imagination of the child. He is, it is true, quite insatiable when he is learning about the way in which a thing is made; then one may be as detailed as a receipt. But his imagination is frequently far less trammeled than yours and he likes to use it. Youngsters usually care very little about details which pertain to previous history. They want to know what is going on now or what is likely to happen next. The present and the future belong to youth.

A history of how Jerry's ancestors happened to buy the island and why they gave up mining it and what their losses were, at its best, if told vividly enough to hold the reader's attention, would serve only to sidetrack it from the main issue. At its worst it would be dull enough to keep him from finishing the story.

All that is distracting should be omitted. In a short story everything must focus on the plot and no matter how entertaining an extraneous detail, it should be cut out.

Beginners almost invariably need a stern course in selection. They have to come to a realization of the restriction of time and space in the short story. They learn that a kerosene lamp has more effect if it is set in the middle of a

room than if placed in a window. Limiting scenes and details, it is comforting to remember, becomes less painful as the skill increases. The process of pruning is likely to have a strengthening effect on the surviving parts.

It may seem from the emphasis on simplicity and the urgency placed on selection and limitation that anything in the way of complication of our plot will serve to counteract the effects which we are working to obtain. As we have already pointed out, a juvenile story may complete itself perfectly well without any complication or secondary interest. Suppose we told the story of Jerry's discovery, forced him into a singlehanded struggle and left him either a winner or a loser of his silver mine. We should have told the story in the form of an incident with one line of interest, with no entanglement or intermingling of parts. Such an incident, told with sufficient vigor, might have the basis of a short story. But what the incident gains in simplicity, it loses by its isolation. If two people participate in an exploit, the action is more than doubled. Moreover it acquires significance. What an individual does strictly by himself or for himself is of very little importance to the rest of the world. When we come to write our book, we shall see that a novel would become meagre to the starvation point if it tried to subsist on the one main plot. One or more sub-plots are bound to enter in. In much the same way a story of any pretension needs a complication to lift it out of the mere

incident form and to endow it with the significance of human reality. We may as well, therefore, consider complication here if we mean to go beyond the narration of the incident.

The use of complication brings with it certain obligations. If the writer is going to introduce a second line of interest, he must look far enough ahead to be sure that he is going to be able to weave this thread into the main tissue of the plot. By the end of his story it will have to be so integral a part of the whole that, removed, the story would ravel out into rags.

Suppose we decide to single out from the group of interlopers on the island a boy whom the miners call "Sis." The name "Sis" implies certain characteristics which may or may not be true of this boy according to the author's knowledge of him. Let us, on this tentative piece of structure, choose to have the boy's distaste for the sort of things which the men make him do be the basis for his actions which have given him this nickname. Our business will be to prove that he is quite the contrary of a sissy. The author must know by now how "Sis" came to be with these men, who he really is, what sort of a boy he is, what he wants, etc. But he is by no means ready to confide his knowledge to his reader. It will be time enough for the reader to know when Jerry finds out himself, and should be much more interesting coming through him.

"Sis" has been left in charge while the men have gone to the mainland for a piece of machinery and some supplies. He goes off in the woods to read in peace. Jerry, therefore, finds the place curiously deserted though bearing evidence of occupancy. He builds a fire on the beach to roast some clams which he has dug and becomes aware that his smoke has attracted an observer. He flings a good-natured greeting at the figure which he realizes is hiding behind the rocks and finds himself looking into the muzzle of an undeniably wavering gun. Jerry's quick wit continues its raillery and finally gets a sullen response from "Sis," who lowers the gun and comes out. The main character and the complicating character have now entered the story. Each one has a problem but these two problems instead of running as parallel lines must converge until at the climax they become unified into the one final situation for both. Jerry's struggle will very likely be intensified and made more difficult by his association with "Sis" and his sense of responsibility for him. But on the other hand, his experience will become enriched by human contact without which the emotional quality of the story is lacking.

We must now consider "Sis" in the light of his connection with the outcome which he may determine and in which at any rate he has considerable interest. Jerry extracts from "Sis" some meagre and reluctant information

about the worthless uncle who holds him here on the island with the promise of freedom and school as soon as the mine has paid them enough. "Sis" meantime is forced to furnish the funds from a small inheritance. The character sketch of the uncle suggests to Jerry that it would be well for him to be off. Just as his dingy rounds the point which hides his own motor boat, he hears the chug of the returning boat. He slips unseen into his boat, but though he tries every device, it refuses to start. Finally to his chagrin he finds that his gas tank is empty. He settles down for the night. This leads up to the scene of the night visit from "Sis" with his warning. "Sis" manages with much difficulty to get a can of gasoline from his Uncle's boat for Jerry. Jerry tows his boat well out before he dares start the noise of the engine. He fears for "Sis" if his visit is discovered.

Since a juvenile story is usually weakened by introducing adults in order to solve the problems, suppose we have Jerry living with a feeble old grandfather who could be of no help to him anyway. His only use will be as a proof of the ownership of the island. The little fishing village is miles from a lawyer and Jerry, therefore, must manage the situation with no help except that of "Sis" if he can get it. We are now ready to work up the struggle to a climax which will lead to the solution.

Jerry's conflict is made intricate by several things. The island and the silver mine are his through his grandfather who lost all his money getting the mine into such shape that it is now easy for these trespassers to go on and make money from it. The Flynn house is falling into decay and Jerry is held there helpless by the need of the old man. To regain the silver mine will mean a chance in life for Jerry. On the other hand, it apparently will take away any chance from "Sis." The men have repaired the old machinery and installed new, as Jerry himself never could have done. Without means for working the mine, it is of no use. Yet on the other hand Jerry knows that it would not take long to interest someone with money in a mine that showed evidence of activity.

The writer may have Jerry ponder these things and after an amicable visit to the island decide to go halves on the plant with the men. Such a moral struggle and tame climax would not, however, interest boys. Jerry will have to be plunged into a physical struggle as well, short and sharp to suit the length of the story. He, with "Sis" who has stood by him, must be left victors in the field, the villains routed. Then "Sis," whose patrimony has furnished the funds so far for the mine, and Jerry, who owns it, are left partners with highly interesting prospects ahead of them. The climax of the story which comes with the victory of the boys leads to a conclusion which deals satisfactorily with everybody concerned. The writer must be skillful enough

to arrange his material so that the victory of the two boys becomes plausible, which means, of course, that it cannot be a purely physical combat. The introduction of the points of real ownership of the mine and of the real source of the funds will be important. Note, however, that these two factors which determine the solution of the story's problem are the basis of the separate problems of the main and complicating characters. The problems of the characters have become unified into a single solution which finishes the story.

The introduction of "Sis" with the working out of his difficulties has enriched the story of Jerry by its added human interest. It has left the situation, as boys like to have it left, in the hands of their peers. By reducing the number of the older men to two, the story is not littered up by many characters. Of these, close characterization is necessary only for the two boys; the uncle is hit off sufficiently by "Sis's" description of him to Jerry, and his companion is unimportant. They must be real people standing out as individuals but their characterization should be as brief as it is adequate. If our story has been handled with skill, we should have proved by the time we have finished it, our earlier thesis about the importance of characterization.

