КОЛЛЕКТИВ АВТОРОВ

THE GREAT ENGLISH SHORT-STORY WRITERS, VOLUME 1

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The Great English Short-Story Writers, Volume 1

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE SHORT-STORY

I

The short-story commenced its career as a verbal utterance, or, as Robert Louis Stevenson puts it, with "the first men who told their stories round the savage camp-fire."

It bears the mark of its origin, for even to-day it is true that the more it creates the illusion of the speaking-voice, causing the reader to listen and to see, so that he forgets the printed page, the better does it accomplish its literary purpose. It is probably an instinctive appreciation of this fact which has led so many latter-day writers to narrate their short-stories in dialect. In a story which is communicated by the living voice our attention is held primarily not by the excellent deposition of adjectives and poise of style, but by the striding progress of the plot; it is the

plot, and action in the plot, alone which we remember when the combination of words which conveyed and made the story real to us has been lost to mind. "Crusoe recoiling from the foot-print, Achilles shouting over against the Trojans, Ulysses bending the great bow, Christian running with his fingers in his ears; these are each culminating moments, and each has been printed on the mind's eye for ever."[1]

The secondary importance of the detailed language in which an incident is narrated, when compared with the total impression made by the naked action contained in the incident, is seen in the case of ballad poetry, where a man may retain a vivid mental picture of the localities, atmosphere, and dramatic moments created by Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, or Rossetti's *White Ship*, and yet be quite incapable of repeating two consecutive lines of the verse. In literature of narration, whether prose or verse, the dramatic worth of the action related must be the first consideration.

In earlier days, when much of the current fiction was not written down, but travelled from mouth to mouth, as it does in the Orient to-day, this fact must have been realized – that, in the short-story, plot is superior to style. Among modern writers, however, there has been a growing tendency to make up for scantiness of plot by high literary workmanship; the result has been in reality not a short-story, but a descriptive sketch or vignette, dealing chiefly with moods and landscapes. So much

[1] A Gossip on Romance, from *Memories and Portraits*, by R.L. Stevenson.

has this been the case that the writer of a recent *Practical Treatise on the Art of the Short-Story* has found it necessary to make the bald statement that "the first requisite of a short-story is that the writer have a story to tell."[2]

However lacking the stories which have come down to us from ancient times may be in technique, they invariably narrate action – they have something to tell. If they had not done so, they would not have been interesting to the men who first heard them, and, had they not been interesting, they would not have survived. Their paramount worth in this respect of *action* is proved by the constant borrowings which modern writers have made from them. Take one case in illustration. In the twenty-eighth chapter of Aristotle's *Secretum Secretorum* appears a story in which "a queen of India is said to have treacherously sent to Alexander, among other costly presents, the pretended testimonies of friendship, a girl of exquisite beauty, who, having been fed with serpents from her infancy, partook of their nature." It comes to light again, in an altered and expanded form, in the *Gesta Romanorum*, as the eleventh tale, being entitled *Of the Poison of Sin*.

"Alexander was a prince of great power, and a disciple of Aristotle, who instructed him in every branch of learning. The Queen of the North, having heard of his proficiency, nourished her daughter from the cradle upon a certain kind of deadly poison; and when she grew up, she was considered so beautiful,

[2] *Short-Story Writing*, by Charles Raymond Barrett.

that the sight of her alone affected many to madness. The queen sent her to Alexander to espouse. He had no sooner beheld her than he became violently enamoured, and with much eagerness desired to possess her; but Aristotle, observing his weakness, said: 'Do not touch her, for if you do, you will certainly perish. She has been nurtured upon the most deleterious food, which I will prove to you immediately. Here is a malefactor who is already condemned to death. He shall be united to her, and you shall soon see the truth of what I advance.'

"Accordingly the culprit was brought without delay to the girl; and scarcely had he touched her lips, before his whole frame was impregnated with poison, and he expired. Alexander, glad at his escape from such imminent destruction, bestowed all thanks on his instructor, and returned the girl to her mother."

After which follows the monkish application of the moral, as long as the entire story: Alexander being made to stand for a good Christian; the Queen of the North for "a superfluity of the things of life, which sometimes destroys the spirit, and generally the body"; the Poison Maid for luxury and gluttony, "which feed men with delicacies that are poison to the soul"; Aristotle for conscience and reason, which reprove and oppose any union which would undo the soul; and the malefactor for the evil man, disobedient unto his God.

There have been at least three writers of English fiction who, borrowing this germ-plot from the *Gesta Romanorum*, have handled it with distinction and originality. Nathaniel Hawthorne,

having changed its period and given it an Italian setting, wove about it one of the finest and most imaginative of his short-stories, *Rappaccini's Daughter*. Oliver Wendell Holmes, with a freshness and vigor all his own, developed out of it his fictional biography of *Elsie Venner*. And so recent a writer as Mr. Richard Garnett, attracted by the subtle and magic possibilities of the conception, has given us yet another rendering, restoring to the story its classic setting, in *The Poison Maid*.[3] Thus, within the space of a hundred years, three master-craftsmen have found their inspiration in the slender anecdote which Aristotle, in the opulence of his genius, was content to hurry into a few sentences and bury beneath the mass of his material.

[3] Vide *The Twilight of the Gods and Other Tales*, published by John Lane, 1903.

II

Probably the first stories of mankind were *true stories*, but the true story is rarely good art. It is perhaps for this reason that few true stories of early times have come down to us. Mr. Cable, in his *Strange True Stories of Louisiana*, explains the difference between the fabricated tale and the incident as it occurs in life. "The relations and experiences of real men and women," he writes, "rarely fall in such symmetrical order as to make an artistic whole. Until they have had such treatment as we give stone in the quarry or gems in the rough, they seldom group themselves with that harmony of values and brilliant unity of interest that result when art comes in – not so much to transcend nature as to make nature transcend herself." In other words, it is not until the true story has been converted into fiction by the suppression of whatever is discursive or ungainly, and the addition of a stroke of fantasy, that it becomes integral, balanced in all its parts, and worthy of literary remembrance.

In the fragments of fiction which have come down to us from the days when books were not, odd chapters from the Fieldings and Smollets of the age of Noah, remnants of the verbal libraries which men repeated one to the other, squatting round "the savage camp-fire," when the hunt was over and night had gathered, the stroke of fantasy predominates and tends to comprise the whole. Men spun their fictions from the materials with which

their minds were stored, much as we do to-day, and the result was a cycle of beast-fables – an Odyssey of the brute creation. Of these the tales of Aesop are the best examples. The beast-fable has never quite gone out of fashion, and never will so long as men retain their world-wonder, and childishness of mind. A large part of Gulliver's adventures belong to this class of literature. It was only the other day that Mr. Kipling gave us his *Just-so Stories*, and his *Jungle-Book*, each of which found an immediate and secure place in the popular memory.

Mr. Chandler Harris, in his introduction to *Uncle Remus*, warns us that however humorous his book may appear, "its intention is perfectly serious." He goes on to insist on its historic value, as a revelation of primitive modes of thought. At the outset, when he wrote his stories serially for publication in *The Atlanta Constitution*, he believed that he was narrating plantation legends peculiar to the South. He was quickly undeceived. Prof. J.W. Powell, who was engaged in an investigation of the mythology of the North American Indians, informed him that some of Uncle Remus's stories appear "in a number of different languages, and in various modified forms among the Indians." Mr. Herbert H. Smith had "met with some of these stories among tribes of South American Indians, and one in particular he had traced to India, and as far east as Siam." "When did the negro or North American Indian ever come in contact with the tribes of South America?" Mr. Harris asks. And he quotes Mr. Smith's reply in answer to the question: "I am not prepared to

form a theory about these stories. There can be no doubt that some of them, found among the negroes and the Indians, had a common origin. The most natural solution would be to suppose that they originated in Africa, and were carried to South America by the negro slaves. They are certainly found among the Red Negroes; but, unfortunately for the African theory, it is equally certain that they are told by savage Indians of the Amazon's Valley, away up on the Tapajos, Red Negro, and Tapura. These Indians hardly ever see a negro… It is interesting to find a story from Upper Egypt (that of the fox who pretended to be dead) identical with an Amazonian story, and strongly resembling one found by you among the negroes… One thing is certain. The animal stories told by the negroes in our Southern States and in Brazil were brought by them from Africa. Whether they originated there, or with the Arabs, or Egyptians, or with yet more ancient nations, must still be an open question. Whether the Indians got them from the negroes or from some earlier source is equally uncertain." Whatever be the final solution to this problem, enough has been said to show that the beast-fable is, in all probability, the most primitive form of short-story which we possess.

III

For our purpose, that of tracing the evolution of the English short-story, its history commences with the *Gesta Romanorum*. At the authorship of this collection of mediaeval tales, many guesses have been made. Nothing is known with certainty; it seems probable, however, judging from the idioms which occur, that it took its present form in England, about the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, and thence passed to the Continent. The work is written in Latin, and was evidently compiled by a man in holy orders, for its guiding purpose is to edify. In this we can trace the influence of Aesop's beast-fables, which were moral lessons drawn from the animal creation for the instruction of mankind. Every chapter of the *Gesta Romanorum* consists of a moral tale; so much so that in many cases the application of the moral is as long as the tale itself.

The title of the collection, *The Deeds of the Romans*, is scarcely justified; in the main it is a garnering of all the deathless plots and dramatic motives which we find scattered up and down the ages, in the legend and folklore of whatsoever nation. The themes of many of its stories were being told, their characters passing under other names, when Romulus and Remus were suckled by their wolf-mother, before there was a Roman nation or a city named Rome.

In the Bible we have many admirable specimens of the short-story. Jotham's parable of the trees of the wood choosing a king is as good an instance of the nature-fable, touched with fine irony and humor, as could be found. The Hebrew prophet himself was often a story-teller. Thus, when Nathan would bring home the nature of his guilt to David, he does it by a story of the most dramatic character, which loses nothing, and indeed gains all its terrific impact, by being strongly impregnated with moral passion. Many such instances will occur to the student of the Bible. In the absence of a written or printed literature the story-teller had a distinct vocation, as he still has among the peoples of the East. Every visitor to Tangier has seen in the market-place the professional story-teller, surrounded from morn till night with his groups of attentive listeners, whose kindling eyes, whose faces moved by every emotion of wonder, anger, tenderness, and sympathy, whose murmured applause and absorbed silence, are the witnesses and the reward of his art. Through such a scene we recover the atmosphere of the Arabian Nights, and indeed look back into almost limitless antiquity. Possibly, could we follow the story which is thus related, we might discover that this also drew its elemental incidents from sources as old as the times of Jotham and Nathan.

The most that can be said for the Latin origin of the *Gesta Romanorum* is that the nucleus is made up of extracts, frequently of glaring inaccuracy, from Roman writers and historians. The Cologne edition comprises one hundred and eighty-one chapters,

each consisting of a tale or anecdote followed by a moral application, commencing formally with the words, "My beloved, the prince is intended to represent any good Christian," or, "My beloved, the emperor is Christ; the soldier is any sinner." They are not so much short-stories as illustrated homilies. In the literary armory of the lazy parish priest of the fourteenth century, the *Gesta Romanorum* must have held the place which volumes of sermon-outlines occupy upon the book-shelves of certain of his brethren to-day.

"The method of instructing by fables is a practice of remote antiquity; and has always been attended with very considerable benefit. Its great popularity encouraged the monks to adopt this medium, not only for the sake of illustrating their discourses, but of making a more durable impression upon the minds of their illiterate auditors. An abstract argument, or logical deduction (had they been capable of supplying it), would operate but faintly upon intellects rendered even more obtuse by the rude nature of their customary employments; while, on the other hand, an apposite story would arouse attention and stimulate that blind and unenquiring devotion which is so remarkably characteristic of the Middle Ages."[4]

[4] Introduction to *Gesta Romanorum*, translated by the Rev. Charles Swan, revised and corrected by Wynnard Hooper, B.A.

