

CHAPTER 1

Introduction.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF BRET HARTE

Francis Bret Harte whose writing formed the metrix of the myths of the west, was born in Albany, New York, on August 25, 1836. His father, Henry Harte, was a school - teacher and he taught at the Albany Female Academy. A year after Bret was born, his father's private school failed from lack of pupils and thus he became a ^awondering school - master. Then onwards the family moved from one place to the other, from city to city. When Bret was nine his father died leaving the family penniless. Bret's mother took her remarriage with Colonel Williams. When the family settled in California, Bret was seventeen. On the coast, he tried various jobs including a brief attempt of mining in the mother Lode. By then the gold rush was in full swing and the raw new country and the strange competition of fortune makers had a great impact on Bret's mind. He was shocked by the racial violence manifested towards the Indians, Mexicans and Chinese. In 1860, he settled in San Fransicso, where he became a printer. Though he tried various jobs, he graviated towards journalium and through his contributions to the Golden Era and the Californian, he became a praniaent literary figure. His success included tales about spanish California in vein of Washington Irving. A novelette "Mliss", about a young girl's adventures in the gold rush mining country also became very popular. Outcroppings (1865), an anthology of local verse, The lost Galleon (1867), a collection of his own poems and Condensed Novels and other Papers(1867), were his first and popular books. In 1868, he became the editor of the Overland Monthly. In this magazine appeared some of his first short sleries, including "The Luck of Roaring Camp". The Outcasts of Poker Fat". "Tennessee's Partner" and "Miggles". The above stories won him his first

national ^{and} renown, and these could be found in expensive, illustrated editions on the living - room tables of all the reading families in America. They were reprinted in England, and in translations, all over Europe. In 1870, his precise ironical poem about the superior wiles of a Chinese gambler, which was called "Plain Language from Truthful James" caught the popular fancy. The poem was reprinted in thousands of newspapers and magazines and cut out and pasted up in store windows and street - cars.

Growing fame drew Harte to the East in 1871, where he became the welcome guest of the best known literary figures, such as, longfellow, Emerson, Lowell, Holmes and Howells. In the East, the Atlantic Monthly, then the foremost intellectual magazine in the nation, offered him a magnificent \$ 10,000 for anything he might produce in a year. After 1871, Harte collected his magazine contributions in Mrs. Skagg's Husbands (1873) and Tales of Argonauts (1875). He also wrote such novels as Gabriel Lon ray (1876) and Jeff Brigg's Love Story (1880). He also wrote such novels as Gabriel Conrey (1876) and Jeff Brigg's Love Story (1880). He wrote two plays viz. Two Men of Sandy Bar (1876) and Ah Sin (1877). He wrote many other stories but none of them approached the success of his earliest writings. Then he became v.s. Consul of Crefeld, Rhenish Prussia (1878) and at Glassgew (1880 - 85). By the mid - January of 1902 he became seriously ill and died on May 5, 1902.

I I

(i) The local colour movement :

The term local colour has strong geo - cultural implications. By local - colour we mean a particular geographical setting or the milieu of a writer. How far the setting is an active agent in the information of characters and plot is an important aspect of the local colour stories. The term is applied to that literature which emphasizes and concentrates upon the picturesqueness of the strange and remote in characters manners, customs and speech of a special geographical area. This type of literature also deals with the folkways and the charm of the dialect of that particular area. All these factors are more emphasized because these help to shape the lives and behaviour of the characters. The special geographical areas dealt with in this type of literature are often remote, out of the way places.

The term also refers to -culture. The spirit of the local is a part of the Pike Country idea of literature - a native rogue - tale with touches of sentiments and it is shortened to an effective form. This dominant note of local colourism in short story is often regarded as a reaction from too much uniformity of literary expression. Due to this reason we find that the characters in such literature are often tred in isolated places.

The earliest American writing reflects its local, but the local colour movement came into prominence in the United States after the Civil War. The movement is supposed to be an attempt

to recapture the glamour of a past era. It is also dealt with as an attempt to portray the reactions of the reunited country, one to the other. The American influences upon the local colour writers may be found in Down East Humour and in the frontier tradition of tall-tales¹. The writings of Washington Irving in the English tradition of Scott, Maria Edgeworth, and French Romantic tradition represented by Hugo, Marionce and Bernardin de saint Pierre greatly influenced the local colourists.