In an adventure story, although the emphasis is on action, characterization plays as important a part as in any other kind of story. If you set up two indeterminate figures, no matter how much action you force them into, they will remain puppets and the movement of your story will have no more spontaneity and naturalness than if you pulled their strings. Jerry's daring and vigor are characteristics which we have selected to force him into a dangerous situation and to get him out of it. His good humor and winning Irish wit have captured "Sis" for him, and thus influence the outcome of the story. "Sis," physically inferior to Jerry, quiet, book-loving, sullen through ill-treatment and unhappiness, but equipped with an unsuspected wire of courage, in his turn directs events through his characteristics. The uncle, brutal, unprincipled, but a coward as well as a bully, fights for the things for which he stands. Jerry could not relinquish his rights, "Sis" could not fail him at the crisis, and the uncle could not summon courage to face the consequences of defiance of the law. Thus your story is determined for you by your characters. Your job is to make it convincing to your readers.

Anyone with a fairly active imagination can conjure up a story plot which will be no more and no less interesting than the foregoing until it is taken in hand by the creative writer. At this point it is usual to say, "Writing is a gift that cannot be taught." The chances are that a person with a low intelligence quotient would not be able to produce a story of any great

power and beauty. That people with low intelligence quotients do write stories is unquestionably true. One has only to read the magazines to know it. But one should bear in mind that a large proportion of their readers would measure even lower.

It is true also that an intelligent person who is hopelessly unimaginative would do well to keep to the writing of articles and essays. But the intelligent imaginative person, who has lived long enough to have acquired some experience and who wants to write, is likely to do it. On the way to achievement, he may be saved some roundabout paths if he is given certain direction. Early in my own writing a brilliant author said to me rather quizzically, "No matter how impossible your situation, you can make it real if you know how to select your detail."

When a writer has gained the ability to use vivid detail, original in its expression without being labored, he is well on the way toward the acquisition of style. But to give, one must get. Behind vivid expression lies quickened experience. The youngster derives much experience through the use of his senses. If you wish to make those experiences relive for him, or to put him in touch with new ones, you must arouse his associations. The chapter on the use of detail deals with this problem of the writer to make vivid and real his story. The principles of the use of concrete detail apply to

the story of Jerry or to any other story. They give to the story its flavor, color, realism, convincing quality.

CHAPTER 11: THEME

THE unity of the plot, we have already observed, depends on our conception of the motivating character as a real person. Jerry Flynn, acting in character, swings his story into a kind of rhythm which is peculiar to him. By action which is harmonious a theme is evolved not unlike the theme of a piece of music. It runs through the story, influences the movement, and finally tests the result which we are working to obtain, unity of effect and emotion. Defined very simply, this theme is the underlying idea of the story. The chief trait of the character working on the situation in which he is evolved furnishes the general theme.

The story of Jerry Flynn, like many of the stories for children, is primarily an action story. As such, the theme consists of the effect of certain traits worked out through well motivated convincing acts. Courage and wit, which extricate their owner from a difficult situation, become in a general way the theme of our Jerry story. The story will not be finished until this theme is attested to. For example, suppose Jerry goes through the part of the story which deals with the discovery of the men working the old silver mine, and starts home in his motor boat after his interview with "Sis." On the way a bad storm comes up, the old engine gives out, and 'Jerry is capsized and

drowned. Obviously the story is finished as far as he is concerned. But have we really said anything? Is the reader to infer that boys should not go in motor boats, or that relatives should not acquire islands with old silver mines, or that the inquiring mind will meet disaster, or what? The plot must say something, and if we finish Jerry off in this fashion, it does not. No problem has been worked out, no conclusive statement can be formulated about the situation; we have proved nothing. But if Jerry through his predominating qualities of wit and courage succeeds in dominating the situation and making it deliver to him success for "Sis" and himself, the theme has been made to yield a plot which has unity and drama.

Theme, therefore, takes on an important function in the structure of a story. Its importance, however, like much that is vital to any kind of life, is closely bound up with its inconspicuousness. A theme which resolves a story into an argument for an idea or a plea for a desirable quality has defeated its own end. A child's story is usually an attempt to answer what is right and best. The attempt to make this answer clear beyond any possibility of doubt to the child has been a source of the endless supply of moral tales for the young.

The simple way of teaching successfully a lesson to the child who runs away is to tell him about the little boy who ran away and in consequence met disaster. The uncreative parent is unable to produce a supply of these stories equal to his need of them but he has much assistance from writers. Whether the child takes to heart the immediate and inevitable connection between sin and punishment in fiction is one question; if he is an intelligent youth he will possibly observe that truth is somewhat distorted, that punishment is too neat. In any case he is likely to resent being preached at. He, like his elders, feels that fiction is something to enjoy. The theme story in adult form seeks to suggest artfully the underlying argument. Its writer knows that only a good story can get over a good idea. With the child, even more than with adults, life is regulated by action. When we seek to reach him by the written word we are using a method of approach which is foreign to his present state of development. The pure theme story, as an influential factor in his youthful career, is likely to meet resentment or indifference. If, however, the author uses the same care which he knows would be necessary in an adult story, he can reach the child through his imagination. It would be inartistic as well as mistaken policy in our Jerry story to hammer once on the idea that wicked impostors like the men on the island are bound to meet defeat in the hands of those whom they seek to defraud. Besides, of course, it would not be the truth. But that determination and resourcefulness if properly applied do in this case

accomplish the ends of justice is a theme which might influence a boy to choose those weapons rather than the passive attitude of "Sis," if he were confronted by a critical situation. His imagination rather than his intellect supplies the wire over which our theme current must enter.

The theme story as a purely didactic production, then, is a failure. The story without a theme is equally a failure. But a story which is held together by a theme, directed by it, evolved from it, and which at the same time keeps the theme in abeyance to its action has a good chance at success.

If stories may be evolved from themes, then themes should prove a prolific source of plots. Evidence of their usefulness in this direction is afforded when a theme is presented to a class with the demand for an accompanying plot. Each writer is likely to have his own individual reaction toward the theme as far as the emphasis goes in his plan. Suppose for example that we take the theme, "A person likes to have something which he can call his own." The writer whose tendency is toward emphasis of the theme itself might evolve some such plot as this:

Mary, a member of a large family who has always shared her sister's room, wants a room of her own, more than anything else. After much effort, her mother manages to let her have a small attic room. Mary spends all of her

time and allowance in making the room pretty and comfortable. Just as it is ready for occupation, her old aunt, who is poor and crotchety, writes to ask if she may come there, as she has no other place to go. Mary's room is the only vacant spot. The aunt is in great need. Mary's struggle is between her desire to have something of her own and her realization of her aunt's need. The writer may emphasize the poignancy of the struggle, and solve the story by Mary's unselfish relinquishing of the room to her aunt. In that solution Mary can realize that a comfortable state of mind is a more desirable possession than the room. The theme has evolved somewhat from the first statement. Mary desires a room of her own, but her most important desire is for a satisfactory peace of mind.