IV

The influence of the *Gesta Romanorum* is most conspicuously to be traced in the work of Gower, Chaucer, and Lydgate; but it has served as a source of inspiration to the flagging ingenuity of each succeeding generation. It would be tedious to enter on an enumeration of the various indebtednesses of English literature to these early tales. A few instances will serve as illustration.

It seems a far cry from the *The Ingoldsby Legends* to *The Deeds of the Romans*, nevertheless *The Leech of Folk-stone* was directly taken from the hundred and second tale, *Of the Transgressions and Wounds of the Soul*. Shakespeare himself was a frequent borrower, and planned his entire play of *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, upon the hundred and fifty-third tale, *Of Temporal Tribulation*. In some cases the language is almost identical, as for instance in the fifth tale, where the king warns his son, saying, "Son, I tell thee that thou canst not confide in her, and consequently ought not to espouse her. *She deceived her own father when she liberated thee from prison*; for this did her father lose the price of thy ransom." Compare with this:

"Look to her, Moor; have a quick eye to see; *She has deceived her father, and may thee*."[5]

But the ethical treatment of the short-story, as exemplified in these monkish fables, handicapped its progress and

[5] *Othello*, act I, scene III.

circumscribed its field of endeavor. Morality necessitated the twisting of incidents, so that they might harmonize with the sermonic summing-up that was in view. Life is not always moral; it is more often perplexing, boisterous, unjust, and flippant. The wicked dwell in prosperity. "There are no pangs in their death; their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued as other men. They have more than heart could wish." But the art of the teller of tales "is occupied, and bound to be occupied not so much in making stories true as in making them typical."[6]

The ethical method of handling fiction falls between two stools; it not only fails in portraying that which is true for the individual, but it incurs the graver error of ceasing to be true to the race, i.e., typical.

It would be interesting, had we space, to follow Shakespeare in his borrowings, noticing what he adopts and incorporates in his work as artistically true, and what he rejects. Like a water-color landscape-painter, he pauses above the box of crude materials which others have made, takes a dab here and a dab there with his brush, rarely takes all of one color, blends them, eyes the result judicially, and flashes in the combination with swiftness and certainty of touch.

For instance, from the lengthy story which appears as the hundred and first tale in Mr. Douce's edition of the *Gesta*, he selects but one scene of action, yet it is the making of

[6] From a Humble Remonstrance, in *Memories and Portraits*, by R.L. Stevenson.

Macbeth– one would almost suppose that this was the germ-thought which kindled his furious fancy, preceding his discovery of the Macbeth tradition as related in Holinshed's *Chronicle*.[7]

The Emperor Manelay has set forth to the Holy Land, leaving his empress and kingdom in his brother's care. No sooner has he gone than the regent commences to make love to his brother's wife. She rejects him scornfully. Angered by her indignation, he leads her into a forest and hangs her by the hair upon a tree, leaving her there to starve. As good-fortune will have it, on the third day a noble earl comes by, and, finding her in that condition, releases her, takes her home with him, and makes her governess to his only daughter. A feeling of shame causes her to conceal her noble rank, and so it comes about that the earl's steward aspires to her affection. Her steadfast refusal of all his advances turns his love to hatred, so that he plans to bring about her downfall. Then comes the passage which Shakespeare seized upon as vital: "It befell upon a night that the earl's chamber door was forgotten and left unshut, which the steward had anon perceived; and when they were all asleep he went and espied the light of the lamp where the empress and the young maid lay together, and with that he drew out his knife and cut the throat of the earl's daughter and put the knife into the empress's hand, she being asleep, and nothing knowing thereof, to the intent that when the earl awakened he should think that she had cut his daughter's throat, and so would she be put to a shameful death for his mischievous deed."

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[7] *The Chronicle of England and Scotland*, first published in 1577.

The laws of immediateness and concentration, which govern the short-story, are common also to the drama; by reason of their brevity both demand a directness of approach which leads up, without break of sequence or any waste of words, through a dependent series of actions to a climax which is final. It will usually be found in studying the borrowings which the masters have made from such sources as the *Gesta Romanorum* that the portions which they have discriminated as worth taking from any one tale have been the only artistically essential elements which the narrative contains; the remainder, which they have rejected, is either untrue to art or unnecessary to the plot's development.

These tales, as told by their monkish compiler, lack "that harmony of values and brilliant unity of interest that results when art comes in" – they are splendid jewels badly cut.

V

As has been already stated, a short-story theme, however fine, can only be converted into good art by the suppression of whatever is discursive or ungainly, so that it becomes integral and balanced in all its parts; and by the addition of a stroke of fantasy, so that it becomes vast, despite its brevity, implying a wider horizon than it actually describes; but, in excess of these qualities, there is a last of still greater importance, without which it fails —*the power to create the impression of having been possible*.

Now the beast-fable, as handled by Aesop, falls short of being high art by reason of its overwhelming fantasy, which annihilates all chance of its possibility. The best short-stories represent a struggle between fantasy and fact. And the mediaeval monkish tale fails by reason of the discursiveness and huddling together of incidents, without regard to their dramatic values, which the moral application necessitates. In a word, both are deficient in technique – the concealed art which, when it has combined its materials so that they may accomplish their most impressive effect, causes the total result to command our credulity because it seems typical of human experience.

The technique of the English prose short-story had a tardy evolution. That there were any definite laws, such as obtain in poetry, by which it must abide was not generally realized until Edgar Allan Poe formulated them in his criticism of Nathaniel

Hawthorne.

As he states them, they are five in number, as follows: Firstly, that the short-story must be short, i.e., capable of being read at one sitting, in order that it may gain "the immense force derivable from *totality*." Secondly, that the short-story must possess *immediateness*; it should aim at a single or unique effect – "if the very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then it has failed in its first step." Thirdly, that the short-story must be subjected to *compression*; "in the whole composition there should not be one word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design." Fourthly, that it must assume the aspect of *verisimilitude*; "truth is often, and in very great degree, the aim of the tale – some of the finest tales are tales of ratiocination." Fifthly, that it must give the impression of *finality*; the story, and the interest in the characters which it introduces, must begin with the opening sentence and end with the last.

These laws, and the technique which they formulate, were first discovered and worked out for the short-story in the medium of poetry.[8] The ballad and narrative poem must be,

[8] Poe himself implies this when he says, in an earlier passage of his essay on Hawthorne: "The Tale Proper" (i.e., short-story), "in my opinion, affords unquestionably the fairest field for the exercise of the loftiest talent which can be afforded by the wide domains of mere prose. Were I bidden to say how the highest genius could be most advantageously employed for the best display of its own powers, I should answer, without hesitation, in the composition of a rhymed poem, not to exceed in length what might be perused in an hour. Within this limit alone can the highest order of true poetry exist. I need only here say, upon this topic, that in almost all classes

by reason of their highly artificial form, comparatively short, possessing totality, immediateness, compression, verisimilitude, and finality. The old ballad which commemorates the battle of Otterbourne, fought on August 10, 1388, is a fine example of the short-story method. Its opening stanza speaks the last word in immediateness of narration:

> "It felle abowght the Lamasse tyde,
> When husbands wynn ther haye,
> The dowghtye Dowglasse bowynd hym to ryde
> In England to take a praye."

Thomas Hood's poem of *The Dream of Eugene Aram*, written at a time when the prose short-story, under the guidance of Hawthorne and Poe, was just beginning to take its place as a separate species of literary art, has never been surpassed for short-story technique by any of the practitioners of prose. Prof. Brander Matthews has pointed out that "there were nine muses in Greece of old, and no one of these daughters of Apollo was expected to inspire the writer of prose-fiction."[9]

He argues from this that "prose seemed to the Greeks, and even to the Latins who followed in their footsteps, as fit only

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of composition the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. *It is clear*, moreover, *that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting*."

[9] In his introduction to *Materials and Methods ofFiction*, by Clayton Hamilton, published by the Baker & Taylor Co., New York.

for pedestrian purposes." It is more probable that, as regards prose-fiction, they did not realize that they were called upon to explain the omission of the tenth muse. Her exclusion was based on no reasoned principle, but was due to a sensuous art-instinct: the Greeks felt that the unnatural limitations of the poetic medium were more in keeping with the unnatural[10] brevity of a story which must be short. The exquisite prose tales which have been handed down to us belong to the age of their decadence as a nation; in their great period their tellers of brief tales unconsciously cast their rendering in the poetic mould.[11] In natures of the highest genius the most arduous is instinctively the favorite task.

Chaucer, by reason of his intimate acquaintance with both the poetry and prose-fiction of Boccaccio, had the opportunity to choose between these two mediums of short-story narration; and he chose the former. He was as familiar with Boccaccio's poetic method, as exemplified in the *Teseide*, as with his prose, as exemplified at much greater length in the *Decameron*, for he borrowed from them both. Yet in only two instances in the *Canterbury Tales* does he relapse into prose.

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[10] "The short-story is artificial, and to a considerable degree unnatural. It could hardly be otherwise, for it takes out of our complex lives a single person or a single incident and treats that as if it were complete in itself. Such isolation is not known to nature." – Page 22 of *Short-Story Writing*, by Charles Raymond Barrett, published by the Baker & Taylor Co., New York.

[11] For example, the story told by Demodocus of *TheIllicit Love of Ares for Aphrodite, and the Revenge which HephaestusPlanned*– Odyssey, Bk. VIII.

The *Teseide* in Chaucer's hands, retaining its poetic medium, is converted into the *Knight's Tale*; while the *Reeve's Tale*, the *Franklin's*, and the *Shipman's*, each borrowed from the prose version of the *Decameron*, are given by him a poetic setting. This preference for poetry over prose as a medium for short-story narration cannot have been accidental or unreasoned on his part; nor can it be altogether accounted for by the explanation that "he was by nature a poet," for he *did* experiment with the prose medium to the extent of using it twice. He had the brilliant and innovating precedent of the *Decameron*, and yet, while adopting some of its materials, he abandoned its medium. He was given the opportunity of ante-dating the introduction of technique into the English prose short-story by four hundred and fifty years, and he disregarded it almost cavalierly. How is such wilful neglect to be accounted for? Only by his instinctive feeling that the technique, which Boccaccio had applied in the *Decameron*, belonged by right to the realm of poetry, had been learned in the practising of the poetic art, and could arrive at its highest level of achievement only in that medium.

That in Chaucer's case this choice was justified cannot be disputed; the inferiority of the short-story technique contained in his two prose efforts, when compared with that displayed in the remainder of the *Canterbury Tales*, is very marked. Take, for instance, the *Prioress' Tale* and apply to it the five short-story tests established by Poe, as a personal discovery, four and a half centuries later; it survives them all. It attains, in

addition, the crowning glory, coveted by Stevenson, of appearing *typical*. There may never have been a Christian child who was martyred by the Jews in the particularly gruesome way described – probably there never was; but, in listening to the Prioress, it does not enter into our heads to doubt her word – the picture which she leaves with us of how the Christian regarded the Jew in the Middle Ages is too vivid to allow any breathing-space for incredulity. No knowledge of mediaeval anti-Jewish legislation, however scholarly, can bring us to realize the fury of race-hatred which then existed more keenly than this story of a little over two thousand words. By its perusal we gain an illuminating insight into that ill-directed religious enthusiasm which led men on frenzied quests for the destruction of the heretic in their own land and of the Saracen abroad, causing them to become at one and the same time unjust and heroic. In a word, within the compass of three hundred lines of verse, Chaucer contrives to body forth his age – to give us something which is *typical*.

The *Morte D'Arthur* of Malory is again a collection of traditional stories, as is the *Gesta Romanorum*, and not the creative work of a single intellect. As might be expected, it straggles, and overlays its climax with a too-lavish abundance of incidents; it lacks the *harmony of values* which results from the introduction of a unifying purpose —*i. e.*, of art. Imaginative and full of action though the books of the *Morte D'Arthur* are, it remained for the latter-day artist to exhaust their individual incidents of their full dramatic possibilities. From the eyes of the

majority of modern men the brilliant quality of their magic was concealed, until it had been disciplined and refashioned by the severe technique of the short-story.

