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**THE ABC OF SHORT-STORY WRITING
AND FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM**

THE A B C OF
SHORT-STORY
WRITING

AND FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM

WITH COMPLETE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE
WRITING OF GOOD ENGLISH

BY

WILLIAM DODGSON BOWMAN

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**THE
A B C OF SHORT-STORY WRITING
AND FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM**

**PART I
HOW TO WRITE**

CHAPTER I

THE ART OF WRITING

THE EQUIPMENT OF A WRITER.—“If,” said Anthony Trollope, “a man can command a table, a chair, pen, ink, and paper, he can commence his trade as a literary man. It requires no capital, no special education, and may be taken up without a moment’s delay.”

This sounds very simple, as no doubt it was to the gifted novelist, but the novice who attempts to launch himself on a journalistic career equipped only with these necessary tools will quickly discover that he is only scantily equipped for the enterprise. He will find that he has much to unlearn, and much more to learn.

He must be armed with knowledge and girded with experience before he can storm the ramparts of Fleet Street. In the first place, he must learn how to write. The ability to write sound, clear, vigorous English is an accomplishment all too rare. But it can be compassed by all men and women who will apply themselves with industry and perseverance to the task. Every budding journalist should be able to express his thoughts on paper with simplicity and directness. Until he has mastered the art he cannot do full justice to the ideas he wishes to express.

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PROSE WRITING AN ART.—Some will protest with impatience that they do not need this preliminary training. "Anyone can write," they exclaim. Editors and publishers' readers know better. Writing is an art. It demands the exercise of powers as various and highly developed as any other form of art. The beginner who tries to make written words and sentences accurate reflections of his ideas quickly discovers this, and finds his first attempts halting and confused, amateurish and inadequate. Afterwards, by application and steady practice, many of his difficulties disappear. It dawns on him that he has developed a style that enables him to express himself with vigour and accuracy. But, as in every other form of art, mastery is the reward of application and effort.

CLEAR THINKING THE BASIS OF GOOD WRITING.—The beginner should for his early attempts choose subjects with which he is familiar. When he has selected one of these, and has satisfied himself that he has something definite to say and a new point of view to present, he should think out the points he will develop in his essay, and arrange them in his mind in their logical and proper order. Any information he has to give should be verified by close observation.

But it is not enough to present ideas in their logical sequence. They must be presented clearly and effectively. To this end he should think out the actual phrases and sentences he will use. This will have a

twofold effect. Not only will it make the writing easier: it will also clarify his thoughts on the subject. Clear thinking leads to clear writing. If the writer's thoughts are confused or vague, vagueness and confusion will be reflected in the composition, and the reader correspondingly bewildered. To be definite is a duty the writer owes to those who read his effort, and he can only achieve precision in statement by careful thinking.

THE REQUIREMENTS OF A GOOD STYLE.—In addition to lucidity of style, the young writer should aim at being brief, direct, simple, and vigorous. To be of value his essay should impress and interest the reader. It should persuade him that the writer's thoughts bear the impress of conviction. It should not weary with unnecessary verbiage, but instead arrest and compel his attention with well-chosen words and phrases.

These may sound like counsels of perfection, but they show just what a good style of writing should be.

There are other and greater qualities of a prose style, but these do not concern us here.

The first business of the novice is to learn to give natural expression to his thoughts, and to record his emotions and experiences simply and with force. When he can do this he may spread his wings for higher flights.

The beginner who has the impulse to write, often

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disdains this preliminary training and practice. He is eager to test his abilities, and plunges at once into short-story writing or journalism.

A moment's reflection will show that this is a mistake.

An artist does not attempt to paint a picture until he has mastered the elements of drawing and knows something of the properties of colours.

Words and phrases are the raw material of the author, as colours are of the painter, and as the wielder of the brush knows the effects of the tints he puts on the canvas, in harmonies of light and shade, so the writer must use judgment and knowledge in selecting the right words with which to build up his sentences, if they are to express his meaning exactly.