Suppose the tendency of the writer is to emphasize action in a story. He may develop the original theme as follows: John is a timid boy who has never had anything of his own. He becomes obsessed by the desire to own a bicycle. He earns the money for it with great difficulty because of his shyness. The climax of the story comes when he is roused to physical fight to retain possession of this bicycle, the first thing he has ever possessed.

If the emphasis of the story is on character, the writer may develop his theme into a story dominated by a young girl who exhibits a growing tendency to wish to own things. As she covets and collects, the propensity

works back on her character, and she begins to develop all sorts of undesirable traits. The effect on her character of over-valuation of things will make the basis of the story, which will probably end with her realization of their proper place in the universe. Here, too, the original theme has been altered into the statement that a person's desire for material possessions is disastrous unless it is curbed.

Suppose a writer has in mind a story in which atmosphere would play an important part. A child is taken to China where he finds nothing familiar or pleasant in the way of play or work. He becomes almost ill from homesickness. One day his father brings him from a visiting American ship a Boston terrier puppy. The dog stands for home and for something of his very own in a strange land where nothing, not even the language, is his. The puppy wanders away one day into a Chinese slum. The boy searches for him, and finds him in a little coolie hut. If the writer knows his material he will be able to invest this story with considerable atmosphere.

Such a story in more ordinary surroundings could easily transfer the emphasis to the emotional effect. Suppose for example, a newsboy picks up a mongrel pup and the two form a boy's dog partnership. The dog is the only thing the boy has ever had any sort of claim upon. The relative who allows Tim a corner to sleep in refuses to keep the dog. Tim takes his pup

and starts forth on his own. His adventures might serve as a long story, or be terminated in a climax through the arrest of Tim and his dog as vagrants and their subsequent release and new start through one of Tim's old newspaper customers.

Thus one theme, with its possible variations, will yield many plots which will differ as the tendency toward certain kinds of emphasis differs in the writers. As a matter of fact, no one who is reading this chapter would have created exactly the same plot as any of those presented, and he probably would have been able to invent just as many and just as varied plots if the theme had been presented to him. The question comes to the writer then, what kinds of themes and what sorts of emphasis are desirable and suitable for children?

The interests of children are so wide and so alive that anyone who has felt their vigor of attack dislikes to classify any material as taboo. It is, moreover, quite obvious that a theme limitation for a five-year-old would not apply to a fifteen-year-old. Perhaps most of the limitations of themes for the young would apply as well for adult stories.

A theme is especially unfit for children if it calls for too elaborate staging. For that reason a story like that of the boy and his Boston terrier in China

might easily in the hands of an author become so dense with atmosphere that the dramatic narrative was entirely obscured. Whatever interrupts or draws attention away from dramatic narrative, whether it is elaborate staging or an overwhelming idea, is bad for the child's story.

The trite theme may be a dangerous one to forbid since it would eliminate so large a proportion of children's stories. Moreover no author recognizes his own theme as trite, and a complete list of such would be a difficult proposition. Such themes as rest in the following situations: the child who dreams a fairy story, the poor boy who becomes head of the firm by the Horatio Alger method, the girl who wins over a crusty employer by cheery ways and self-sacrificing devotion to work; these themes seem a little outworn. Yet after all, the skill of the writer in his power to see the situation in a new way and to express it in fresh phrasing has so great an influence in determining whether the final effect of the story is trite or not that the theme itself becomes secondary to the ability to handle it.

Themes which deal with the occult or with the horrible may be safely eliminated from the list. If they could be excluded from the oral tales as well, much of the fear element which lurks in the background of children's lives would disappear also. Such a prohibition is not applied to the themes

which yield mystery stories. A mystery story which has reality is interesting and stimulating both to children and to adults.

But themes which are based on unreality form a large tabooed group. One attribute of youth is credulity and it is too beautiful and too useful an asset to life's apprentices to be taken advantage of. Fiction form cannot excuse false standards or impossible situations. Boys would not be so ready to jump a freight car for the west or girls to fall into the arms of the first applicant if fiction had a follow-up system. Their dreams are based on the unreality of their stories and they follow their dreams with the single-heartedness of youth. A theme based on false standards or untruth has no right in juvenile fiction.

If a theme is too problematic, it becomes unfit, because both sides of the situation must be produced. The story loses unity of effect and leaves the reader with divided attention. A writer, for example, cannot in a short story handle the question of the comparative advantages of the country or the city for a child. He must have a representative of each, and if he treats them honestly he will have to give advantages to each in their competition. The problematic theme or the propaganda theme has small place in fiction for the young. Questions which have not yet been settled by the world may well be eliminated from the stories.

The unfamiliar theme has its disadvantages. If it is unfamiliar to the writer, and he tries to write a story on the influence of the tropics on character when he has always lived in the Bronx, he is likely to obtain an unconvincing result. If the theme is too unfamiliar to the stage of childhood for which it is intended, the reader has unsatisfactory results. Unless it can be correlated with his present experience he has no pass key to it. Themes are limited both by the writer's and by the reader's knowledge, experience, and beliefs.

The writer draws upon himself as the source of inspiration for his themes. Experience may have given him an interesting life, reading should have provided him with a well-furnished mind, thinking ought to stimulate him into the production of original ideas. Any or all of these sources yield themes which will be a prolific source of plots. If he has an awareness of the potentiality of grasp of his audience, he can fit his theme to its demands and needs.

CHAPTER 12: THE ANGLE OF NARRATION

AFTER the writer has decided upon his theme, his characters, and his plot, he has to settle one more question before he can begin to write. This question is much more easily decided for children's than for adults' stories. But with any fiction a writer must know the angle which he intends to take in his narration in order that he may stand consistently by his choice. The amateur author plunges in and tells all he knows about everything and everybody in the story. The skillful author realizes possibility in the technical point of angle of narration.

Any action in which several people partake will take on a different aspect according to the point of view of the person who relates it, or through whom it is related. Suppose, for example, that our story of the old silver mine should be given as it appeared to "Sis." We should have to begin with "Sis" on the island, and make clear his state of captivity. "We should have to present his feeling toward the situation, his state of mind toward the strange boy who appears on the beach; and we should have to tell the whole story as "Sis" saw it, felt it, was affected by it. Jerry would become a minor character in this story, the spot light being focused on "Sis."

Suppose, instead, that we consider the story from the uncle's point of view, his satisfaction at the find of the mine, his determination to use "Sis" and his money for his own ends, his anger at the two boys, and his feeling at his defeat. Again we have another story. If, on the other hand, the narrative is transferred to the old grandfather, he too would have quite a different slant on the whole affair and through him we should get quite a different story.

The first question then is, whose story is this? To decide, we must consider on which character we wish the child's attention especially focused. As we know, he will identify himself with one person if the story has unity, and will continue to share the hopes, fears, and activities of that person from the beginning to the end. If we give him with equal emphasis and care the point of view of another character, his interest becomes divided in his effort to be two people at once. The illusion of identification with the chief character is destroyed, and sometimes that of reality itself.