By the eighteenth century the influence of Malory was scarcely felt at all; but his imaginativeness, as interpreted by Tennyson, in *The Idylls of the King*, and by William Morris, in his *Defence of Guinevere*, has given to the Anglo-Saxon world a new romantic background for its thoughts. *The Idylls of the King* are not Tennyson's most successful interpretation. The finest example of his superior short-story craftsmanship is seen in the triumphant use which he makes of the theme contained in *The Book of Elaine*, in his poem of *The Lady of Shalott*. Not only has he remodelled and added fantasy to the story, but he has threaded it through with *atmosphere*– an entirely modern attribute, of which more must be said hereafter.

So much for our contention that the laws and technique of the prose short-story, as formulated by Poe, were first instinctively discovered and worked out in the medium of poetry.

VI

"*The Golden Ass* of Apuleius is, so to say, a beginning of modern literature. From this brilliant medley of reality and romance, of wit and pathos, of fantasy and observation, was born that new art, complex in thought, various in expression, which gives a semblance of frigidity to perfection itself. An indefatigable youthfulness is its distinction."[12]

An indefatigable youthfulness was also the prime distinction of the Elizabethan era's writings and doings; it was fitting that such a period should have witnessed the first translation into the English language of this Benjamin of a classic literature's old age.

Apuleius was an unconventional cosmopolitan in that ancient world which he so vividly portrays; he was a barbarian by birth, a Greek by education, and wrote his book in the Romans' language. In his use of luminous slang for literary purposes he was Rudyard Kipling's prototype.

"He would twist the vulgar words of every-day into quaint unheard-of meanings, nor did he deny shelter to those loafers and footpads of speech which inspire the grammarian with horror. On every page you encounter a proverb, a catchword, a literary allusion, a flagrant redundancy. One quality only was distasteful

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[12] From the introduction, by Charles Whibley, to the Tudor Translations' edition by W.E. Henley, of *The Golden Ass of Apuleius*, published by David Nutt, London, 1893. All other quotations bearing upon Apuleius are taken from the same source.

to him – the commonplace."

There are other respects in which we can trace Mr. Kipling's likeness: in his youthful precocity – he was twenty-five when he wrote his *Metamorphoses*; in his daring as an innovator; in his manly stalwartness in dealing with the calamities of life; in his adventurous note of world-wideness and realistic method of handling the improbable and uncanny.

Like all great artists, he was a skilful borrower from the literary achievements of a bygone age; and so successfully does he borrow that we prefer his copy to the original. The germ-idea of Kipling's *Finest Story in the World* is to be found in Poe's *Tale of the Ragged Mountains*; Apuleius's germ-plot, of the man who was changed by enchantment into an ass, and could only recover his human shape by eating rose-leaves, was taken either from Lucian or from Lucius of Patrae. In at least three of his interpolations he remarkably foreshadows the prose short-story method, upon which we are wont to pride ourselves as being a unique discovery of the past eight decades: these are *Bellepheron's Story; The Story of Cupid and Psyche*, one of the most exquisite both in form and matter in any language or age; and the story of *The Deceitful Woman and the Tub*, which Boccaccio made use of in his *Decameron* as the second novel for the seventh day.

In the intense and visual quality of the atmosphere with which he pervades his narrative he has no equal among the writers of English prose-fiction until Sir Walter Scott appears. "Apuleius

has enveloped his world of marvels in a heavy air of witchery and romance. You wander with Lucius across the hills and through the dales of Thessaly. With all the delight of a fresh curiosity you approach its far-seen towns. You journey at midnight under the stars, listening in terror for the howling of the wolves or the stealthy ambush. At other whiles you sit in the robbers' cave and hear the ancient legends of Greece retold. The spring comes on, and 'the little birds chirp and sing their steven melodiously.' Secret raids, ravished brides, valiant rescues, the gayest intrigues – these are the diverse matters of this many-colored book."

But as a short-story writer he shares the failing of all his English brothers in that art, until James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd, penned his tales – namely, that his short-stories do not stand apart, as things total in themselves, but are woven into a larger narrative by whose proportions they are dwarfed, so that their true completeness is disguised. "He cares not how he loiters by the way; he is always ready to beguile his reader with a Milesian story – one of those quaint and witty interludes which have travelled the world over and become part, not merely of every literature, but of every life." It is to three of these chance loiterings of this Kipling of Rome in its decadence that we owe the famous stories alluded to above.

To the Elizabethan period belong the most masterly translations of which the English language is possessed; and this not by virtue of their accuracy and scholarship, but because, to use Doctor Johnson's words, the translator "exhibits

his author's thoughts in such a dress as the author would have given them had his language been English." That same "indefatigable youthfulness" which converted courtiers into sailors and despatched them into unknown seas to ransack new worlds, urged men of the pen to seek out and to pillage, with an equal ardor of adventure, the intellectual wealth of their contemporaries in other lands and the buried and forgotten stores of the ancients upon their own neighboring book-shelves. A universal and contagious curiosity was abroad. To this age belong William Paynter's version of the *Decameron*, entitled *The Palace of Pleasure*, 1566, from which Shakespeare borrowed; Geoffrey Fenton's translation of Bandello's *Tragical Discourses*, 1567; Sir Thomas North's rendering of *Plutarch's Lives*, 1579; Thomas Underdowne's *Heliodorus*, 1587; Thomas Shelton's *Don Quixote*, 1612; and others too numerous to mention. It seems extraordinary at first sight that when such models of advanced technique were set before them, Englishmen were so slow to follow; for though Professor Baldwin is probably correct in his analysis of the *Decameron* when he states that, of the hundred tales, over fifty are not much more than anecdotes, about forty are but outlined plots, three follow the modern short-story method only part way, and, of the hundred, two[13] alone are perfect examples, yet those two perfect examples remained and were capable of imitation. The explanation of this neglect is, perhaps, that the Elizabethans were too busy originating to find

[13] The second novel of the second day, and the sixth of the ninth day.

time for copying; they were very willing to borrow ideas, but must be allowed to develop them in their own way – usually along dramatic lines for stage purposes, because this was at that time the most financially profitable.

VII

The blighting influence of constitutional strife and intestine war which followed in the Stuarts' reigns turned the serious artist's thoughts aside to grave and prophetic forms of literary utterance, while writers of the frivolous sort devoted their talent to a lighter and less sincere art than that of the short-story – namely, court-poetry. It was an age of extremes which bred despair and religious fervor in men of the Puritan party, as represented by Bunyan and Milton, and conscious artificiality and mock heroics in those of the Cavalier faction, as represented by Herrick and the Earl of Rochester.

The examples of semi-fictional prose which can be gathered from this period serve only to illustrate how the short-story instinct, though stifled, was still present. Isaak Walton as a diarist had it; Thomas Fuller as an historian had it; John Bunyan as an ethical writer had it. Each one was possessed of the short-story faculty, but only manifested it, as it were, by accident. Not until Daniel Defoe and the rise of the newspaper do we note any advance in technique. Defoe's main contribution was the *short-story essay*, which stands midway between the anecdote, or germ-plot, buried in a mass of extraneous material, and the short-story proper. The growth of this form, as developed by Swift, Steel, Addison, Goldsmith, and Lamb, has been traced and criticised

elsewhere.[14] It had this one great advantage that, whatever its departures from the strict technique of the modern short-story, it was capable of being read at one sitting, stood by itself, and gained "the immense force derivable from *totality*."

In the *True Revelation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal*, Defoe is again strangely in advance of his time, as he is in so many other ways. Here is an almost perfect example of the most modern method of handling a ghost-tale. Surely, in whatever department of literature we seek, we shall find nothing to surpass it in the quality of *verisimilitude*. The way in which Drelincourt's *Book on Death* is introduced and subsequently twice referred to is a master-stroke of genius. In days gone by, before they were parted, we are told, Mrs. Veal and Mrs. Bargrave "would often console each other's adverse fortunes, and read together Drelincourt *On Death* and other good books." At the time when the story opens Mrs. Bargrave has gone to live in Canterbury, and Mrs. Veal is in Dover. To Mrs. Bargrave in Canterbury the apparition appears, though she does not know that it is an apparition, for there is nothing to denote that it is not her old friend still alive. One of the first things the apparition does is "to remind Mrs. Bargrave of the many friendly offices she did her in former days, and much of the conversation they had with each other in the times of their adversity; what books they read, and what comfort in particular they received from Drelincourt's

[14] In the third chapter of *The Great English Essayists*, vol. iii of *The Reader's Library*, published by Messrs. Harper & Brothers, 1909.

Book on Death. Drelincourt, she said, had the clearest notions of death and of the future state of any who had handled that subject. Then she asked Mrs. Bargrave whether she had Drelincourt. She said, 'Yes,' Says Mrs. Veal, 'Fetch it.' Some days after, when Mrs. Bargrave, having discovered that the visitor was a ghost, has gone about telling her neighbors, Defoe observes, 'Drelincourt's *Book on Death* is, since this happened, bought up strangely,'"

This masterpiece of Defoe is before its time by a hundred years; nothing can be found in the realm of the English prose short-story to approach it in symmetry until the Ettrick Shepherd commenced to write.

Of all the models of prose-fiction which the Tudor translations had given to English literature, the first to be copied was that of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, rendered into English by Thomas Shelton in 1612. Swift must have had the rambling method of Cervantes well in mind when he wrote his *Gulliver*; and Smollett confessedly took it as his pattern and set out to imitate. The most that was required by such a method in the way of initial construction was to select a hero, give some account of his early history, from the day of his birth up to the point where the true narrative commences, and then send him upon his travels. Usually it was thought necessary to have a Sancho to act as background to Don Quixote; thus Crusoe is given his Man Friday, Tom Jones his Mr. Partridge, and Roderick Random his Strap; but this was not always done, for both Gulliver and the hero of the *Sentimental Journey* set out on their

journeyings unaccompanied. The story which grew out of such a method usually consisted of a series of plots, anecdotes, and incidents linked together only by the characters, and governed by no unifying purpose which made each one a necessary and ascending step toward a prearranged climax. These early novels are often books of descriptive travel rather than novels in the modern sense; the sole connection between their first incident and their last being the long road which lies between them, and has been traversed in the continual company of the same leading characters. Many of the chapters, taken apart from their context, are short-story themes badly handled. Some of them are mere interpolations introduced on the flimsiest of excuses, which arrest the progress of the main narrative —*i. e.*, the travel – and give the author an opportunity to use up some spare material which he does not know what to do with. Such are "The Man of the Hill," in *Tom Jones*; "The History of Melopoyn the Playwright" in *Roderick Random*; the "Memoirs of a Lady of Quality," occupying fifty-three thousand words, in *Peregrine Pickle*; "The Philosophic Vagabond," in the *Vicar of Wakefield*; and "Wandering Willie's Tale," in *Redgauntlet*. The reason why the eighteenth-century novelist did not know what to do with these materials was, in certain cases, that he had discovered a true short-story theme and was perplexed by it. He knew that it was good – his artist's instinct made him aware of that; but somehow, to his great bewilderment and annoyance, it refused to be expanded. So, in order that it might not be entirely lost to

him, he tied the little boat on behind the great schooner of his main narration, and set them afloat together.

By the modern reader, whether of the short-story or the novel, the lack of atmosphere and of immediateness in eighteenth-century prose-fiction is particularly felt. There is no use made of landscapes, moods, and the phenomena of nature; the story happens at almost any season of the year. Of these things and their use the modern short-story writer is meticulously careful. By how much would the worth of Hardy's *The Three Strangers* be diminished if the description of the March rain driving across the Wessex moorland were left out? Before he commences the story contained in *A Lodging for the Night*, Stevenson occupies three hundred words in painting the picture of Paris under snow. In the same way, in his story of *The Man Who Would Be King*, Kipling is at great pains to make us burn with the scorching heat which, in the popular mind, is associated with India. For such effects you will search the prose-fiction of the eighteenth century in vain; whereas the use of *atmosphere* has been carried to such extremes to-day by certain writers that the short-story in their hands is in danger of becoming all atmosphere and no story.

