

THE BEGINNING

seeking through the flashing, tender, and heroic pictures the exact point of contact between his hero and that first particular incident in which lay the seed from which would spring all the clashing adventure and melting sentiment that glowed behind his forehead. He found the point of contact and that first particular incident. Again he wet his brush.

But no! The beginning was not there! That incident was not the seed, but a sturdy branch of the half-grown plant. So he looked deeper and further, deeper and further, still deeper and further. The ink dried on his brush. The brush slipped from his fingers. He clasped his head in his hands. Where was the beginning?

At last, in despair, he wrote—the end of the story. It was dramatic, romantic, convincing, conclusive, altogether admirable. From that he wrote back toward the beginning, day after day, month after month, year after year, firm in the belief that he would know the beginning when he came to it. He died in the eighty-first year of his age, with his great story not yet begun, though long since concluded, and his heirs—who did not inherit his literary conscience—published the monumental record and result of his backward quest.

Sometimes, between sleeping and waking, I feel so deep a sympathy for that ancient Celestial's reversed method of composition that I doubt horribly if any story has ever been really