This effect of confusion and lack of unity of effect frequently arises from the effort of the reader to tell his story from the angle of omniscient author. Such a writer would be likely to land Jerry on the island, where he would leave him for a time while he attended to "Sis." He would then give us the story of "Sis" up to the point of Jerry's arrival. When it came time for the uncle to put in his appearance, he would be preceded by an account of the

struggle in which he was involved. Probably also the grandfather would not be neglected on Jerry's return to the house. We have, however, decided that this story belongs to Jerry. He is the character with whom we wish our reader to become intimate; his struggle is the one on which the story centers. We are going to tell the story from the angle of narration which in juvenile writing is likely to yield direct and clear results; that is, the angle of the main character.

And we are using the third person form. Children usually like this form better than first person. "I don't like an *I* story," is a frequent form of criticism from them. The / story, it is true, has certain disadvantages. It is likely to be rather more subjective than children like, and it presents the difficulty of giving full valuation to the character without making him appear conceited. In *What Happened to Inger Johanne,* the child tells her own story with much humor and reality by frequent references to the reactions of other people to her and her pastimes. The story *Real Stuff,* by Katherine Haviland Taylor, is told in the first person by the device of allowing a chapter at a time to one person. Thus the reader gets the character's own point of view on a situation, and in the next chapter is able to check that up with the narrative as told in the first person by another participant in the incident. This book is written for girls who are mature

enough to be interested in a more subjective form of treatment than interests the younger child.

Whether a writer shall use subjective or objective method is determined largely by his reader's demands upon the story. A child wishes action chiefly. He is interested in thoughts and feelings only as they determine the kind of action, or as they throw light on motivating characteristics. Later the young person comes to a realization of simple psychology, an interest in emotion and thoughts as they rule the inner life of the character. Girls, largely perhaps through patterns put over on them in life and literature by their elders, become absorbed in emotional analysis earlier than boys. To gratify this new interest the growing girl feeds on love stories at the same age that the boy is absorbed in male adventures. We must, therefore, consider the stage of development of our readers before we decide upon how far we may become subjective in dealing with them.

The purely objective story is told in the dramatic method. That is, the reader becomes a spectator and sees pass before him the action of the story much as if he were seated in the theatre watching the stage. He listens to the dialogue of the characters just as he hears the actors talk. He is not told how they think and feel any more than he is told in the theatre where the old fashioned asides have been replaced by significant speech and

interpretative activity. A child's story is rarely handled in the purely objective fashion, of for instance, Hardy's *Three Strangers*. Even in an adventure story where the writer focuses on the drama instead of on the individual, the child needs a clue now and then as to the state of mind of the actors. In *Dr. Dolittle* we are told nothing about the thoughts of the characters, but such a statement appears as, "Then they all grew very sad," or "Gub-Gub was a bit scared," and "The Doctor felt very pleased—" This touch of author's omniscience is justified by the needs of the audience. It is quite different from the usual method of the beginner of which we have spoken, by which he reveals everything about everybody. The emphasis still remains on the dramatic intensity of action with omniscience of insight only as it is necessary for interpretation. The more skillful the writer, of course, the less interpretation of his drama is necessary.

For younger children, then, we need comparatively slight analysis of motives, feelings, thoughts. The subjective method has little in their experience to meet it. In the pure adventure narrative where interest is focused on dramatic action, again we find little call for subjective analysis. But when we tell our story from the angle of narration of one person, as we do with Jerry Flynn, and when that person's appreciation of his own situation becomes important enough to interest us in his hopes, ambitions, and fears, as well as in the actions which they motivate, then we need to

treat his story with just enough degree of subjectivity to make the emotions as well as the action clear in the mind of the reader who has identified himself with Jerry. If we write the story, regarding the material from Jerry's point of view toward it, giving the material as Jerry discovers it or acts in it, and if we tell the story in the third person with sufficient analysis of Jerry's thought and feeling to make his position clear, we should be able to accomplish this end.

The writer of juvenile stories sometimes uses the angle of narration of a character outside of the story. For example, stories told by grandma about children she knew when she was small, or by the old house about the action which went on within its walls, or by any outside or minor character, have a certain value. The elements of the situation are concealed until the time comes to reveal them. In the hands of the storyteller, the reader realizes, lies the key to the whole situation; on him depends its unlocking. The narrative coming straight from a witness or minor character takes on an air of authenticity. The storyteller gives his word that the story is true, thus inducing belief in the child's mind. If unskillfully handled, however, the story is likely to become cluttered up with the personality of characters in whom the reader is not interested. Grandma is all right in her place, but her fund of experience, not her character, is what the children wish to draw upon. Occasionally, as in the Uncle Remus stories, the personality of the

narrator, his speech, his mannerisms, give flavor to the stories and thus justify that angle of narration.

When the writer shifts from the short to the long story, he has a different problem about the angle of narration on his hands. In a book he has plenty of time and space to devote to everybody. Though the story must center about one person, yet it may bring each of the others into relief as it finds necessary to serve its purpose. For instance, in *Little Women,* though Jo's point of view is the most frequently emphasized, still Meg and Amy and Beth each has a chapter devoted to her now and then in which the reader has the situation from the special girl's point of view. Jo could not have given us adequately Meg's emotions toward John, her new home, her babies; she could have told us only how they seemed to Jo, the onlooker. If the book had been managed so that all of its material came to the reader through the one character, it would not have been *Little Women* at all; its title must have been *Jo March.* The child has time to identify herself with each book character in turn without confusion until she settles for herself which one is really her favorite. To this one she remains attached whether it is the main character or not. She may think of herself as Beth if she is a certain type of child, quite as readily as if Beth were the heroine of the book.

The problem of the short story is concentration; economy of material without loss of efficacy. The short story, therefore, throws its spotlight on one person and keeps it there. It has neither time nor space to deal with the other characters except in their relation to and as they affect the central person. Their lives, except as they touch the hero's, are not part of his story; they are the basis of stories of their own. The simplest way to obtain this concentration of interest on the hero of stories for older children is to give the circumstances as they seem from his point of view. A certain psychological soundness is acquired by maintaining a chosen angle throughout the story. The writer places the interest where he wishes it and keeps it there. He captures the effect of reality through the reader's identification with his chief character, who, under this treatment emerges from fiction estate into human proportions. He acquires a unity of effect both emotional and dramatic, through his concentration on the character, actions, and emotions of one person. He is likely to do a much more thorough and permanent piece of work as far as its effect on the child's mind goes.

Stories for younger children will need more objective treatment and a freer and more direct interpretation of the motives behind the action. The writer tells the story as he sees it; the reader faces the story teller and listens. The story may hold the reader if it is well told, until the listener forgets the

narrator. Such method approaches the pure narrative art of the oral story. If employed discreetly, it gives the younger child the narrative without much analysis which is unsuitable to his present state. Again in choice of angle of narration as in other points of technique of juvenile writing, the writer's method depends upon his reader's stage of development.

CHAPTER 13: Chapter Arrangement And Development

In books for adults, chapter divisions are becoming increasingly unimportant. The modern novel is divided into sections or parts, each part subdivided into smaller sections. The point of division depends upon the convenience of the author, who may separate his material chronologically into the periods through which his character passes, childhood, youth, middle age; or into periods of emotional development; or periods passed in different settings; or in any other way he pleases. Sometimes the word chapter is not mentioned. When it is recognized, it is usually indicated only by a numeral.