The impression created by the old technique, such as it was, when contrasted with the new, when legitimately handled, is the difference between reading a play and seeing it staged.

As regards immediateness of narration, Laurence Sterne may, perhaps, be pointed out as an example. But he is not immediate in the true sense; he is abrupt, and this too frequently for his own

sly purposes – which have nothing to do with either technique or the short-story.

Most of the English short-stories, previous to those written by James Hogg, are either prefaced with a biography of their main characters or else the biography is made to do service as though it were a plot – nothing is left to the imagination. Even in the next century, when the short-story had come to be recognized in America, through the example set by Hawthorne and Poe, as a distinct species of literary art, the productions of British writers were too often nothing more than compressed novels. In fact, it is true to say that there is more of short-story technique in the short-story essays of Goldsmith and Lamb than can be found in many of the brief tales of Dickens and Anthony Trollope, which in their day passed muster unchallenged as short-stories.

VIII

But between the irrelevant brief story, interpolated in a larger narrative, and the perfect short-story, which could not be expanded and is total in itself, of Hawthorne and Poe, there stands the work of a man who is little known in America, and by no means popular in England, that of the Ettrick Shepherd, James Hogg. He was born in Scotland, among the mountains of Ettrick and Yarrow, the son of a shepherd. When he was but six years old he commenced to earn his living as a cowherd, and by his seventh year had received all the schooling which he was destined to have – two separate periods of three months. Matthew Arnold, when accounting for the sterility of Gray as a poet, says that throughout the first nine decades of the eighteenth century, until the French Revolution roused men to generosity, "a spiritual east wind was blowing." Hogg's early ignorance of letters had at least this advantage, that it saved him from the blighting intellectual influences of his age – left him unsophisticated, free to find in all things matter for wonder, and to work out his mental processes unprejudiced by a restraining knowledge of other men's past achievements. In his eighteenth year he taught himself to read, choosing as his text-books Henry the Minstrel's *Life and Adventures of Sir William Wallace* and the *Gentle Shepherd* of Allan Ramsay. Not until his twenty-sixth year did he acquire the art of penmanship, which

he learned "upon the hillside by copying the Italian alphabet, using his knee as his desk, and having the ink-bottle suspended from his button." During the next fourteen years he followed his shepherd's calling, making it romantic with sundry more or less successful attempts at authorship. He had reached his fortieth year before he abandoned sheep-raising and journeyed to Edinburgh, there definitely to adopt the literary career. He was by this time firm in his philosophy of life and established in his modes of thought; whatever else he might not be, among townsmen and persons of artificial training, his very simplicity was sure to make him original. In his forty-seventh year, having so far cast his most important work into the poetic form, he contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine* his *Shepherd's Calendar*, followed in the same year by the publishing of *The Brownie of Bodsbeck*; these were his first two serious excursions into the realm of prose-fiction. From then on until his death, in 1835, he continued his efforts in this direction, pouring out a mass of country-side tradition and fairy-folklore, amazing in its fantasy and wealth of drama.

For the imparting of *atmosphere* to his stories, a talent so conspicuously lacking not only in his predecessors, but also in many of his contemporaries, he had a native faculty. The author of *Bonny Kilmeny* could scarcely fail in this respect, when he turned his attention from poetry to prose. He had lived too close to nature to be able ever to keep the green and silver of woods and rivers far from his thoughts; they were the mirrors

in which his fancy saw itself. Professor Wilson, who had known him as a friend, writing of him in *Blackwood's* after his death, says: "Living for years in solitude, he unconsciously formed friendships with the springs, the brooks, the caves, the hills, and with all the more fleeting and faithless pageantry of the sky, that to him came in place of those human affections from whose indulgence he was debarred by the necessities that kept him aloof from the cottage fire and up among the mists of the mountain-top. The still green beauty of the pastoral hills and vales where he passed his youth inspired him with ever-brooding visions of fairyland, till, as he lay musing in his lonely shieling, the world of fantasy seemed, in the clear depths of his imagination, a lovelier reflection of that of nature, like the hills and heavens more softly shining in the water of his native lake."

His taste is often defective, as is that of Burns on occasions. This is a fault which might be expected in a man of his training; but the vigor and essential worth of the matters which he relates are beyond all question. He did not always know where to begin his short-story, or where to terminate. Some of his tales, if edited with blue-pencil erasures, would be found to contain a nucleus-technique which, though far from perfect, is more than equal to that of Washington Irving, who, like Apuleius, "cared not how he loitered by the way," and very superior to that of most of his immediate successors in the art. His story here included, of *The Mysterious Bride*,[15] could scarcely be bettered in its method. To

[15] Compare with Kipling's treatment of a similar theme in *The Brushwood Boy*.

tell it in fewer words would be to obscure it; to tell it at greater length would be to rob it of its mystery and to make it obvious. Moreover, by employing atmosphere he tells it in such a way as to leave the reader with the impression that this occurrence, for all its magic, might not only be possible, but even probable – which achievement is the greatest triumph of the short-story writer's art.

As this history of the evolution of the English short-story commenced with a poet, Chaucer,[16] who wrote all save two of his short-stories in poetry, so it fittingly closes with a poet, the Ettrick Shepherd, who wrote most of his short-stories in prose. It remained for yet another poet, Edgar Allan Poe, who may never have heard the name or have read a line from the writings of James Hogg, to bring to perfection the task on which he had spent his labor.

[16] The *Gesta Romanorum* was written in Latin.

THE APPARITION OF MRS. VEAL

Daniel Defoe (1661-1731)

This thing is so rare in all its circumstances, and on so good authority, that my reading and conversation have not given me anything like it. It is fit to gratify the most ingenious and serious inquirer. Mrs. Bargrave is the person to whom Mrs. Veal appeared after her death; she is my intimate friend, and I can avouch for her reputation for these fifteen or sixteen years, on my own knowledge; and I can confirm the good character she had from her youth to the time of my acquaintance. Though, since this relation, she is calumniated by some people that are friends to the brother of Mrs. Veal who appeared, who think the relation of this appearance to be a reflection, and endeavor what they can to blast Mrs. Bargrave's reputation and to laugh the story out of countenance. But by the circumstances thereof, and the cheerful disposition of Mrs. Bargrave, notwithstanding the ill usage of a very wicked husband, there is not yet the least sign of dejection in her face; nor did I ever hear her let fall a desponding or murmuring expression; nay, not when actually under her husband's barbarity, which I have been a witness to, and several other persons of undoubted reputation.

Now you must know Mrs. Veal was a maiden gentlewoman of about thirty years of age, and for some years past had been troubled with fits, which were perceived coming on her by her

going off from her discourse very abruptly to some impertinence. She was maintained by an only brother, and kept his house in Dover. She was a very pious woman, and her brother a very sober man to all appearance; but now he does all he can to null and quash the story. Mrs. Veal was intimately acquainted with Mrs. Bargrave from her childhood. Mrs. Veal's circumstances were then mean; her father did not take care of his children as he ought, so that they were exposed to hardships. And Mrs. Bargrave in those days had as unkind a father, though she wanted neither for food nor clothing; while Mrs. Veal wanted for both, insomuch that she would often say, "Mrs. Bargrave, you are not only the best, but the only friend I have in the world; and no circumstance of life shall ever dissolve my friendship." They would often condole each other's adverse fortunes, and read together *Drelincourt upon Death*, and other good books; and so, like two Christian friends, they comforted each other under their sorrow.

Some time after, Mr. Veal's friends got him a place in the custom-house at Dover, which occasioned Mrs. Veal, by little and little, to fall off from her intimacy with Mrs. Bargrave, though there was never any such thing as a quarrel; but an indifferency came on by degrees, till at last Mrs. Bargrave had not seen her in two years and a half, though above a twelvemonth of the time Mrs. Bargrave hath been absent from Dover, and this last half-year has been in Canterbury about two months of the time, dwelling in a house of her own.

In this house, on the eighth of September, one thousand seven hundred and five, she was sitting alone in the forenoon, thinking over her unfortunate life, and arguing herself into a due resignation to Providence, though her condition seemed hard: "And," said she, "I have been provided for hitherto, and doubt not but I shall be still, and am well satisfied that my afflictions shall end when it is most fit for me." And then took up her sewing work, which she had no sooner done but she hears a knocking at the door; she went to see who was there, and this proved to be Mrs. Veal, her old friend, who was in a riding-habit. At that moment of time the clock struck twelve at noon.

"Madam," says Mrs. Bargrave, "I am surprised to see you, you have been so long a stranger"; but told her she was glad to see her, and offered to salute her, which Mrs. Veal complied with, till their lips almost touched, and then Mrs. Veal drew her hand across her own eyes, and said, "I am not very well," and so waived it. She told Mrs. Bargrave she was going a journey, and had a great mind to see her first. "But," says Mrs. Bargrave, "how can you take a journey alone? I am amazed at it, because I know you have a fond brother." "Oh," says Mrs. Veal, "I gave my brother the slip, and came away, because I had so great a desire to see you before I took my journey." So Mrs. Bargrave went in with her into another room within the first, and Mrs. Veal sat her down in an elbow-chair, in which Mrs. Bargrave was sitting when she heard Mrs. Veal knock. "Then," says Mrs. Veal, "my dear friend, I am come to renew our old friendship again, and beg your pardon

for my breach of it; and if you can forgive me, you are the best of women." "Oh," says Mrs. Bargrave, "do not mention such a thing; I have not had an uneasy thought about it." "What did you think of me?" says Mrs. Veal. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "I thought you were like the rest of the world, and that prosperity had made you forget yourself and me." Then Mrs. Veal reminded Mrs. Bargrave of the many friendly offices she did her in former days, and much of the conversation they had with each other in the times of their adversity; what books they read, and what comfort in particular they received from Drelincourt's *Book of Death*, which was the best, she said, on the subject ever wrote. She also mentioned Doctor Sherlock, and two Dutch books, which were translated, wrote upon death, and several others. But Drelincourt, she said, had the clearest notions of death and of the future state of any who had handled that subject. Then she asked Mrs. Bargrave whether she had Drelincourt. She said, "Yes." Says Mrs. Veal, "Fetch it." And so Mrs. Bargrave goes up-stairs and brings it down. Says Mrs. Veal, "Dear Mrs. Bargrave, if the eyes of our faith were as open as the eyes of our body, we should see numbers of angels about us for our guard. The notions we have of Heaven now are nothing like what it is, as Drelincourt says; therefore be comforted under your afflictions, and believe that the Almighty has a particular regard to you, and that your afflictions are marks of God's favor; and when they have done the business they are sent for, they shall be removed from you. And believe me, my dear friend, believe what I say to you, one

minute of future happiness will infinitely reward you for all your sufferings. For I can never believe" (and claps her hand upon her knee with great earnestness, which, indeed, ran through most of her discourse) "that ever God will suffer you to spend all your days in this afflicted state. But be assured that your afflictions shall leave you, or you them, in a short time." She spake in that pathetical and heavenly manner that Mrs. Bargrave wept several times, she was so deeply affected with it.