In local colour literature the author frequently looks away from ordinary life to distant lands, strange customs or exotic scenes, and still he retains a sense of fidelity and accuracy of description. The local colour movement produced most of its distinguished writing in the form of the short story. Besides Harte, the local colour school produced such prominent authors as Mrs. Stowe, Miss. Jewett, Mrs. Freeman, R.E. Robinson in England, and R.H. Davis, H.C. Bunner, Brander Matthews and O.ttenry in New York City; George Washington Cable, Clemens, E.W. Howe, Zona Gale, and Edward Eggleston from Indiana, who were the earliest writers of this movement in the short story.

Edward Eggleston (1837 - 1902) a native of Indiana, wrote of pioneer life in Southern Indiana in The Hoosier Schoolmaster and other novels which were published in the early 1870's.

Samuel Clemens (1835 - 1910) better known by his pen name Mark Twain, stands head and shoulders above all other men

who wrote about the west in the generation after the Civil War. His first national reputation came with The Celebrated Jumping Frog. Journalistic and literary success brought invitations to lectures at which Clemens was very effective. His first book on the Far West was Roughing It (1872), which concerned largely with life in Nevada. The book is a fine description of mining life in Nevada during 1860's.

Mrs. Freeman (1852 - 1930) was born in Randolph, Massachusetts. The scenes she knew form the background for most of her tales of New England rural life. Her early work is a dispassionate observation of local character and it constitutes an important contribution to the local colour school by its study of repressed people in a decaying social system, capturing their spirit through their dialect. Her first collection of tales, A Humble Romance (1887) and A New England Nun (1891) established her reputation.

Zona Gale (1874 - 1938) is a Wisconsinⁿ author known for her short stories in the local colour tradition. Which are collected in such volumes as "Friendship Village" (1908) and 'Bridal Pond' (1930). Her Pulitzer Prize winner novel Miss Lulu Bett (1920) is a story of a woman repressed by the bleak life of the Middle West. Her other works include 'Borgia' (1929), the story of a modern girl, who thinks herself a modern Lucrezia Borgia. 'Papa La Fleur' (1933) is the story of a country - girl whose ideas of liberty for younger generation hurt the feelings of both her father and her sweetheart.

Miss Jewett Sarah Orne (1849 - 1909) was early stimulated by Mrs. Stowe's sympathetic depiction of her state's local customs. Jewett dweterminantly followed her in recording the life of the dwindling farms and deserted, shipless hartours. In 1873, the Atlantic Monthly printed her story "The Short House", which gave her reputation. Her later works won her a place among the important writersof the local colour school.

T.N. Page (1853 -1922), a Virginia auther^o, was distinguished as a leader of the local colour movement. His first short story appeared in 1887. The stories collected in such volumes as The Burial of the Guns (1894) and Bred in the Bone (1904) depict the romantic aspects of his region before and during the Civil War. He employes frequently Negro dialect and his stories are generally concerned sentimentally with the Aristocratic South as in the collection.

The Ole Virginia (1887).

Hamlin Garland once characterized local - colour fiction by saying that "it was such quality of teseture and background that it could not have been written in any other place or by any one else than a native"². Garland meant the complex dialect speech, superstition, proverbial lore, and folkways which help to define a local culture "Back ground" refers to physical setting as well as to the distinctive qualities of the landscape which help to condition human thought and behaviour in a secheded hill country settlement like a rough mining camp in the Sierras Garland indicated the

ultimate aim of the local colourist as the creation of the illusion of an indigenous little world.

American fiction has portrayed with ever - increasing fidelity the native scene in its manifold variety. Every section of America has its own writers, who, with photographic accuracy, have recorded local topography, architecture, manners, customs, history, dialect and character types. But despite the common tie of faith in fundamental democratic doctrines, there are, in America, divergencies from region to region. These divergencies result from racial heritage and from community and family traditions. Occupations, as well as, topography and heritage, created indistinguishable character types such as the miners, solitary shepherds, the cowboys, the lumberjacks, and the rivermen.

The first successful record of this cultural diversity was made in the nineteenth century by authors whose work has been denominated local colour. These writers, perceiving the peculiarities of a community, wrote narratives whose vitality depended largely upon accurate portrayal of the setting, upon the delineation of provincial character types and upon the use of dialect. Local colour is one type of realism, if we define realism as a graphic delineation of actual life. It is concerned with contemporary social truth. Yet it is not a realism that tries to present the whole truth. The Local colourists employed an atmospheric setting in their fictional practices. The setting is clearly related to the action and to characterization and while intensifying both, it becomes a

positive force in the narrative. These writers presented the environmental features not only for the purpose of stimulating the interest, but also to add to the forces of action and to produce a harmony between the characters and their background³. Sometimes the landscape assumed a greater importance than the individual protagonists. These writers realized that external background is justified only as to provide objective reality for the whole story.