The demands of young readers upon the structure of the juvenile book prohibit any such freedom with chapter arrangement. A child cannot carry successfully in his mind too much suspended material. Far issues are not for him. His enjoyment depends on many problems started and finished in turn rather than upon the intricacies of a single complex struggle. The relation of the chapter to the whole book as we have already pointed out is part of the problem of the relation of the juvenile short story to the juvenile book. Like a mathematical equation, the chapter: the book:: short story: the long form.

The juvenile book then, from the nature of the demands upon it, resolves itself into a series of stories in chapters held together by a thread of unity in the form of some large problem toward the solution of which all the lesser plots are working. A chapter, or a small group of chapters, takes up a difficulty of the hero, works at it, solves it sufficiently to satisfy the reader and to leave the hero a perceptible degree nearer the solution of the main problem of the book. For instance, in *High Benton* the unifying bond of the book is the theme, the developing power of work. The book gives the small town setting, the effect of bad companions on High, and the working out of his individuality. In the process many separate adventures, each with a climax and solution, make up the separate chapters or groups of chapters. All have the same general aim in view, but each has its own special job. These chapter-plots which are united by the one main theme, we have called *contributory plots*.

The unifying bond may be based on a situation, as in *Forest Castaways,* where the main plot is the problem of getting the boys out of the woods, and the contributory plots are the separate adventures which they go through in that struggle. Or the main issue may deal with character development. In *Understood Betsy,* the child changes from a repressed, fear-stricken, helpless creature into a happy, healthy, useful girl. The series

of chapters correspond with the series of struggles against her handicaps through which Betsy goes in her process of development.

If instead of dealing with one character as in *Understood Betsy,* the writer chooses a group for his material, he is faced by a new problem. Is it possible to have a group hero? Can the unifying bond of a book be concerned equally with more than one person? *Little Women* deals with a group, each member of which has certain chapters given definitely to her. Yet on whom is the attention of the reader most fixed and with whose problems most concerned? Each member of the family gets her turn and contributes her struggle to the problem of the book but the highlight is on Jo. The solution of Jo's difficulties is the strong wire core within the twisted cable of the bond.

In *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew,* each little Pepper is essential to the working out of the book, but Polly has the leading part, is the main character on the stage. Polly's problems, like Jo's, maintain the strength of the bond. The story, like the stage, is most successful when the audience is able to focus on one character. Crowd the scene with people, or allow a minor character to be excruciatingly funny in one corner of the stage, and the attention of the audience becomes scattered. The main actor with the

plot of the play in his hands loses his grip on his hearers. The play flattens out. Unity is lost.

The child reader identifies himself with one person in his story, not with an entire group. The book, then, which makes that identification easy by focusing on a character is more likely to be successful than the book which scatters its interests among a number of people. An exception to this rule may be made for twins. Twins may go through diverse adventures with impunity and still receive the single-minded attention usually devoted to the unattached hero. The pair apparently represent one complete whole to the child, and offer no obstacle as an object of transfer.

The actual chapter arrangement is likely to be planned according to the temperament of the author. At least three ways are open to choice. The chapters may all be planned before the book is started. The writer may know just what his principal characters are going to experience beforehand, and he may tabulate his calculations in chapter heads before he begins the book. Such a method would be valuable for books based on pre-ascertained scientific data. It would tend to keep the writer to the point and to exclude extraneous material. It would also serve to analyze the mystery story into its necessary component parts and bring it to a logical close. It has, however, certain disadvantages for much of fiction. By this method material

cannot grow under the hand of the author little by little into a living product. It is cut out like a paper doll, with each new chapter a new tissue paper dress. And the end product is likely to be crackly and stiff.

In the second method of chapter arrangement, the writer makes up chapters as he goes along. He may plan one chapter at a time, bearing in mind the main issue of the book, complete that chapter, then plan and write the next. Among the advantages of this method is the fact that the chapters will probably be of the right length; they will bear the right relation to each other, and to the orderly whole; they will escape irregular lengths, one short and one long; and they will avoid inclusion of unimportant issues. The only serious disadvantage is that the writer, once well started, will have to hold up the creative fire while he ascertains whether he has burned just enough wood to make the wood pile come out even.

The third method of the author is to divide his story up into chapters after he has it finished. This is probably the most slovenly method, but this, the author is obliged to confess, is her own method. It has plenty of obvious disadvantages but it has one real advantage. The writer can keep his fire going as hot as he pleases without being held up and cooled off while he considers whether the fuel will last. With the main issue in mind and the different contributory plots which he wishes to use in developing his theme,

he works steadily on toward his goal. At the end he will find, of course, that his adventures will not always cut up into pieces of regular length. But as a matter of fact more than one chapter may be used in the development of a complete adventure or contributory plot. Such an elasticity permits enough freedom of division to make the chapter arrangement fairly simple at the end. The adjustment of chapter lengths by this method is not so difficult as it might seem, because of the construction of the juvenile book from a series of contributory plots. A chapter is about the length of a short story and the material of one incident or contributory plot works out naturally into the length of a short story which serves as a chapter.

Whatever method the writer chooses as most congenial to his temperament and material, one thing he must know beforehand and keep in mind all the time he is writing, *the main issue of the story*. One of the first rules given in drawing is: To draw a straight line, keep the eye on the destination, not on the pencil. Among the many things to which this rule is applicable is the writing of a story.

The question usually arises: Shall chapters be named or will it suffice to give them numbers only? To test the feeling of young readers 'toward chapter headings, try reading aloud books which use each method. With the pause which follows the announcement of the name of a new chapter comes

an anticipatory look, a gleam of conjecture, a swift gesture of the mind to meet the new situation. Favorite chapters are called for and are reread according to their proper names. The number system is much simpler for the writer but it has no argument in its favor for the young reader.

A name is a difficult enough problem in any case. The names of the characters must express them as we have already noted. The name of the book itself opens one of the best avenues of publicity for it. Notice the advertisements of juvenile books, how important a place the book names receive. Analyze the best ones: short, significant, catchy, original, not too revealing, but piquing the curiosity. Not an easy thing to capture! Since each chapter name demands much the same care and skill, it is no wonder that authors prefer numbers. But the enhancement of interest for the reader is sufficient to make the extra work necessary. A successful book does not neglect its chapter heads any more than its Christian name.

The Initial Plunge

The old saying that all beginnings are hard is as applicable to getting a story started as to other efforts. Heywood Broun notes a certain likeness between sword swallowing and book reading which has significance for the discerning writer.

But what we really had chiefly in mind upon reading Mr. Houdini's interesting and instructive book was the close kinship between swallowing swords and reading novels, for we find that ever so many books have a habit of sticking at the pharynx or thereabouts. Getting started is the great difficulty. Some authors try to obviate the difficulty by beginning with a pistol shot or a scene in which a beautiful young girl suddenly enters a young man's two-room apartment in an exclusive building at dead of night and exclaims, "You must save me. They're following me!"

