

III. NARRATION.

PRECEPTS.

1. DEFINITION AND ESSENTIAL POINTS.

Narration.—Narration is the recounting of the particulars of an event. In a narration we may consider:—

1. The **purpose**, the aim which the writer has in view in telling the story.

2. The **particulars**, the selected details of the event.

The selection is determined by the importance of the particulars and by the purpose of the author. Unity requires that particulars not necessary to the understanding of the story or not contributing to its effect, be excluded, and that all digressions from the story be avoided.

3. The **order**, the arrangement of the particulars.

The order of time is usually followed. Sometimes the effects of an action, though coming to pass long after their cause has ceased to exist, are related in immediate succession to that cause. Thus, in *Rip Van Winkle*, Rip's sleep of twenty years and its effects are related in immediate succession. Sometimes the story opens at a point after the beginning of an action, and the preceding details are afterwards recounted, as in *The Widow and her Son*, and *The Pride of the Village*.

4. The **movement**, the relative amount of space or degree of prominence given to each particular.

Movement is merely the law of proportion applied to narration. If the particulars are introductory, subordinate, or unimportant, they are briefly and summarily stated. The movement is then said to be rapid. If the particulars are important for the writer's purpose or belong to the chief part of the story, they are dwelt upon and developed according to some of the various modes already mentioned. The movement is then said to be slow.

Paragraphing of Narrations. — Narrations take ordinarily more than one paragraph for their telling, and then the particulars that go to make up subordinate events are grouped together. In thus dividing up the story, the eye must sometimes be consulted so as not to have an unvaried succession of short or long paragraphs. Hence several closely united subordinate events may be gathered into one longer paragraph.

2. ANALYSIS OF A NARRATION.

Notwithstanding the obloquy with which the early historians have overshadowed the characters of the unfortunate natives, some bright gleams occasionally break through which throw a degree of melancholy lustre on their memories. Facts are occasionally to be met with in the rude annals of the eastern provinces which, though recorded with the coloring of prejudice and bigotry, yet speak for themselves, and will be dwelt on with applause and sympathy when prejudice shall have passed away.

In one of the homely narratives of the Indian wars in New England there is a touching account of the desolation carried into the tribe of the Pequod Indians. Humanity shrinks from the cold-blooded detail of indiscriminate butchery. In one

place we read of the surprisal of an Indian fort in the night, when the wigwams were wrapped in flames and the miserable inhabitants shot down and slain in attempting to escape, "all being despatched and ended in the course of an hour." After a series of similar transactions "our soldiers," as the historian piously observes, "being resolved by God's assistance to make a final destruction of them," the unhappy savages being hunted from homes and fortresses, and pursued with fire and sword, a scanty, but gallant band, the sad remnant of the Pequod warriors, with their wives and children, took refuge in a swamp.

Burning with indignation, and rendered sullen by despair; with hearts bursting with grief at the destruction of their tribe, and spirits galled and sore at the fancied ignominy of their defeat, they refused to ask their lives at the hands of an insulting foe, and preferred death to submission.

As the night drew on, they were surrounded in their dismal retreat, so as to render escape impracticable. Thus situated, their enemy "plied them with shot all the time, by which means many were killed and buried in the mire." In the darkness and fog that preceded the dawn of day some few broke through the besiegers and escaped into the woods: "the rest were left to the conquerors, of which many were killed in the swamp, like sullen dogs who would rather, in their self-willedness and madness, sit still and be shot through, or cut to pieces," than implore for mercy. When the day broke upon this handful of forlorn but dauntless spirits, the soldiers, we are told, entering the swamp, "saw several heaps of them sitting close together, upon whom they discharged their pieces, laden with ten or twelve pistol bullets at a time, putting the muzzles of the pieces under the boughs, within a few yards of them; so as, besides those that were found dead, many more were killed and sunk into the mire, and never were minded more by friend or foe."

Can any one read this plain unvarnished tale, without admiring the stern resolution, the unbending pride, the loftiness of spirit, that seemed to nerve the hearts of these self-taught

heroes, and to raise them above the instinctive feelings of human nature? When the Gauls laid waste the city of Rome, they found the senators clothed in their robes, and seated with stern tranquillity in their curule chairs; in this manner they suffered death without resistance or even supplication. Such conduct was in them applauded as noble and magnanimous; in the hapless Indian it was reviled as obstinate and sullen. How truly are we the dupes of show and circumstance! How different is virtue clothed in purple and enthroned in state from virtue naked and destitute and perishing obscurely in a wilderness! — *Traits of Indian Character.*

Subject: The Destruction of the Pequod Indians.

Purpose: To excite pity for the fate of the Indians and admiration for their resolution.

This purpose is declared in the introductory paragraph and more clearly in the concluding paragraph.

Particulars: The burning of the Indian fort; the retreat to the swamp; the determination to die; the massacre, at night, before dawn, and at daybreak.

As this story is condensed from a longer narration, the selection of the particular events under the control of the author's purpose is quite manifest. Notice especially the details enclosed within quotation marks.

Order: The order of time is followed.

Movement: The movement is rather slow in the recital of the first particular where many circumstances are given, but becomes rapid until the author comes to the massacre. At this event, which is the most important of all, the movement becomes very slow, and many minute circumstances of time, place, and action are detailed.