Then Mrs. Veal mentioned Doctor Kendrick's *Ascetic*, at the end of which he gives an account of the lives of the primitive Christians. Their pattern she recommended to our imitation, and said, "Their conversation was not like this of our age. For now," says she, "there is nothing but vain, frothy discourse, which is far different from theirs. Theirs was to edification, and to build one another up in faith, so that they were not as we are, nor are we as they were. But," said she, "we ought to do as they did; there was a hearty friendship among them; but where is it now to be found?" Says Mrs. Bargrave, "It is hard indeed to find a true friend in these days." Says Mrs. Veal, "Mr. Norris has a fine copy of verses, called *Friendship in Perfection*, which I wonderfully admire. Have you seen the book?" says Mrs. Veal. "No," says Mrs. Bargrave, "but I have the verses of my own writing out." "Have you?" says Mrs. Veal; "then fetch them"; which she did from above stairs, and offered them to Mrs. Veal to read, who refused, and waived the thing, saying, "holding down her head would make it ache"; and then desiring Mrs. Bargrave to read

them to her, which she did. As they were admiring *Friendship*, Mrs. Veal said, "Dear Mrs. Bargrave, I shall love you forever." In these verses there is twice used the word "Elysian." "Ah!" says Mrs. Veal, "these poets have such names for Heaven." She would often draw her hand across her own eyes, and say, "Mrs. Bargrave, do not you think I am mightily impaired by my fits?" "No," says Mrs. Bargrave; "I think you look as well as ever I knew you."

After this discourse, which the apparition put in much finer words than Mrs. Bargrave said she could pretend to, and as much more than she can remember – for it cannot be thought that an hour and three quarters' conversation could all be retained, though the main of it she thinks she does – she said to Mrs. Bargrave she would have her write a letter to her brother, and tell him she would have him give rings to such and such; and that there was a purse of gold in her cabinet, and that she would have two broad pieces given to her cousin Watson.

Talking at this rate, Mrs. Bargrave thought that a fit was coming upon her, and so placed herself on a chair just before her knees, to keep her from falling to the ground, if her fits should occasion it; for the elbow-chair, she thought, would keep her from falling on either side. And to divert Mrs. Veal, as she thought, took hold of her gown-sleeve several times, and commended it. Mrs. Veal told her it was a scoured silk, and newly made up. But, for all this, Mrs. Veal persisted in her request, and told Mrs. Bargrave she must not deny her. And she would

have her tell her brother all their conversation when she had the opportunity. "Dear Mrs. Veal," says Mrs. Bargrave, "this seems so impertinent that I cannot tell how to comply with it; and what a mortifying story will our conversation be to a young gentleman. Why," says Mrs. Bargrave, "it is much better, methinks, to do it yourself." "No," says Mrs. Veal; "though it seems impertinent to you now, you will see more reasons for it hereafter." Mrs. Bargrave, then, to satisfy her importunity, was going to fetch a pen and ink, but Mrs. Veal said, "Let it alone now, but do it when I am gone; but you must be sure to do it"; which was one of the last things she enjoined her at parting, and so she promised her.

Then Mrs. Veal asked for Mrs. Bargrave's daughter. She said she was not at home. "But if you have a mind to see her," says Mrs. Bargrave, "I'll send for her." "Do," says Mrs. Veal; on which she left her, and went to a neighbor's to see her; and by the time Mrs. Bargrave was returning, Mrs. Veal was got without the door in the street, in the face of the beast-market, on a Saturday (which is market-day), and stood ready to part as soon as Mrs. Bargrave came to her. She asked her why she was in such haste. She said she must be going, though perhaps she might not go her journey till Monday; and told Mrs. Bargrave she hoped she should see her again at her cousin Watson's before she went whither she was going. Then she said she would take her leave of her, and walked from Mrs. Bargrave, in her view, till a turning interrupted the sight of her, which was three-quarters after one in the afternoon.

Mrs. Veal died the seventh of September, at twelve o'clock

at noon, of her fits, and had not above four hours' senses before her death, in which time she received the sacrament. The next day after Mrs. Veal's appearance, being Sunday, Mrs. Bargrave was mightily indisposed with a cold and sore throat, that she could not go out that day; but on Monday morning she sends a person to Captain Watson's to know if Mrs. Veal was there. They wondered at Mrs. Bargrave's inquiry, and sent her word she was not there, nor was expected. At this answer, Mrs. Bargrave told the maid she had certainly mistook the name or made some blunder. And though she was ill, she put on her hood and went herself to Captain Watson's, though she knew none of the family, to see if Mrs. Veal was there or not. They said they wondered at her asking, for that she had not been in town; they were sure, if she had, she would have been there. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "I am sure she was with me on Saturday almost two hours." They said it was impossible, for they must have seen her if she had. In comes Captain Watson, while they were in dispute, and said that Mrs. Veal was certainly dead, and the escutcheons were making. This strangely surprised Mrs. Bargrave, when she sent to the person immediately who had the care of them, and found it true. Then she related the whole story to Captain Watson's family; and what gown she had on, and how striped; and that Mrs. Veal told her that it was scoured. Then Mrs. Watson cried out, "You have seen her indeed, for none knew but Mrs. Veal and myself that the gown was scoured." And Mrs. Watson owned that she described the gown exactly; "for," said she, "I helped

her to make it up." This Mrs. Watson blazed all about the town, and avouched the demonstration of truth of Mrs. Bargrave's seeing Mrs. Veal's apparition. And Captain Watson carried two gentlemen immediately to Mrs. Bargrave's house to hear the relation from her own mouth. And when it spread so fast that gentlemen and persons of quality, the judicious and sceptical part of the world, flocked in upon her, it at last became such a task that she was forced to go out of the way; for they were in general extremely satisfied of the truth of the thing, and plainly saw that Mrs. Bargrave was no hypochondriac, for she always appears with such a cheerful air and pleasing mien that she has gained the favor and esteem of all the gentry, and it is thought a great favor if they can but get the relation from her own mouth. I should have told you before that Mrs. Veal told Mrs. Bargrave that her sister and brother-in-law were just come down from London to see her. Says Mrs. Bargrave, "How came you to order matters so strangely?" "It could not be helped," said Mrs. Veal. And her brother and sister did come to see her, and entered the town of Dover just as Mrs. Veal was expiring. Mrs. Bargrave asked her whether she would drink some tea. Says Mrs. Veal, "I do not care if I do; but I'll warrant you this mad fellow" – meaning Mrs. Bargrave's husband – "has broke all your trinkets." "But," says Mrs. Bargrave, "I'll get something to drink in for all that"; but Mrs. Veal waived it, and said, "It is no matter; let it alone"; and so it passed.

All the time I sat with Mrs. Bargrave, which was some hours,

she recollected fresh sayings of Mrs. Veal. And one material thing more she told Mrs. Bargrave, that old Mr. Bretton allowed Mrs. Veal ten pounds a year, which was a secret, and unknown to Mrs. Bargrave till Mrs. Veal told her.

Mrs. Bargrave never varies in her story, which puzzles those who doubt of the truth, or are unwilling to believe it. A servant in the neighbor's yard adjoining to Mrs. Bargrave's house heard her talking to somebody an hour of the time Mrs. Veal was with her. Mrs. Bargrave went out to her next neighbor's the very moment she parted with Mrs. Veal, and told her what ravishing conversation she had had with an old friend, and told the whole of it. Drelincourt's *Book of Death* is, since this happened, bought up strangely. And it is to be observed that, notwithstanding all the trouble and fatigue Mrs. Bargrave has undergone upon this account, she never took the value of a farthing, nor suffered her daughter to take anything of anybody, and therefore can have no interest in telling the story.

But Mr. Veal does what he can to stifle the matter, and said he would see Mrs. Bargrave; but yet it is certain matter of fact that he has been at Captain Watson's since the death of his sister, and yet never went near Mrs. Bargrave; and some of his friends report her to be a liar, and that she knew of Mr. Bretton's ten pounds a year. But the person who pretends to say so has the reputation to be a notorious liar among persons whom I know to be of undoubted credit. Now, Mr. Veal is more of a gentleman than to say she lies, but says a bad husband has crazed her; but she needs

only present herself, and it will effectually confute that pretence. Mr. Veal says he asked his sister on her death-bed whether she had a mind to dispose of anything. And she said no. Now the things which Mrs. Veal's apparition would have disposed of were so trifling, and nothing of justice aimed at in the disposal, that the design of it appears to me to be only in order to make Mrs. Bargrave satisfy the world of the reality thereof as to what she had seen and heard, and to secure her reputation among the reasonable and understanding part of mankind. And then, again, Mr. Veal owns that there was a purse of gold; but it was not found in her cabinet, but in a comb-box. This looks improbable; for that Mrs. Watson owned that Mrs. Veal was so very careful of the key of her cabinet that she would trust nobody with it; and if so, no doubt she would not trust her gold out of it. And Mrs. Veal's often drawing her hands over her eyes, and asking Mrs. Bargrave whether her fits had not impaired her, looks to me as if she did it on purpose to remind Mrs. Bargrave of her fits, to prepare her not to think it strange that she should put her upon writing to her brother, to dispose of rings and gold, which look so much like a dying person's request; and it took accordingly with Mrs. Bargrave as the effect of her fits coming upon her, and was one of the many instances of her wonderful love to her and care of her, that she should not be affrighted, which, indeed, appears in her whole management, particularly in her coming to her in the daytime, waiving the salutation, and when she was alone; and then the manner of her parting, to prevent a second attempt to

salute her.

Now, why Mr. Veal should think this relation a reflection – as it is plain he does, by his endeavoring to stifle it – I cannot imagine; because the generality believe her to be a good spirit, her discourse was so heavenly. Her two great errands were, to comfort Mrs. Bargrave in her affliction, and to ask her forgiveness for her breach of friendship, and with a pious discourse to encourage her. So that, after all, to suppose that Mrs. Bargrave could hatch such an invention as this, from Friday noon to Saturday noon – supposing that she knew of Mrs. Veal's death the very first moment – without jumbling circumstances, and without any interest, too, she must be more witty, fortunate, and wicked, too, than any indifferent person, I dare say, will allow. I asked Mrs. Bargrave several times if she was sure she felt the gown. She answered, modestly, "If my senses be to be relied on, I am sure of it." I asked her if she heard a sound when she clapped her hand upon her knee. She said she did not remember she did, but said she appeared to be as much a substance as I did who talked with her. "And I may," said she, "be as soon persuaded that your apparition is talking to me now as that I did not really see her; for I was under no manner of fear, and received her as a friend, and parted with her as such. I would not," says she, "give one farthing to make any one believe it; I have no interest in it; nothing but trouble is entailed upon me for a long time, for aught I know; and, had it not come to light by accident, it would never have been made public." But now she says she will make her own

private use of it, and keep herself out of the way as much as she can; and so she has done since. She says she had a gentleman who came thirty miles to her to hear the relation; and that she had told it to a roomful of people at the time. Several particular gentlemen have had the story from Mrs. Bargrave's own mouth.

This thing has very much affected me, and I am as well satisfied as I am of the best-grounded matter of fact. And why we should dispute matter of fact, because we cannot solve things of which we can have no certain or demonstrative notions, seems strange to me; Mrs. Bargrave's authority and sincerity alone would have been undoubted in any other case.

THE MYSTERIOUS BRIDE[17]

James Hogg (1770-1835)

A great number of people nowadays are beginning broadly to insinuate that there are no such things as ghosts, or spiritual beings visible to mortal sight. Even Sir Walter Scott is turned renegade, and, with his stories made up of half-and-half, like Nathaniel Gow's toddy, is trying to throw cold water on the most certain, though most impalpable, phenomena of human nature. The bodies are daft. Heaven mend their wits! Before they had ventured to assert such things, I wish they had been where I have often been; or, in particular, where the Laird of Birkendelly was on St. Lawrence's Eve, in the year 1777, and sundry times subsequent to that.

Be it known, then, to every reader of this relation of facts that happened in my own remembrance that the road from Birkendelly to the great muckle village of Balmawhapple (commonly called the muckle town, in opposition to the little town that stood on the other side of the burn) – that road, I say, lay between two thorn-hedges, so well kept by the Laird's hedger, so close, and so high, that a rabbit could not have escaped from the highway into any of the adjoining fields. Along this road was the Laird riding on the Eve of St. Lawrence, in a careless,

[17] From *Tales and Sketches*, by the Ettrick Shepherd.

indifferent manner, with his hat to one side, and his cane dancing a hornpipe before him. He was, moreover, chanting a song to himself, and I have heard people tell what song it was too. There was once a certain, or rather uncertain, bard, ycleped Robert Burns, who made a number of good songs; but this that the Laird sang was an amorous song of great antiquity, which, like all the said bard's best songs, was sung one hundred and fifty years before he was born. It began thus:

"I am the Laird of Windy-wa's,
I cam nae here without a cause,
An' I hae gotten forty fa's
In coming o'er the knowe, joe.
The night it is baith wind and weet;
The morn it will be snaw and sleet;
My shoon are frozen to my feet;
O, rise an' let me in, joe!
Let me in this ae night," etc.