There was a time when these fooled us, but by now we have learned to anticipate that nobody of any particular interest will be hit by the pistol shot and that the beautiful young woman will turn out to be only the crown princess of Robogivinia in disguise. As for the books which begin with a long description of the countryside and expand for a chapter or so the menacing quality of the ancient oaks which cluster about the manor house, we must admit we never have been able to do much with them. In fact for almost a month now book after book has gone as far as the pharynx and no further.

The point is then to begin the story in such, wise that it will get past the pharynx. The juvenile reader is even more insistent than the adult upon this

qualification. He has neither the far sight nor the patience to wade through an uninteresting beginning for the sake of future reward. The opening paragraphs of the opening chapter are important outposts for the writer to capture.

The book which begins with a block of description or exposition is likely to have an unenthusiastic reception. Its unbroken solidity may serve as a high board fence to children. Something may be on the other side but only the agile-minded will bother to find out by climbing over. Yet authors sometimes compass this form of beginning with marked success. The first chapter of *Heidi* begins with the footpath going up straight and steep to the Alps; and climbing the narrow path, the flushed child who wears her entire wardrobe. But the description is active; even the footpath climbs. The reader is on his way to some destination. Later in the chapter the exposition explaining the Aim-Uncle is given in the form of dialogue which offers the advantage of broken short paragraphs. The story of Dr. Dolittle opens with a description of the doctor an3 of his home. But who objects to reading of a doctor who kept white mice in his piano and who lost his practice because an old lady patient sat on his hedgehog? If the description is active, if it has actual bearing on the drama of the story, it is as interesting to the child as his first view of the stage when the curtain goes up, or the arrangement of

his own camp in the woods. He knows something is going to happen in these places and he is prepared to make use of their possibilities.

The story which opens with a solid block of exposition has even less chance of success than the descriptive opening. Yet like description it may be handled skillfully enough to keep the child's interest. Such a chapter as the one which opens *Tom Brown's School Days* would theoretically turn aside any reader young or old. Hughes gives the history of the Brown family, solidly, solemnly. The exposition is unenlightened by dialogue, unfermented by action. But the first chapter never seems to have daunted readers. One wonders if the boys ever skip it.

The story may open with rapid fire action. Such a beginning attracts the reader's immediate attention; but makes him oblivious to the lesser sounds. And no writer can keep big guns going all the time. Or if he could, only the deaf-minded would care to read him. Since the tumult must ordinarily subside soon, the effect of an anticlimax creeps in. As a result the reader discards the book.

Another method of starting the story is by homely, comfortable detail. Sometimes it is in the form of dialogue, sometimes of what the theatre calls stage business, a revealing kind of personal activity. The psychology of the

effect of such a beginning is to make the reader feel at home at once. The material correlates with his previous experience. He has heard people talk that way before, he has seen people busy about just such things. He recognizes the casual element without analyzing it far enough to be aware that it is also significant. For an opening of this sort has more of a function than making the reader feel at home. It must suggest to him the revealing characteristics of the situation. The hero does not burst into any sort of conversation, or concern himself with scattered activities just to call attention to the fact that he is there ready to start things off. A dramatist chooses carefully the speech and action of his character when the curtain goes up; he recognizes the importance of first impressions in the habits of thinking of his audience. No false character clues are given; none is wasted. Yet the effect is of unconscious natural self-expression and the audience begins at once to feel acquainted with the characters and the situation. A beginning of this sort demands infinite pains in order to secure the coupled effect of ease and significance. An author has the double role of dramatist and actor on his hands and it is no wonder that he sometimes appears self-conscious in his two-fold effort.

The old favorite, *Little Women,* opens with dialogue, which, while apparently a discussion that might be duplicated in any family, reveals in each speech something of the speaker.

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

"It's so dreadful to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy, with an injured sniff.

"We've got father and mother and each other," said Beth contentedly, from her corner.

The four young faces on which the firelight shone brightened at the cheerful words, but darkened again as Jo said sadly—"We haven't got father and shall not have him again for a long time." She didn't say, "perhaps never," but each silently added it, thinking of father far away, where the fighting was.

In each of these first four sentences of the book a character clue is given and a glimpse of the general circumstances of the family. In the next paragraph the reader learns through the natural sequence of conversation that the father is at war. There, then, with a kind of effortless ease, Louise Alcott has

performed her introductions and explained her situation. One realizes that she never could have begun her book with such revealing phrases if, from the very first, the characters had not been clear in her own mind. Jo would lounge on the rug and grumble. Who should know better since she herself was Jo!

In *Five Little Peppers,* another old favorite, the curtain rises on the old kitchen at twilight where all the little Peppers except Ben are assembled. Polly helps her mother pull bastings, Joe and David nail up a box while Phronsie watches them and asks questions. Ben comes in from work and they all have supper. Simple enough action, but character-revealing. The poverty of the family, their loyalty to each other and the good times they have together become evident to the reader at once. His ideas are in order to grasp the development of the book.

Lewis Carroll wastes no time in plunging *Alice into Wonderland*. The book opens:

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the bank and of having nothing to do; once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversation in it, and "what is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversation?"

So she was considering in her own mind (as well as she could for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid) whether the pleasure of making a daisy chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a White Rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her.

The rabbit's remark of "Oh dear, oh dear, I shall be late!" and his action of taking a watch out of his waistcoat pocket and looking at it arouse the interest of Alice as well as of the reader, and so the story is off. Carroll has suggested a real situation by his setting and his shrewd comment on children's books. For the literal minded reader he has offered the privilege of believing that Alice merely fell asleep (for the hot day made her feel very sleepy and stupid) and for the romantic reader a realistic enough lead to justify belief in what follows.

Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm has had a wide and continued enough popularity to warrant attention to the method by which the reader is drawn into the book. The story begins with the trip of the old stage coach driven by Mr. Jeremiah Cobb on a hot day in May. The single passenger, a little girl, is introduced at once and her appearance given in detail. Mrs. Wiggin has used description largely in her opening paragraphs. She has conveyed to the reader that her setting is in the country, that the juvenile character is a

little country girl, that she is going somewhere, that she is going alone, and that she is unused to travel. Mr. Jeremiah Cobb is obviously a part of the background for Rebecca who, though not named yet, is already characterized in part. The orientation of the reader has begun.

Note the way in which Kipling captures the attention of his reader when he begins *Stalky & Co*.

In summer all right-minded boys built huts in the furzehill behind the college—little lairs whittled out of the heart of the prickly bushes, full of stumps, odd root-ends, and spikes, but, since they were strictly forbidden, palaces of delight. And for the fifth summer in succession, Stalky, McTurk, and Beetle (this was before they reached the dignity of a study) had built like beavers a place of retreat and meditation where they smoked.

Kipling goes on to the incident where McTurk attacks Colonel Dabney because his keeper was out after a fox. To the Colonel's question, "Do you know who I am?" "No, sorr, nor do I care if ye belonged to the Castle itself. Answer me now, as one gentleman to another. Do ye shoot foxes or do ye not?"

Kipling's psychology is sound here. He has raised the curtain on a scene which all boys find ensnaring. It either correlates with their past experience or furnishes a desire for such experience. Then he satisfies their will to power by making a boy the master of a situation which has every prophecy of being his Waterloo. The reader is ready to go on with the book.