ON THE CHOICE OF WORDS.—There is no language with a richer or more copious vocabulary than English. To the young writer this is embarrassing and confusing, and makes demands on his judgment and powers of discrimination. Often there are a score of words, or groups of words, to express one meaning, but there is only one word or phrase that expresses it vividly. That is the word the beginner, at whatever trouble to himself, should search diligently for. Mr. Arnold Bennett, the famous novelist, advises the literary beginner to study a good dictionary. No better counsel could be given. The number of those who have a good working knowledge of English, even among writers, is surprisingly small. The works of popular novelists teem with

examples of the use of faulty English. Miss Marie Corelli makes one of her characters chuckle "at his own *perspicuity*," though what there is to chuckle about no one but the novelist herself could have told us. A reference to the dictionary shows that *perspicuity* means transparency or clearness. It is obvious from the context that the word Miss Corelli had in mind was *perspicacity* or insight. A hundred similar examples of the wrong use of words could be culled from the pages of recent best sellers, but this space will not allow.

There are also pitfalls for the writer, in words that superficially resemble each other but differ widely in meaning. Among these are *transcendently* and *transcendentally*, *complaisant* and *complacent*, *observation* and *observance*, *requisite* and *requisition*, *euphuism* and *euphemism*, *depreciate* and *deprecate*, *fortuitous* and *fortunate*. The words in these groups are mistakenly regarded by many speakers and writers as interchangeable, but each has a definite meaning of its own. The student can quickly discover this for himself by referring to the dictionary. When he has looked up these words in turn and mastered their various meanings, he will appreciate the help a full vocabulary can give him. If he does not already possess a dictionary he would be well advised to buy a good one. The Concise Oxford Dictionary or Chambers's Etymological Dictionary can each be bought for a few shillings. Roget's Thesaurus, which offers several alternative words for one of the same

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meaning, is also a useful aid to the student of letters, and will help him to find the word he wants.

No hard and fast rules can be given that will guide the young writer in the choice of words. Some teachers of English composition counsel their pupils to use only Saxon words in preference to Romance. But this is an instruction impossible to put in practice. It has already been said that English is a hybrid language. It has drawn and is still drawing its vocabulary from many sources. Even since the war hundreds of new words have come into common use in speech and writing, and have found a place in the vast storehouse of English words. From the Americans we have borrowed many striking words and phrases. From the Russian we have acquired *Bolshevic* and *Soviet*, and the word *red* has earned a new and sinister connotation. From this it is clear that we cannot express modern thoughts by the use of Saxon words alone. Moreover, it would be impossible for any but an experienced philologist to pick out the Saxon words among the many thousands given in an English dictionary. Our purpose is to write English, and it is obvious from what has just been written, that Saxon words alone will not answer this purpose. To express our thoughts and emotions we must turn to the rich and varied store of words that the English language affords.

But again the richness and variety of this store embarrasses the beginner. There are so many words that stand for the same thing or express our

THE ART OF WRITING

idea. How, then, is the writer to choose? We have seen that it would be useless to try and use Saxon words only. There are no fixed rules to guide him. How is he then to discriminate?

It is here that the masters of English literature come to his aid. From the study of the great examples of prose they have left us, we discover that, almost invariably, they used the simplest and most familiar words to express their meaning, and that they also used concrete words instead of what are known as abstract words. They also went straight to the point, and did not resort to circumlocution where a single direct word would express the idea they wished to convey. These deductions, then, give us three useful working rules for the choice of words in literary composition, which may be expressed as follows:

Use the simple or familiar word instead of the lesser known.

Select the concrete word in preference to the abstract.

Choose the single word instead of the roundabout phrase or circumlocution.

CHOOSE THE FAMILIAR WORD.—One of the greatest temptations that assails the literary beginner is to use grand, high-sounding terms. He thinks that long words will impress his reader. They will; but not in the way he expects. He should remember that his aim must be first to interest and then to convince those who read his composition. To do this

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terms he uses should be readily understood and his ideas clearly and forcibly expressed. If he uses words that are far-fetched and high-sounding he will only sacrifice sense to sound, and distract rather than persuade. His style will appear pompous and ostentatious. Decking a composition with false ornament is like wearing flash jewellery—a sign of vulgarity and conceit.