This song was the Laird singing, while, at the same time, he was smudging and laughing at the catastrophe, when, ere ever aware, he beheld, a short way before him, an uncommonly elegant and beautiful girl walking in the same direction with him. "Aye," said the Laird to himself, "here is something very attractive indeed! Where the deuce can she have sprung from? She must have risen out of the earth, for I never saw her till this breath. Well, I declare I have not seen such a female figure – I

wish I had such an assignation with her as the Laird of Windy-wa's had with his sweetheart."

As the Laird was half-thinking, half-speaking this to himself, the enchanting creature looked back at him with a motion of intelligence that she knew what he was half-saying, half-thinking, and then vanished over the summit of the rising ground before him, called the Birky Brow. "Aye, go your ways!" said the Laird; "I see by you, you'll not be very hard to overtake. You cannot get off the road, and I'll have a chat with you before you make the Deer's Den."

The Laird jogged on. He did not sing the *Laird of Windy-wa's* any more, for he felt a stifling about his heart; but he often repeated to himself, "She's a very fine woman! – a very fine woman indeed! – and to be walking here by herself! I cannot comprehend it."

When he reached the summit of the Birky Brow he did not see her, although he had a longer view of the road than before. He thought this very singular, and began to suspect that she wanted to escape him, although apparently rather lingering on him before. "I shall have another look at her, however," thought the Laird, and off he set at a flying trot. No. He came first to one turn, then another. There was nothing of the young lady to be seen. "Unless she take wings and fly away, I shall be up with her," quoth the Laird, and off he set at the full gallop.

In the middle of his career he met with Mr. McMurdie, of Aulton, who hailed him with, "Hilloa, Birkendelly! Where the

deuce are you flying at that rate?"

"I was riding after a woman," said the Laird, with great simplicity, reining in his steed.

"Then I am sure no woman on earth can long escape you, unless she be in an air balloon."

"I don't know that. Is she far gone?"

"In which way do you mean?"

"In this."

"Aha-ha-ha! Hee-hee-hee!" nichered McMurdie, misconstruing the Laird's meaning.

"What do you laugh at, my dear sir? Do you know her, then?"

"Ho-ho-ho! Hee-hee-hee! How should I, or how can I, know her, Birkendelly, unless you inform me who she is?"

"Why, that is the very thing I want to know of you. I mean the young lady whom you met just now."

"You are raving, Birkendelly. I met no young lady, nor is there a single person on the road I have come by, while you know that for a mile and a half forward your way she could not get out of it."

"I know that," said the Laird, biting his lip and looking greatly puzzled; "but confound me if I understand this; for I was within speech of her just now on the top of the Birky Brow there, and, when I think of it, she could not have been even thus far as yet. She had on a pure white gauze frock, a small green bonnet and feathers, and a green veil, which, flung back over her left shoulder, hung below her waist, and was altogether such an engaging figure that no man could have passed her on the road

without taking some note of her. Are you not making game of me? Did you not really meet with her?"

"On my word of truth and honor, I did not. Come, ride back with me, and we shall meet her still, depend on it. She has given you the go-by on the road. Let us go; I am only to call at the mill about some barley for the distillery, and will return with you to the big town."

Birkendelly returned with his friend. The sun was not yet set, yet M'Murdie could not help observing that the Laird looked thoughtful and confused, and not a word could he speak about anything save this lovely apparition with the white frock and the green veil; and lo! when they reached the top of Birky Brow there was the maiden again before them, and exactly at the same spot where the Laird first saw her before, only walking in the contrary direction.

"Well, this is the most extraordinary thing that I ever knew!" exclaimed the Laird.

"What is it, sir?" said M'Murdie.

"How that young lady could have eluded me," returned the Laird. "See, here she is still!"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I don't see her. Where is she?"

"There, on the other side of the angle; but you are shortsighted. See, there she is ascending the other eminence in her white frock and green veil, as I told you. What a lovely creature!"

"Well, well, we have her fairly before us now, and shall see what she is like at all events," said McMurdie.

Between the Birky Brow and this other slight eminence there is an obtuse angle of the road at the part where it is lowest, and, in passing this, the two friends necessarily lost sight of the object of their curiosity. They pushed on at a quick pace, cleared the low angle – the maiden was not there! They rode full speed to the top of the eminence from whence a long extent of road was visible before them – there was no human creature in view. McMurdie laughed aloud, but the Laird turned pale as death and bit his lip. His friend asked him good-humoredly why he was so much affected. He said, because he could not comprehend the meaning of this singular apparition or illusion, and it troubled him the more as he now remembered a dream of the same nature which he had, and which terminated in a dreadful manner.

"Why, man, you are dreaming still," said McMurdie. "But never mind; it is quite common for men of your complexion to dream of beautiful maidens with white frocks, and green veils, bonnets, feathers, and slender waists. It is a lovely image, the creation of your own sanguine imagination, and you may worship it without any blame. Were her shoes black or green? And her stockings – did you note them? The symmetry of the limbs, I am sure you did! Good-bye; I see you are not disposed to leave the spot. Perhaps she will appear to you again."

So saying, McMurdie rode on toward the mill, and Birkendelly, after musing for some time, turned his beast's head slowly round, and began to move toward the great muckle village.

The Laird's feelings were now in terrible commotion. He was

taken beyond measure with the beauty and elegance of the figure he had seen, but he remembered, with a mixture of admiration and horror, that a dream of the same enchanting object had haunted his slumbers all the days of his life; yet, how singular that he should never have recollected the circumstance till now! But farther, with the dream there were connected some painful circumstances which, though terrible in their issue, he could not recollect so as to form them into any degree of arrangement.

As he was considering deeply of these things and riding slowly down the declivity, neither dancing his cane nor singing the *Laird of Windy-wa's*, he lifted up his eyes, and there was the girl on the same spot where he saw her first, walking deliberately up the Birky Brow. The sun was down, but it was the month of August and a fine evening, and the Laird, seized with an unconquerable desire to see and speak with that incomparable creature, could restrain himself no longer, but shouted out to her to stop till he came up. She beckoned acquiescence, and slackened her pace into a slow movement. The Laird turned the corner quickly, but when he had rounded it the maiden was still there, though on the summit of the brow. She turned round, and, with an ineffable smile and curtsy, saluted him, and again moved slowly on. She vanished gradually beyond the summit, and while the green feathers were still nodding in view, and so nigh that the Laird could have touched them with a fishing-rod, he reached the top of the brow himself. There was no living soul there, nor onward, as far as his view reached. He now trembled in every

limb, and, without knowing what he did, rode straight on to the big town, not daring well to return and see what he had seen for three several times; and certain he would see it again when the shades of evening were deepening, he deemed it proper and prudent to decline the pursuit of such a phantom any farther.

He alighted at the Queen's Head, called for some brandy and water, quite forgot what was his errand to the great muckle town that afternoon, there being nothing visible to his mental sight but lovely images, with white gauze frocks and green veils. His friend M'Murdie joined him; they drank deep, bantered, reasoned, got angry, reasoned themselves calm again, and still all would not do. The Laird was conscious that he had seen the beautiful apparition, and, moreover, that she was the very maiden, or the resemblance of her, who, in the irrevocable decrees of Providence, was destined to be his. It was in vain that M'Murdie reasoned of impressions on the imagination, and

> "Of fancy moulding in the mind,
> Light visions on the passing wind."

Vain also was a story that he told him of a relation of his own, who was greatly harassed by the apparition of an officer in a red uniform that haunted him day and night, and had very nigh put him quite distracted several times, till at length his physician found out the nature of this illusion so well that he knew, from the state of his pulse, to an hour when the ghost of the officer would

appear, and by bleeding, low diet, and emollients contrived to keep the apparition away altogether.

The Laird admitted the singularity of this incident, but not that it was one in point; for the one, he said, was imaginary, the other real, and that no conclusions could convince him in opposition to the authority of his own senses. He accepted of an invitation to spend a few days with M'Murdie and his family, but they all acknowledged afterward that the Laird was very much like one bewitched.

As soon as he reached home he went straight to the Birky Brow, certain of seeing once more the angelic phantom, but she was not there. He took each of his former positions again and again, but the desired vision would in no wise make its appearance. He tried every day and every hour of the day, all with the same effect, till he grew absolutely desperate, and had the audacity to kneel on the spot and entreat of Heaven to see her. Yes, he called on Heaven to see her once more, whatever she was, whether a being of earth, heaven, or hell.

He was now in such a state of excitement that he could not exist; he grew listless, impatient, and sickly, took to his bed, and sent for M'Murdie and the doctor; and the issue of the consultation was that Birkendelly consented to leave the country for a season, on a visit to his only sister in Ireland, whither we must accompany him for a short space.

His sister was married to Captain Bryan, younger, of Scoresby, and they two lived in a cottage on the estate, and the

Captain's parents and sisters at Scoresby Hall. Great was the stir and preparation when the gallant young Laird of Birkendelly arrived at the cottage, it never being doubted that he came to forward a second bond of connection with the family, which still contained seven dashing sisters, all unmarried, and all alike willing to change that solitary and helpless state for the envied one of matrimony – a state highly popular among the young women of Ireland. Some of the Misses Bryan had now reached the years of womanhood, several of them scarcely, but these small disqualifications made no difference in the estimation of the young ladies themselves; each and all of them brushed up for the competition with high hopes and unflinching resolutions. True, the elder ones tried to check the younger in their good-natured, forthright Irish way; but they retorted, and persisted in their superior pretensions. Then there was such shopping in the county town! It was so boundless that the credit of the Hall was finally exhausted, and the old Squire was driven to remark that "Och, and to be sure it was a dreadful and tirrabell concussion, to be put upon the equipment of seven daughters all at the same moment, as if the young gentleman could marry them all! Och, then, poor dear shoul, he would be after finding that one was sufficient, if not one too many. And therefore there was no occasion, none at all, at all, and that there was not, for any of them to rig out more than one."

It was hinted that the Laird had some reason for complaint at this time, but as the lady sided with her daughters, he had

no chance. One of the items of his account was thirty-seven buckling-combs, then greatly in vogue. There were black combs, pale combs, yellow combs, and gilt ones, all to suit or set off various complexions; and if other articles bore any proportion at all to these, it had been better for the Laird and all his family that Birkendelly had never set foot in Ireland.

The plan was all concocted. There was to be a grand dinner at the Hall, at which the damsels were to appear in all their finery. A ball to follow, and note be taken which of the young ladies was their guest's choice, and measures taken accordingly. The dinner and the ball took place; and what a pity I may not describe that entertainment, the dresses, and the dancers, for they were all exquisite in their way, and *outré* beyond measure. But such details only serve to derange a winter evening's tale such as this.

Birkendelly having at this time but one model for his choice among womankind, all that ever he did while in the presence of ladies was to look out for some resemblance to her, the angel of his fancy; and it so happened that in one of old Bryan's daughters named Luna, or, more familiarly, Loony, he perceived, or thought he perceived, some imaginary similarity in form and air to the lovely apparition. This was the sole reason why he was incapable of taking his eyes off from her the whole of that night; and this incident settled the point, not only with the old people, but even the young ladies were forced, after every exertion on their own parts, to "yild the p'int to their sister Loony, who certainly was not the mist genteelest nor mist handsomest of that

guid-lucking fimily."