Tom Sawyer secures his reader through much more obvious tactics. He too has been in mischief and is escaping the results from adult hands.

"Tom!"

No answer.

"Tom!"

No answer.

"What's gone with that boy, I wonder? You TOM!" No answer.

The old lady pulled her spectacles down and looked over them about the room; then she put them up and looked out under them. She seldom or never looked *through* them for so small a thing as the boy; they were her state pair, the pride of her heart and were built for style, not service—she could have seen through a pair of stove-lids just as well. She looked

perplexed for a moment and then said not fiercely but still loud enough for the furniture to hear:

"Well, I lay if I get hold of you, I'll—"

There follows the incident of the switching Tom escapes, of punishment for swimming he eludes, of the fight previously quoted. At the end of the chapter, the reader is acquainted with Tom.

What Happened to Inger Johanne begins with a characterization of the heroine by herself. In order that the reader may really get Inger the author uses the device of allowing Inger to describe herself as she appears to herself and then as she seems to other people. The reader then is in the position of looking Inger over judicially while he listens to her talk.

Chapter I. Ourselves.

There are four brothers and sisters of us at home, and as I am the eldest, it is natural that I should describe myself first. I am very tall and slim (Mother calls it "long and lanky"), and sad to say, I have very large hands and very large feet. "My, what big feet!" our horrid old shoemaker always says when he measures me for a pair of shoes. I feel like punching his

tousled head for him as he kneels there taking my measure; for he has said that so often now that I am sick and tired of it.

My hair is in two long brown braids down my back. That is well enough, but my nose is too broad, I think. So sometimes, when I sit and study, I put a doll's clothespin on it to make it smaller; but when I take the clothespin off, my nose springs out again; so there is no help for it probably.

Inger explains why the boys call her self-important because she does not like to have them pull her braids, call her Ginger and give cat calls and whistle when they want her to come out. The author thus succeeds, through Inger Johanne's own estimation of herself compared with that of her friends, in giving a characterization of the child.

The beginning of a book, then, presents rather a different problem than the beginning of a short story. In the short story the space is so much more limited that concentration is imperative. The writer has fewer words at his command to use in introductions; he must interest his reader with action almost at once; he must give him something vital to the plot. The writer of the book begins with a sense of more leisure. Let him beware, nevertheless, of the dangers in leisure and space. While in scientific terms his problem is not so much to make a cross section of the situation as to present it in a

series of sections, he still must make each section interesting and significant. And the first one must give a key to the theme which he is trying to demonstrate. Let him bear in mind, as he looks over his material with a view to getting its best value, that he must make his characters visible to the readers at once, and that he must set them in action; action which shall be characteristic of the actors and which shall start the story off in the direction toward which its author means it to move. The entrance of new characters may be postponed longer in the book than in the short story; the completeness of the characterization may be delayed further; the action and complication of the plot distributed over more space; but the first paragraphs of the first chapter must capture the young reader just as promptly as those of the short story. In spite of his capture, however, the reader is no prisoner except through his pleasure. Let the bonds of interest loosen and he walks away. The writer will not get him again; once caught, twice wary.

CHAPTER 14: THE PROBLEM OF SUSTAINING INTEREST

IN the short story the time and space are so limited that the writer finds economy of scene necessary. Many short stories take place within the background of one scene only. If the writer changes his characters from place to place he finds that if these places are too widely different in atmosphere, conditions of living, etc., he will have to spend too much time adjusting his reader to the change. The action will probably be delayed while the reader catches up with the scenes.

In the book, however, change of scene will often serve to sustain interest in the larger and more complicated plot. The change may be a completely radical one, as in Katherine Adams' *Mehitable,* where she transfers her little country girl of New England to a boarding school outside of Paris. Or it may be less radical geographically but equally upsetting from its new and trying demands on the characters. Such a change of scene with its new set of reactions for the heroine brings about a deepened interest in Dorothy Canfield's *Understood Betsey*. In any case, change of scene is bound to make new demands upon the characters as they adjust themselves to their new environment. New demands bring out fresh characterization because the characters are bound to adjust themselves in their own peculiar ways.

Thus they become better known to the reader who in turn should be more interested in them.

A change of scene in fiction gives the added interest that a new place brings to the child in real life. If it is successfully handled it is to him like a well-planned trip. He thoroughly enjoys the change. But, as in life, the trip must be well planned. The writer must see far enough ahead that the change is coming to prepare well for it. If it is not soundly motivated by the story, it will serve only to destroy the illusion of reality. One cannot move characters about from pole to pole just because they have no fares to pay. The hero's ticket must be stamped with reason or the reader will not accept it.

Change in condition may work to sustain the interest of the child in the book characters: From riches to poverty, or from poverty to riches, from a dull situation through the entrance of an exciting element to a more stimulating one. In *Five Little Peppers and How They Grew,* good fortune comes to the little Brown House, and has its effect on the various members of the family. Like most changes in condition, it finally leads to change of scene, as when Polly goes to the Kings. Again a new set of reactions brings out a new set of characteristics. In addition, the reader likes to observe the contrasts in ways of living. As in the old Cinderella theme, wishes become fulfilled, day-dreams realized. Here as before the way must be paved for the

change or it will not seem plausible enough to the reader to allow him to identify himself with such proceedings. Mere coincidence or accident, such as the inheritance of a fortune from an unknown and hitherto unmentioned relative may seem a happy fate in life, but in fiction it strains the reader's credulity.

Frequently interest is sustained by radical change in scene and condition both. *Heidi* goes from the simplicity of her mountain home with her grandfather to a complex city life surrounded by many people. Then she returns to the first condition, bringing back to it the important elements of the second, thus making a unit of the story. *Merrylips,* by Beulah Dix, goes through the change of scenes from home to army life, from the state of a little girl to that of a little boy. In a recent serial, the heroine, who belongs to a rich and noble family in France, is left alone and impoverished by the war. The scene changes from France to America where her struggle continues until a happy ending which gives her back her original possessions. Such a shifting of scenes and conditions both offers endless latitude for adventure. The action of the story is propelled by two horse power instead of one. The writer must be sure that his pull is all in the same direction for one drive working against the other will serve only to produce a static condition.

While all of these changes are of value in sustaining interest, a very fundamental service to the story lies in keeping the situation the same. When Robinson Crusoe leaves his island we are finished with him. When the boys in *The Forest Castaways* get out of the woods, the interest of the story is ended. *Little Women* belongs to Concord, and no reader desires to have its characters shifted or their condition radically changed. When Inger Johanne shows signs of growing up and her family moves to a new place, we realize that her story is done. In stories like these the same setting is necessary to the plot, the same general condition of life is essential to show development. The writer presents a problem to the reader in the beginning and then proceeds to offer for it a real solution, real in the sense that the hero works it out for himself without aid from change in environment. To many readers such realism as opposed to the romantic affords deeper satisfaction in that it sounds true and stimulates him to similar endeavors.

