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THE
RISE
OF THE
MODERN

SHORT STORY

BY

ROBERT EMMET MAC ALARNEY
DICKINSON '93

JUNE VIII, MDCCCXCIII.

The past half century has seen a decided change in the character of American fiction. The novel read by our fathers of fifty years ago was as a rule so detailed and formidable in size as to make the perusal of even one of them a serious undertaking.

Indeed this familiarity was carried so far as to exist, that the "three volume" novel of that

time has passed into the
realm of comic papers as a
current joke. And yet even
as was the condition of
the novel of that day,
that of the short story
was even worse.

Of magazines making
a specialty of that branch
of literature, there was
practically none.

In the opinion of
the great mass of the
reading public, nothing
short and snuffed up
tedious procreation of detail
was really worth reading.

To-day the condition
of affairs is com-
pletely revolutionized.

The change however,
has not been sudden
nor pronounced, but
has come through
the gradual culti-
vation of the taste
of the reading public,
by means of our mag-
azines and periodicals.
The rise of the short
story has been corral
with that of the mag-
azine. By no other
people has the sphere

of periodical literature
has enlarged to such
an extent as by our own
aid for this the short
story has in a great
measure, been responsible.
In such popular pub-
lications as *Harper's*,
Scrivener's, and *The Cur-
lery*, short stories and
sketches form the
chief contents, and
the managing editor
who can secure the best
short stories for his
monthly issue, makes
content in the knowledge

that his general will
have the largest sales.
The main argument in
favor of this comparative
widespread and rapid
growing style of writing
is, that the people
of this nineteenth cen-
tury are much too busy
with the multiplied cares
of existence to devote
hours to the careful read-
ing of lengthy works
of fiction. The brief
of the short story can
contain all the best
elements of his more

Under other the same
works of mental culture
will be done by it at
the expenditure of much
less time, and gaining
a large number of able
dilettante readers impossible
under other conditions

Not that the long story
by any means is dead, for
it can be or entirely
be dispensed with, but
by means of the shorter
article even the hard
driven working people of
the country may find
time to pick up one of

the magazines and be
impressed by finding there
something short and
entertaining that they
will read thoroughly
and be impressed.

Among the short
story writers of the
first decade there are
many names well worthy
of mention together with
Lover, Deane, and Dickens,
whose character sketching
and attractiveness of
style are no better dis-
played than hundreds of
pages contained in a

single work.

Of these works of
short stories America
has the best and most
numerous.

What C. Conrad Doyle
is to the English, and
Guy de Maupassant to
the French, Richard
Harding Davis, Thomas
Nelson Page, Braden
Matthews, F. Hopkinson
Smith, and Mary E.
Wilkins, are to us.

There are numerous
others well worth men-
tioning among whom are

Rudyard Kipling and
Henry James, whose long
articles have delighted
the readers of more
than one continent.

Of our own writers
Richard Harding Davis
is by far the best.

With a wide and
varied experience gathered
during several years
work, as a reporter in
New York, he has at
the end of his pen
a firmness of character
drawing and a light
delicacy that possess

a familiar charm.

The favorite character
of Van Buren a young
social man, introducing
the various phases of
New York life and dis-
playing a keen insight
into human nature is
one of his best productions.

His various books
have had a marvellous
sale, not only in our
own country but in all.

They last month
a new French edition
of his "Unfinished Story"
was issued.

Whether the move-
ment toward the above
stage in fiction will
prove to be a beneficial
one in the long run
remains to be seen.

That there are
dangers in the way;
that the tendency may
be pushed to extremes
as has already occurred
in some cases, is no
doubt true.

So far, however,
the change as a whole
has unquestionably been
for the good.

1893 Senior Oration of Robert Emmet MacAlarney, Class of 1893

Transcribed by Krista Gray, September 2008

Edited by Meg MacAvoy, September 2008

The Rise of the Modern Short Story

The past half century has seen a decided change in the character of American fiction. The novels read by our fathers of fifty years ago were as a rule so detailed and formidable in size as to make the perusal of even one of them a serious undertaking.

Indeed this [two words illegible] was carried to such an extent, that the "three volume" work of itself.

[One word illegible] was passed into the realm of our comic papers as a current joke. And yes crude as was the condition of the novel of that day, that of the short story was even worse.

Of magazine's making a speciality of that branch of literature, there was gradually none.

In the opinion of the great mass of the reading public, nothing short and stuffed of tedious procession of detail, was really worth reading.

To-day this condition of affairs is completely revolutionized. This change however, has not been sudden nor pronounced, but has come through the gradual cultivation of that taste of the reading public, by means of our magazines and periodicals. The rise of the short story has been coeval with that of the magazine. By no other people has the sphere

of periodical literature been enlarged to such an extent as by our own, and for this the short story has in a great measure, been responsible. In such popular publications as [Hanger?], [Scribner?], and the [Century?], short stories and sketches form the chief contents, and the managing editor who can secure the best short stories for his monthly issue, rests content in the knowledge

that his journal will have the largest sales. The main argument in favor of this comparatively understood and rapidly growing style of writing, is, that the people of this nineteenth century are much too busy with the meaningful care of existence to devote hours to the careful reading of lengthy works of fiction. This being so, if the short story can contain all the best elements of his more

lengthy brother the same work of mental culture will be done by it at the expenditure of much less time, and gaining a large number of all [one word illegible] readers impossible under other conditions. Not that the long story by any means is dead, for it can never entirely be dispensed with, but by means of the shorter article even the hard [drawn?] working people of the country may find time as finds of one of

the magazine's and be benefited by finding there something short and entertaining that they will read thoroughly and be benefited.

Among the short story writers of this past decade there are many names well worthy of mention together with [one word illegible], Scott, and Dickens, whose character sketching and attractiveness of style are no better than the hundreds of pages consumed in a

single work.

Of those writers of short stories America has the best and most numerous.

What [A. Comand Doyle?] is to the English, and [Guy De Margassant?] to the French, [Roland?] Harding Davis, Thomas Nelson Page, Branden Matthews, F. Hopkinson Smith, and Mary E. Wilkins, are to us.

There are numerous others well worth mentioning among whom are

Rudyard Kipling and Henry James whose lengthy sketches have delighted the readers of more than one continent.

Of our own writers Richard Harding Davis is by far the best.

With a wide and varied experience gathered during several years work, as a reformer in New York, he has as the end of his few a faculty for character drawing and life like deliberations that possess,

a particular charm.

His favorite character of Van Bibean a young society men, introducing the various phases of New York life and displaying a keen interest in the human nature is one of his best productions.

His various books have had a marvellous sale, not only in our our country but in others.

Only last month a new French editorial of his "[one word illegible] Story" was issued.

Whether this movement toward the short story in fiction will prove to be a beneficial one in the long run remains to be seen.

That there are dangers in the way; that the [one word illegible] way be pushed to extremes as has already seemed in some cases, is no doubt true.

So far, however, the change as a whole has unquestionably been for the good.