The next day Lady Luna was dispatched off to the cottage in grand style, there to live hand in glove with her supposed lover. There was no standing all this. There were the two parrocked together, like a ewe and a lamb, early and late; and though the Laird really appeared to have, and probably had, some delight in her company, it was only in contemplating that certain indefinable air of resemblance which she bore to the sole image impressed on his heart. He bought her a white gauze frock, a green bonnet and feather, with a veil, which she was obliged to wear thrown over her left shoulder, and every day after, six times a day, was she obliged to walk over a certain eminence at a certain distance before her lover. She was delighted to oblige him; but still, when he came up, he looked disappointed, and never said, "Luna, I love you; when are we to be married?" No, he never said any such thing, for all her looks and expressions of fondest love; for, alas! in all this dalliance he was only feeding a mysterious flame that preyed upon his vitals, and proved too severe for the powers either of reason or religion to extinguish. Still, time flew lighter and lighter by, his health was restored, the bloom of his cheek returned, and the frank and simple confidence of Luna had a certain charm with it that reconciled him to his sister's Irish economy. But a strange incident now happened to him which deranged all his immediate plans.

He was returning from angling one evening, a little before sunset, when he saw Lady Luna awaiting him on his way home.

But instead of brushing up to meet him as usual, she turned, and walked up the rising ground before him. "Poor sweet girl! how condescending she is," said he to himself, "and how like she is in reality to the angelic being whose form and features are so deeply impressed on my heart! I now see it is no fond or fancied resemblance. It is real! real! real! How I long to clasp her in my arms, and tell her how I love her; for, after all, that is the girl that is to be mine, and the former a vision to impress this the more on my heart."

He posted up the ascent to overtake her. When at the top she turned, smiled, and curtsied. Good heavens! it was the identical lady of his fondest adoration herself, but lovelier, far lovelier, than ever. He expected every moment that she would vanish, as was her wont; but she did not – she awaited him, and received his embraces with open arms. She was a being of real flesh and blood, courteous, elegant, and affectionate. He kissed her hand, he kissed her glowing cheek, and blessed all the powers of love who had thus restored her to him again, after undergoing pangs of love such as man never suffered.

"But, dearest heart, here we are standing in the middle of the highway," said he; "suffer me to conduct you to my sister's house, where you shall have an apartment with a child of nature having some slight resemblance to yourself." She smiled, and said, "No, I will not sleep with Lady Luna to-night. Will you please to look round you, and see where you are." He did so, and behold they were standing on the Birky Brow, on the only spot where he had

ever seen her. She smiled at his embarrassed look, and asked if he did not remember aught of his coming over from Ireland. He said he thought he did remember something of it, but love with him had long absorbed every other sense. He then asked her to his own house, which she declined, saying she could only meet him on that spot till after their marriage, which could not be before St. Lawrence's Eve come three years. "And now," said she, "we must part. My name is Jane Ogilvie, and you were betrothed to me before you were born. But I am come to release you this evening, if you have the slightest objection."

He declared he had none; and kneeling, swore the most solemn oath to be hers forever, and to meet her there on St. Lawrence's Eve next, and every St. Lawrence's Eve until that blessed day on which she had consented to make him happy by becoming his own forever. She then asked him affectionately to change rings with her, in pledge of their faith and troth, in which he joyfully acquiesced; for she could not have then asked any conditions which, in the fulness of his heart's love, he would not have granted; and after one fond and affectionate kiss, and repeating all their engagements over again, they parted.

Birkendelly's heart was now melted within him, and all his senses overpowered by one overwhelming passion. On leaving his fair and kind one, he got bewildered, and could not find the road to his own house, believing sometimes that he was going there, and sometimes to his sister's, till at length he came, as he thought, upon the Liffey, at its junction with Loch Allan; and

there, in attempting to call for a boat, he awoke from a profound sleep, and found himself lying in his bed within his sister's house, and the day sky just breaking.

If he was puzzled to account for some things in the course of his dream, he was much more puzzled to account for them now that he was wide awake. He was sensible that he had met his love, had embraced, kissed, and exchanged vows and rings with her, and, in token of the truth and reality of all these, her emerald ring was on his finger, and his own away; so there was no doubt that they had met – by what means it was beyond the power of man to calculate.

There was then living with Mrs. Bryan an old Scotswoman, commonly styled Lucky Black. She had nursed Birkendelly's mother, and been dry-nurse to himself and sister; and having more than a mother's attachment for the latter, when she was married, old Lucky left her country to spend the last of her days in the house of her beloved young lady. When the Laird entered the breakfast-parlor that morning she was sitting in her black velvet hood, as usual, reading *The Fourfold State of Man*, and, being paralytic and somewhat deaf, she seldom regarded those who went or came. But chancing to hear him say something about the 9th of August, she quitted reading, turned round her head to listen, and then asked, in a hoarse, tremulous voice: "What's that he's saying? What's the unlucky callant saying about the 9th of August? Aih? To be sure it is St. Lawrence's Eve, although the 10th be his day. It's ower true, ower true, ower true for him an'

a' his kin, poor man! Aih? What was he saying then?"

The men smiled at her incoherent earnestness, but the lady, with true feminine condescension, informed her, in a loud voice, that Allan had an engagement in Scotland on St. Lawrence's Eve. She then started up, extended her shrivelled hands, that shook like the aspen, and panted out: "Aih, aih? Lord preserve us! Whaten an engagement has he on St. Lawrence's Eve? Bind him! bind him! Shackle him wi' bands of steel, and of brass, and of iron! O may He whose blessed will was pleased to leave him an orphan sae soon, preserve him from the fate which I tremble to think on!"

She then tottered round the table, as with supernatural energy, and seizing the Laird's right hand, she drew it close to her unstable eyes, and then perceiving the emerald ring chased in blood, she threw up her arms with a jerk, opened her skinny jaws with a fearful gape, and uttering a shriek that made all the house yell, and every one within it to tremble, she fell back lifeless and rigid on the floor. The gentlemen both fled, out of sheer terror; but a woman never deserts her friends in extremity. The lady called her maids about her, had her old nurse conveyed to bed, where every means were used to restore animation. But, alas, life was extinct! The vital spark had fled forever, which filled all their hearts with grief, disappointment, and horror, as some dreadful tale of mystery was now sealed up from their knowledge which, in all likelihood, no other could reveal. But to say the truth, the Laird did not seem greatly disposed to probe it to the bottom.

Not all the arguments of Captain Bryan and his lady, nor the simple entreaties of Lady Luna, could induce Birkendelly to put off his engagement to meet his love on the Birky Brow on the evening of the 9th of August; but he promised soon to return, pretending that some business of the utmost importance called him away. Before he went, however, he asked his sister if ever she had heard of such a lady in Scotland as Jane Ogilvie. Mrs. Bryan repeated the name many times to herself, and said that name undoubtedly was once familiar to her, although she thought not for good, but at that moment she did not recollect one single individual of the name. He then showed her the emerald ring that had been the death of Lucky Black; but the moment the lady looked at it, she made a grasp at it to take it off by force, which she had very nearly effected. "Oh, burn it! burn it!" cried she; "it is not a right ring! Burn it!"

"My dear sister, what fault is in the ring?" said he. "It is a very pretty ring, and one that I set great value by."

"Oh, for Heaven's sake, burn it, and renounce the giver!" cried she. "If you have any regard for your peace here or your soul's welfare hereafter, burn that ring! If you saw with your own eyes, you would easily perceive that that is not a ring befitting a Christian to wear."

This speech confounded Birkendelly a good deal. He retired by himself and examined the ring, and could see nothing in it unbecoming a Christian to wear. It was a chased gold ring, with a bright emerald, which last had a red foil, in some lights

giving it a purple gleam, and inside was engraven "*Elegit*," much defaced, but that his sister could not see; therefore he could not comprehend her vehement injunctions concerning it. But that it might no more give her offence, or any other, he sewed it within his vest, opposite his heart, judging that there was something in it which his eyes were withholden from discerning.

Thus he left Ireland with his mind in great confusion, groping his way, as it were, in a hole of mystery, yet with the passion that preyed on his heart and vitals more intense than ever. He seems to have had an impression all his life that some mysterious fate awaited him, which the correspondence of his dreams and day visions tended to confirm. And though he gave himself wholly up to the sway of one overpowering passion, it was not without some yearnings of soul, manifestations of terror, and so much earthly shame, that he never more mentioned his love, or his engagements, to any human being, not even to his friend M'Murdie, whose company he forthwith shunned.

It is on this account that I am unable to relate what passed between the lovers thenceforward. It is certain they met at the Birky Brow that St. Lawrence's Eve, for they were seen in company together; but of the engagements, vows, or dalliance that passed between them I can say nothing; nor of all their future meetings, until the beginning of August, 1781, when the Laird began decidedly to make preparations for his approaching marriage; yet not as if he and his betrothed had been to reside at Birkendelly, all his provisions rather bespeaking a meditated

journey.

On the morning of the 9th he wrote to his sister, and then arraying himself in his new wedding suit, and putting the emerald ring on his finger, he appeared all impatience, until toward evening, when he sallied out on horseback to his appointment. It seems that his mysterious inamorata had met him, for he was seen riding through the big town before sunset, with a young lady behind him, dressed in white and green, and the villagers affirmed that they were riding at the rate of fifty miles an hour! They were seen to pass a cottage called Mosskilt, ten miles farther on, where there was no highway, at the same tremendous speed; and I could never hear that they were any more seen, until the following morning, when Birkendelly's fine bay horse was found lying dead at his own stable door; and shortly after his master was likewise discovered lying, a blackened corpse, on the Birky Brow at the very spot where the mysterious but lovely dame had always appeared to him. There was neither wound, bruise, nor dislocation in his whole frame; but his skin was of a livid color, and his features terribly distorted.

This woful catastrophe struck the neighborhood with great consternation, so that nothing else was talked of. Every ancient tradition and modern incident were raked together, compared, and combined; and certainly a most rare concatenation of misfortunes was elicited. It was authenticated that his father had died on the same spot that day twenty years, and his grandfather that day forty years, the former, as was supposed, by a fall from

his horse when in liquor, and the latter, nobody knew how; and now this Allan was the last of his race, for Mrs. Bryan had no children.

It was, moreover, now remembered by many, and among the rest by the Rev. Joseph Taylor, that he had frequently observed a young lady, in white and green, sauntering about the spot on a St. Lawrence's Eve.

When Captain Bryan and his lady arrived to take possession of the premises, they instituted a strict inquiry into every circumstance; but nothing further than what was related to them by Mr. M'Murdie could be learned of this Mysterious Bride, besides what the Laird's own letter bore. It ran thus:

"DEAREST SISTER, – I shall before this time to-morrow be the most happy, or most miserable, of mankind, having solemnly engaged myself this night to wed a young and beautiful lady, named Jane Ogilvie, to whom it seems I was betrothed before I was born. Our correspondence has been of a most private and mysterious nature; but my troth is pledged, and my resolution fixed. We set out on a far journey to the place of her abode on the nuptial eve, so that it will be long before I see you again. Yours till death,

"ALLAN GEORGE SANDISON

"BIRKENDELLY, *August 8*, 1781."

That very same year, an old woman, named Marion Haw, was

returned upon that, her native parish, from Glasgow. She had led a migratory life with her son – who was what he called a bell-hanger, but in fact a tinker of the worst grade – for many years, and was at last returned to the muckle town in a state of great destitution. She gave the parishioners a history of the Mysterious Bride, so plausibly correct, but withal so romantic, that everybody said of it (as is often said of my narratives, with the same narrow-minded prejudice and injustice) that it was a *made story*. There were, however, some strong testimonies of its veracity.

She said the first Allan Sandison, who married the great heiress of Birkendelly, was previously engaged to a beautiful young lady named Jane Ogilvie, to whom he gave anything but fair play; and, as she believed, either murdered her, or caused her to be murdered, in the midst of a thicket of birch and broom, at a spot which she mentioned; and she had good reason for believing so, as she had seen the red blood and the new grave, when she was a little girl, and ran home and mentioned it to her grandfather, who charged her as she valued her life never to mention that again, as it was only the nombles and hide of a deer which he himself had buried there. But when, twenty years subsequent to that, the wicked and unhappy Allan Sandison was found dead on that very spot, and lying across the green mound, then nearly level with the surface, which she had once seen a new grave, she then for the first time ever thought of a Divine Providence; and she added, "For my grandfather, Neddy Haw, he dee'd too; there's

naebody kens how, nor ever shall."