The introduction of new characters, if they can be made an integral part of the story, should result in added interest. The writer has the double responsibility of keeping the new character secondary to the person about whom the story centers, and of making him at the same time the kind of person without whom the story could not progress. The new actor must not draw attention away from the movement of the story as far as it has gone, he must not serve to split up the interest of the reader among too many

people; yet he must at once become essential to the further development of the story and he must hold himself inconspicuously but firmly to his job until it is finished.

The question arises: At how late a point in the story is it possible to introduce a new character? The time of introduction of the characters in a book is as important as it is on the stage. If when the curtain first rises, the child sees too many people at once, he becomes entirely confused as to their identity. Unless a writer can definitely characterize his people in the opening sentences so that the child has an unmistakable impression of each, he will lose clarity and permanence of effect. Out of the large group the child is unable to pick the one upon whom he wishes to focus, his attention is scattered and, in the scattering, weakened. If the writer introduces his characters as individuals, not as a group, he will bring each one in as the action of the story demands his presence. Then the way in which the newcomer attacks his part of the problem will help to characterize him at once. Quite possibly, a person rather vital to the outcome of the story may not appear until late in the book. But even if he is not needed on the spot until then, his entrance must be preceded by such a preparation that he is not a stranger up to the time of his appearance. A great deal of interest may be aroused in a person before his actual presence, through reference to him and the things for which he stands. Anticipation is

always a large factor in interest and it is that feeling of expectancy which is stirred by this preliminary treatment of the character. Test your new character then in two ways: Has he had sufficient preparation to make his entrance expected and desired? Is he so essential to the plot that he at once becomes woven into its fiber and remains necessary to its strength? If he is sufficiently motivated and if he is essential to the story, do not hesitate to bring him in at any point in the action.

In the story of *Little Women* Laurie does not appear until we have become acquainted with the girls, and until he is needed to sustain interest in their activities. Still later his grandfather is introduced and he begins at once to help guide the destiny of the story. The book of *Heidi* begins with the story of the child and her grandfather, then it opens wider to include the people with whom Heidi is associated in the city, then gradually it closes again to the characters with whom it opened, Heidi and her grandfather. *Forest Castaways* introduces a strange man well after the reader is plunged into the story of the boys' struggle in the woods, but he helps to solve their problem.

The complication of plot, which, as we have noted, heightens the human interest in a story, often is connected with changes of scene or condition or with the introduction of new characters. While that complication must

occur promptly in a short story, the structure of the book permits justified delay.

A book, whether it is adult or juvenile, usually tries to maintain its effect through the gradual heightening of emotional interest. If as sometimes happens in juvenile books the chapters are loosely strung and disconnected, their cumulative effect is lost. *Mehitable,* though a charming picture of French school life, has little of emotional dependence in its different chapters. As a result the reader leaves the story with a sense of pleasure in its foreign material, but of indifference toward Mehitable who as its chief character should have motivated the weaving of the material into an emotional unit. Such a holding of emotional interest is not to be confused with the pattern used in girls' series where each book takes the heroine through more or less sentimental experiences with the obvious end in view of leaving her in the arms of a young man. The emotional interest to which we refer is apart from sentimentality. A book like *High Benton,* for instance, succeeds in using this emotional growth to hold the reader through a theme which is based upon the developing power of work. This heightening of interest depends upon a central theme or problem which is being worked out. The preceding chapter on Chapter Arrangement and Development discusses in detail the relation between this central problem and the separate chapters.

How to end the book

The last problem which confronts the writer is how to finish up his book. Here again he has a different problem from that of the writer of adult books. Mark Twain sums up the difficulty in his conclusion of Tom Sawyer.

So end this chronicle. It being strictly the history of a *book,* it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a man. When one writes a novel about grown people, he knows exactly where to stop—that is, with a marriage; but when he writes of juveniles, he must stop where he best can.

Yet Mark Twain would have admitted that some stopping points are better than others. As a matter of fact, *Tom Sawyer* was a series of adventures to develop the theme of what a real boy gets out of life. When the theme was finished with Tom's manhood, the book was finished.

In the same way the adventures of Inger Johanne are limited in time. The author uses space limitation to determine their length, by taking Inger away from the locality which had served as their background. The story ends with the scene on the boat.

But I still stood there, looking back and looking back at the gray hills. Among them I had lived my whole life long!

Other hills and islands came into view and the sea splashed up over them, but not one of them did I know. How strange that was!

Nevertheless, I suddenly felt awfully glad, and I began to sing at the top of my voice to the old tune (no one heard me, the sea roared so mightily).

"Oh! I love to travel, travel!"

The reader is allowed to say goodbye to Inger Johanne, and he leaves her with more of a sense of propriety than if he had been dragged off suddenly at the end of a particularly enthralling adventure.

The book may finish on a climax. Mystery stories usually work up to a surprise ending and stop short at that point. More often in books for children a denouement follows which takes care of the loose ends, if there are any left after the climax, and leaves them in compact and satisfactory shape for the understanding of the child's mind. It may explain the effect upon the characters of what happened in the climax, what they did

afterwards, what form their living happily forever took on. In this case the ending takes the form of prophecy, a favorite device of writers of girls' stories.

An anti-climax is an unfortunate method of ending a book. Some writers, like callers saying goodbye, seem unable to leave. Even the most cherished of companions whether in books or life becomes wearying if she keeps one standing too long.

An ending which leaves the solution of the story open, like that of *The Lady or the Tiger,* would be entirely out of the question for a juvenile book. Such an ending would antagonize a child violently. He would, and rightly, feel tricked.

Some books finish with retrospect, like *Little Women,* which leaves Mrs. March and her daughters talking together under a tree. Each girl reviews in turn what life has brought her, and the curtain goes down as it went up with a characteristic speech from each.

Or the story may end in an explanation, as in *Five Little Peppers,* where the relationship of the Kings and the Peppers becomes clear through old Mr. King's explanation via Phronsie. Such an ending is not exactly like that of

the surprise ending because the explanation is not the solution of the entire theme of the book, rather that of a secondary issue which will perhaps stimulate the reader to ask for another book.

Many books for children end with a hint of the next of a series, some openly announcing that the reader will hear no more of the characters unless he buys the next book, others more subtly leaving a situation which is open to further treatment.

The actual handling used in finishing the last chapter will be determined by the effect which the author wishes to make; he may leave his characters informally in dialogue or more formally by exposition; he may assemble them in a group and allow the reader to say goodbye to everybody, or he may clear the stage for his principal actor in order to focus the final impression of the child. He may let the curtain go down on a closing picture which will suggest without any action the situation as it is left. The writer must not stop so abruptly that his reader is not sure the story is finished and turns another page to see, yet at the same time he must secure a feeling of finality without diffuseness.

If in the book the writer has worked out a good central plot so that the solution of that plot, or the real climax comes toward the end of the book,

he will have in the first place the surest method for sustaining interest throughout. The reader's curiosity, his desire to see the problem solved, can be depended upon to hold him. In the second place, the writer will have achieved an effective ending for his book. The particular form this ending will take will be determined by his material. A good ending should fulfill certain obligations; the reader ought to be left with a feeling of satisfaction and a sense of the completeness of the book. He should at the same time be sorry that the book is finished; better that he wish it to be longer than shorter. **THE END**