Local colour achieved ^{wide} popular acceptance only after Bret Harte's stories in 1870 charmed the East, which was unacquainted with the true conditions of Western mining camps. Following Harte's success, the writers in the 1870's dipped into almost every area of the United States and with considerable accurateness, they sketched every layer of society. Sarah Orne Jewell touched the out the - way customs and local scenery in the neighbourhood of Berwick, Maine G.W. Cable found in Creole Louisiana a quaintness that was unrevealed until then in American fiction. Constance Fenimore Woobon portryed the forested shores of Lake Michigan and Mackinac Island.

The great prominence of the local - colour fiction after the Civil War is to be seen as a development whose way was paved by the earlier school of frontier humourists. The movement assumed importance when the integrity of diverse subcultures within the nation was pullicly concerned. A subsfantial number of general periodicals took notice of this and offered a sizeable steady market for short story.

The local colour movement remained strong through the last decade of the nineteenth century. Harte had his imitators in all sections of the United States. But the Far West was chiefly exploited in the dime novels and storypapers. The secret of American local colour story, according to Harte "was the treatment of characteristic American life, with absolute knowledge of its peculiarities and sympathy with its methods"⁴ Constance Fenimore Woolson said "All I write is founded and intended to be founded, upon actual realities"⁵ The development of local colour school in the post-war period was highly influenced by American humour Harte himself felt that American humour was a valuable aid in his early career as a writer.

But surely there were limits beyond which the local colourists did not even attempt to go. Many writers concentrated on the past with their principal aim - to - idealize human behaviour. Thus T.W. Page glorified the Southern tradition in his stories and Mary Catherwood, in her stories, forsake the ugly narrowness of her own mid-western childhood and preferred more spacious days of French colonialism in the Great Lakes Regions.

Another respect in which the local colourists moved their time is represented by their tendency to make oddities seem picturesque, to make the primitive seem romantic. These writers avoided always the unpleasant. Most of them were unwilling to front some of the unpleasant facts of life. It is evident in Harte's sentimental handling of prostitutes.

In general, the local colourists found their material in those aspects of life which were departures from commonplace norms. As a consequence, they specialized in cultural islands where peculiarities had survived, or they depicted a past age during which local individuality had flourished. Theirs was largely a preindustrial view of American rural and village life. Similarly, a large proportion of local colour fiction concerns itself with the poor, and generally, poverty is accepted as a fact of life. Garland, who knew the discomforts of farm life and the perils of natural calamity, dissected his chief protest against the capitalist system in his stories. In fact, Garland wrote,

"American literature can not be built up out of remantic tales of medieval France and stories of country life will be false if they deal only with June sunshine, roses and strawberries. We must put in the dust, the mud, and the snow in their proper proportions. We must base our fiction on reality."⁶

From 1887 to 1900 more than a hundred volumes of local colour stories were published. Around the turn of the century, localism ceased to be a dominant stimulating force, although the familiar type of local story appeared in diminishing numbers for a decade or more. Some years later a new concept of regionalism was indicative of a widespread desire to preserve an agrarian culture and to resist standardization. But the regional scene has continued to interest such writers as Willa Cather, Steinback, Faulkner, Robert

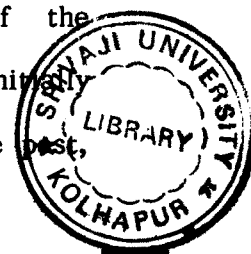
Penn Warren, Elizabeth Madore Roberts, and others. Although they inherited the techniques of an earlier generation of local colourists, they broadened and deepened the concepts a cultural milieu.

III

Local Colour and the West :

The west was a land of opportunity not only for the cattleman and cowboy, but for the miner and the farmer as well. In the mountain regions, discoveries of gold, silver, and copper exerted a magnetic pull on ambitious prospectors. What really brought about the rush to California was the fact that for the first time a treasure hunt was open for all comes. In addition to it, under the laws of the United States anyone who found gold could keep gold. That made all the difference. Tens of thousands of men poured into California from all over the world. They were all after the same thing, gold, and they were all excited by the visions of big fortunes. California gold fired men's imaginations. More than that, it indirectly set in motion of restless frontier.