As they were quite incapable of conceiving from Marion's description anything of the spot, Mr. M'Murdie caused her to be taken out to the Birky Brow in a cart, accompanied by Mr. Taylor and some hundreds of the town's folks; but whenever she saw it, she said, "Aha, birkies! the haill kintra's altered now. There was nae road here then; it gaed straight ower the tap o' the hill. An' let me see – there's the thorn where the cushats biggit; an' there's the auld birk that I ance fell aff an' left my shoe sticking i' the cleft. I can tell ye, birkies, either the deer's grave or bonny Jane Ogilvie's is no twa yards aff the place where that horse's hind-feet are standin'; sae ye may howk, an' see if there be ony remains."

The minister and M'Murdie and all the people stared at one another, for they had purposely caused the horse to stand still on the very spot where both the father and son had been found dead. They digged, and deep, deep below the road they found part of the slender bones and skull of a young female, which they deposited decently in the church-yard. The family of the Sandisons is extinct, the Mysterious Bride appears no more on the Eve of St. Lawrence, and the wicked people of the great muckle village have got a lesson on divine justice written to them in lines of blood.

THE DEVIL AND TOM WALKER[18]

Washington Irving (1783-1859)

A few miles from Boston, in Massachusetts, there is a deep inlet winding several miles into the interior of the country from Charles Bay, and terminating in a thickly wooded swamp or morass. On one side of this inlet is a beautiful dark grove; on the opposite side the land rises abruptly from the water's edge into a high ridge, on which grow a few scattered oaks of great age and immense size. Under one of these gigantic trees, according to old stories, there was a great amount of treasure buried by Kidd the pirate. The inlet allowed a facility to bring the money in a boat secretly, and at night, to the very foot of the hill; the elevation of the place permitted a good lookout to be kept that no one was at hand; while the remarkable trees formed good landmarks by which the place might easily be found again. The old stories add, moreover, that the devil presided at the hiding of the money, and took it under his guardianship; but this, it is well known, he always does with buried treasure, particularly when it has been ill-gotten. Be that as it may, Kidd never returned to recover his wealth; being shortly after seized at Boston, sent out to England, and there hanged for a pirate.

About the year 1727, just at the time that earthquakes were

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[18] From *The Money-diggers*.

prevalent in New England, and shook many tall sinners down upon their knees, there lived near this place a meagre, miserly fellow, of the name of Tom Walker. He had a wife as miserly as himself; they were so miserly that they even conspired to cheat each other. Whatever the woman could lay hands on she hid away; a hen could not cackle but she was on the alert to secure the new-laid egg. Her husband was continually prying about to detect her secret hoards, and many and fierce were the conflicts that took place about what ought to have been common property. They lived in a forlorn-looking house that stood alone and had an air of starvation. A few straggling savin-trees, emblems of sterility, grew near it; no smoke ever curled from its chimney; no traveller stopped at its door. A miserable horse, whose ribs were as articulate as the bars of a gridiron, stalked about a field, where a thin carpet of moss, scarcely covering the ragged beds of pudding-stone, tantalized and balked his hunger; and sometimes he would lean his head over the fence, look piteously at the passer-by, and seem to petition deliverance from this land of famine.

The house and its inmates had altogether a bad name. Tom's wife was a tall termagant, fierce of temper, loud of tongue, and strong of arm. Her voice was often heard in wordy warfare with her husband; and his face sometimes showed signs that their conflicts were not confined to words. No one ventured, however, to interfere between them. The lonely wayfarer shrank within himself at the horrid clamor and clapper-clawing; eyed the den of

discord askance; and hurried on his way, rejoicing, if a bachelor, in his celibacy.

One day that Tom Walker had been to a distant part of the neighborhood, he took what he considered a short-cut homeward, through the swamp. Like most short-cuts, it was an ill-chosen route. The swamp was thickly grown with great, gloomy pines and hemlocks, some of them ninety feet high, which made it dark at noonday and a retreat for all the owls of the neighborhood. It was full of pits and quagmires, partly covered with weeds and mosses, where the green surface often betrayed the traveller into a gulf of black, smothering mud; there were also dark and stagnant pools, the abodes of the tadpole, the bull-frog, and the water-snake, where the trunks of pines and hemlocks lay half-drowned, half-rotting, looking like alligators sleeping in the mire.

Tom had long been picking his way cautiously through this treacherous forest, stepping from tuft to tuft of rushes and roots, which afforded precarious footholds among deep sloughs, or pacing carefully, like a cat, along the prostrate trunks of trees, startled now and then by the sudden screaming of the bittern, or the quacking of a wild duck, rising on the wing from some solitary pool. At length he arrived at a firm piece of ground, which ran like a peninsula into the deep bosom of the swamp. It had been one of the strongholds of the Indians during their wars with the first colonists. Here they had thrown up a kind of fort, which they had looked upon as almost impregnable, and had used as a place of refuge for their squaws

and children. Nothing remained of the old Indian fort but a few embankments, gradually sinking to the level of the surrounding earth, and already overgrown in part by oaks and other forest trees, the foliage of which formed a contrast to the dark pines and hemlocks of the swamps.

It was late in the dusk of evening when Tom Walker reached the old fort, and he paused there awhile to rest himself. Any one but he would have felt unwilling to linger in this lonely, melancholy place, for the common people had a bad opinion of it, from the stories handed down from the times of the Indian wars, when it was asserted that the savages held incantations here and made sacrifices to the Evil Spirit.

Tom Walker, however, was not a man to be troubled with any fears of the kind. He reposed himself for some time on the trunk of a fallen hemlock, listening to the boding cry of the tree-toad, and delving with his walking-staff into a mound of black mould at his feet. As he turned up the soil unconsciously, his staff struck against something hard. He raked it out of the vegetable mould, and lo! a cloven skull, with an Indian tomahawk buried deep in it, lay before him. The rust on the weapon showed the time that had elapsed since this death-blow had been given. It was a dreary memento of the fierce struggle that had taken place in this last foothold of the Indian warriors.

"Humph!" said Tom Walker, as he gave it a kick to shake the dirt from it.

"Let that skull alone!" said a gruff voice. Tom lifted up his

eyes and beheld a great black man seated directly opposite him, on the stump of a tree. He was exceedingly surprised, having neither heard nor seen any one approach; and he was still more perplexed on observing, as well as the gathering gloom would permit, that the stranger was neither negro nor Indian. It is true he was dressed in a rude Indian garb, and had a red belt or sash swathed round his body; but his face was neither black nor copper-color, but swarthy and dingy, and begrimed with soot, as if he had been accustomed to toil among fires and forges. He had a shock of coarse black hair, that stood out from his head in all directions, and bore an axe on his shoulder.

He scowled for a moment at Tom with a pair of great red eyes.

"What are you doing on my grounds?" said the black man, with a hoarse, growling voice.

"Your grounds!" said Tom, with a sneer; "no more your grounds than mine; they belong to Deacon Peabody."

"Deacon Peabody be damned," said the stranger, "as I flatter myself he will be, if he does not look more to his own sins and less to those of his neighbors. Look yonder, and see how Deacon Peabody is faring."

Tom looked in the direction that the stranger pointed, and beheld one of the great trees, fair and flourishing without, but rotten at the core, and saw that it had been nearly hewn through, so that the first high wind was likely to blow it down. On the bark of the tree was scored the name of Deacon Peabody, an eminent man who had waxed wealthy by driving shrewd bargains with the

Indians. He now looked around, and found most of the tall trees marked with the name of some great man of the colony, and all more or less scored by the axe. The one on which he had been seated, and which had evidently just been hewn down, bore the name of Crowninshield; and he recollected a mighty rich man of that name, who made a vulgar display of wealth, which it was whispered he had acquired by buccaneering.

"He's just ready for burning!" said the black man, with a growl of triumph. "You see I am likely to have a good stock of firewood for winter."

"But what right have you," said Tom, "to cut down Deacon Peabody's timber?"

"The right of a prior claim," said the other. "This woodland belonged to me long before one of your white-faced race put foot upon the soil."

"And, pray, who are you, if I may be so bold?" said Tom.

"Oh, I go by various names. I am the wild huntsman in some countries; the black miner in others. In this neighborhood I am known by the name of the black woodsman. I am he to whom the red men consecrated this spot, and in honor of whom they now and then roasted a white man, by way of sweet-smelling sacrifice. Since the red men have been exterminated by you white savages, I amuse myself by presiding at the persecutions of Quakers and Anabaptists; I am the great patron and prompter of slave-dealers and the grand-master of the Salem witches."

"The upshot of all which is, that, if I mistake not," said Tom,

sturdily, "you are he commonly called Old Scratch."

"The same, at your service!" replied the black man, with a half-civil nod.

Such was the opening of this interview, according to the old story; though it has almost too familiar an air to be credited. One would think that to meet with such a singular personage in this wild, lonely place would have shaken any man's nerves; but Tom was a hard-minded fellow, not easily daunted, and he had lived so long with a termagant wife that he did not even fear the devil.

It is said that after this commencement they had a long and earnest conversation together, as Tom returned homeward. The black man told him of great sums of money buried by Kidd the pirate under the oak-trees on the high ridge, not far from the morass. All these were under his command, and protected by his power, so that none could find them but such as propitiated his favor. These he offered to place within Tom Walker's reach, having conceived an especial kindness for him; but they were to be had only on certain conditions. What these conditions were may be easily surmised, though Tom never disclosed them publicly. They must have been very hard, for he required time to think of them, and he was not a man to stick at trifles when money was in view. When they had reached the edge of the swamp, the stranger paused. "What proof have I that all you have been telling me is true?" said Tom. "There's my signature," said the black man, pressing his finger on Tom's forehead. So saying, he turned off among the thickets of the swamp, and seemed, as

Tom said, to go down, down, down, into the earth, until nothing but his head and shoulders could be seen, and so on, until he totally disappeared.

When Tom reached home he found the black print of a finger burned, as it were, into his forehead, which nothing could obliterate.

The first news his wife had to tell him was the sudden death of Absalom Crowninshield, the rich buccaneer. It was announced in the papers, with the usual flourish, that "A great man had fallen in Israel."

Tom recollected the tree which his black friend had just hewn down, and which was ready for burning. "Let the freebooter roast," said Tom; "who cares!" He now felt convinced that all he had heard and seen was no illusion.

He was not prone to let his wife into his confidence; but as this was an uneasy secret, he willingly shared it with her. All her avarice was awakened at the mention of hidden gold, and she urged her husband to comply with the black man's terms, and secure what would make them wealthy for life. However Tom might have felt disposed to sell himself to the devil, he was determined not to do so to oblige his wife; so he flatly refused, out of the mere spirit of contradiction. Many and bitter were the quarrels they had on the subject; but the more she talked, the more resolute was Tom not to be damned to please her.

At length she determined to drive the bargain on her own account, and, if she succeeded, to keep all the gain to herself.

Being of the same fearless temper as her husband, she set off for the old Indian fort toward the close of a summer's day. She was many hours absent. When she came back, she was reserved and sullen in her replies. She spoke something of a black man, whom she had met about twilight hewing at the root of a tall tree. He was sulky, however, and would not come to terms; she was to go again with a propitiatory offering, but what it was she forbore to say.

The next evening she set off again for the swamp, with her apron heavily laden. Tom waited and waited for her, but in vain; midnight came, but she did not make her appearance; morning, noon, night returned, but still she did not come. Tom now grew uneasy for her safety, especially as he found she had carried off in her apron the silver tea-pot and spoons, and every portable article of value. Another night elapsed, another morning came; but no wife. In a word, she was never heard of more.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.