The frontier has helped to shape many distinctive aspects of American literature. It has affected the ballad, the tall - tale and also the local colour movement. The physical frontier had its beginning at the Atlantic Coast. It moved continuously westward, along with the new discoveries of gold, until free land was exhausted. This progression of the frontier influenced virtually every American author. It has also formed the attitude and manner of the contemporary American authors. The myth of the west initially involved the notion of a revived Eden. This Eden is not of the



but it is of one in the land itself. Besides the fact that the land was rich with gold, the permission to keep the gold with the person who found it, seemed to promise a renewal of the abundance of the Lost Garden. Thus prosperity was mistaken for Paradise. The myth of earthly paradise has a long history in Western European thought and the myth of the West was the dream of Europe as well as of the Eastern Sea board.

West is a term, which in the United States, has been applied both to a geographic location and to a social - economic condition. Because settlement began on the eastern rim of the continent and in most cases expanded in a westerly direction, the west was both a place farther and toward the setting sun and a place where men were beginning over again the creation of a new society. Strictly speaking, each eastward physical social region had its own west, where its patterns of life were exposed to a new environment. All wests, therefore, differed to a degree according to the origins of their people, but all partook of the quality of newness and all revealed some similarity in outlook and attitude.

The outer edge of any western advance was known as the frontier. The United States census bureau defined it as a place where the population was not much more than two persons to the square mile. Its first inhabitants, except in a few unusual cases, trappers, traders and lone-settlers. Always on the move, they left behind them, as they pushed on into the wilderness, a gradually maturing society, to which, people to its east called west. In early

stages at least, each west was supposed to exhibit certain characteristics -- individualism, boastfulness, materialism, hurry and crudeness. In the mean time, each west reached some degree of social maturity, political independence, and economic complexity, and each west became eastern in all but geographic location.

Both as fact and idea, the frontier, which came into existence in its specific American sense in the beginning of the eighteenth century, has a great importance as a factor in the development of America. At first, the frontier was the Atlantic Coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. The advance has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe and a steady growth of independence on American lines. In the beginning, the frontier was the meeting point of savagery and civilization. The American intellect owes its striking characteristics to the frontier. The most important effects of the frontier are supposed to be the promotion of democracy and individualism. On the frontier, the community existed before the existence of government. The people got together and made common cause to provide themselves and their families with essentials of social life, schools, roads, etc. No authority existed to turn to for those things. But since the frontier was beyond the law it had bred lawlessness and violence. Its law was lynch law prosecution persons who were the supported criminals, without a lawful trial. The influence of the frontier is apparent also in the nomadism of the Americans, their mobility, their willingness still to break for the high timber, at a moment's notice. The frontier,

the movement westward, remains the great image of the American sense of possibility. As such, it is one of the main components of the American dream, of America as a dream. After reading Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, one might say that the dream of the frontier is the dream of escape from Aunt Sally, from respectability, from the constraints of civilization and society, into the life an uninhibited freedom. The emigrants, all of the, whether they came in hope or they were driven by persecution or by threat of starvation of home, crossed a frontier, the frontier of the Atlantic. They made a leap into a country, where it seemed to them a better life was possible. Industrialism, first in the form of the Erie Canal from Albany to Buffalo, was itself a major factor in the opening up of the frontier. The immigrants, who came to America to farm and therefore, to stay, were from different classes and countries -- after the suppression of the German Revolution in 1848, there was a great inflow into America of refugees, middle-class, liberal in outlook, educated and scholarly. There were immigrants from Bohemia, Sweden and Norway also. They settled in what is now the Middle West, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Kansas the Dakotas and Nebraska.

IV

The geo-cultural and socio-economic reality of the frontier is thus greatly linked with the local colour movement. Harte was one of the major short-story writers of his generation to capture the complex spirit of this changing geo-cultural reality.

The present discussion seeks to provide a critical analysis of the stories of Bret Harte in terms of the perspective provided by the geo-cultural realities of the local colour and the west. Since these geo-cultural realities also constitute a whole set of literary tradition and conventions, they are of great importance for a proper understanding of Bret Harte. The present work seeks to arrive at a critical understanding of this kind with special reference to the two collections of short stories by Bret Harte :

- i) Bret Harte
Stories of the Early West Forward by
Walter Van Tilburg Clerk.

- ii) Harte of the West
17 stories by Bret Harte
Edited by Ned E. Hoopes.