The familiar word, the word that is instantly understood, providing it has not been debased by slang usage, should always be chosen, when it is appropriate. The use of homely, familiar words makes for clarity of expression. It may be objected that such words are common. So they are, but they are not debased or vulgar. As well object to bread, or air, or water. They are all common, but without them we would perish. The familiar words are the warp and woof of literature. You find them in greatest number in writings that the world would not willingly let die. The genius of Shakespeare has illumined them with magic and enduring beauty. The poetry of Shelley and Keats and the glowing rhetoric of Burke are written in simple words that the most illiterate can understand. Turn to the New Testament and you will find in those writings, which are at once the envy and despair of all who use the pen, the simple words of everyday speech.

Consider, too, that you owe it as a duty to the reader to write so that he can instantly grasp your meaning. Personality is shown as much in writing as

in deportment or dress, and it is a sign of good breeding to write simply and directly.

Affectation should be avoided. Do not write *perchance* for *perhaps*, or *ere* for *before*, or *save* for *except*. *Perchance*, *ere*, and *save* may be suitable words to use in poetry; in prose they sound affected and freakish. Do not write as a newspaper correspondent did :

“The threat of a general strike of seamen was boldly *envisaged* by the shipowners.”

Envisaged is journalese for *faced*.

Do not write of a thing as *unique* unless it is the only one of its kind. An object may be *unique* or not *unique*. It cannot be “rather *unique*” or “very *unique*,” just as you cannot say a thing is “somewhat perfect” or “very perfect.” There can be no degrees of perfection or uniqueness. To say of a chair that “it is *singularly* rare” means that it is the only one of its kind, which is probably not the impression the writer wished to convey.

The word *individual* should not be used for *man* or *person* unless it is intended to refer to a single or private person as opposed to a group. As an adjective, *individual* is always rightly used, and the adverb *individually* is also correct.

Remember that when anyone contemplates taking a rash step it is *precipitate* and not *precipitous*.

These examples illustrate the value of the dictionary. It may be troublesome to consult, but the time spent in searching for the right word is never

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wasted, for not only will your writing be more direct and vigorous, but your vocabulary will be enriched, and you will gain a definite knowledge of the meaning of words that before conveyed vague and shadowy impression to your mind.

Use the familiar or common word in preference to any other. As Hazlitt says :

“ Words are like money, not the worse for being common, but that it is the stamp of custom alone that gives them circulation or value.”

In commenting on Dr. Johnson’s style, the same critic says :

“ The reason I object to Dr. Johnson’s style is that there is no discrimination, no selection, no variety in it. He uses none but ‘ tall, opaque words,’ taken from the ‘ first row of the rubric ’—words with the greatest number of syllables, or Latin phrases, with merely English terminations.”

Hazlitt’s criticism is well founded. Avoid as you would the plague the ‘ tall, opaque words,’ which are pompous and devoid of meaning. But also reject slang and cant phrases. Some slang words are expressive, and when put to service by an experienced writer are sometimes used with great effect. But the beginner would do well to avoid them and to steer a middle course between the affected and the vulgar. This is not easy to do, but is worth striving for. Seek diligently for the right word, and your writing will gain in simplicity, precision, and purity of expression.

THE CONCRETE WORD AND THE ABSTRACT.—We now come to the second of the working rules that will help in choosing the right word :

Use the concrete word in preference to the abstract.

There are two classes of nouns—concrete and abstract.

Concrete words are those that stand for real things that one can touch or see, as *chair, knife, table*, etc.

Abstract words express ideas and conceptions, not concrete, as *theology, science, generosity*, etc.

Concrete words represent material realities; abstract words, systemized conceptions of things.

Concrete words cannot always be used, especially when discussing abstract ideas, though these are put in concrete terms more often than might be imagined by those who have not read the great English writers with critical attention.

Open a volume of Shakespeare's plays and you will find lofty thoughts expressed in lines of magical beauty. We sense this beauty the more clearly because the images conjured up are of things we can see and touch in the material world around us. Note the concrete nouns in the extracts that follow :

How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

Or again :

The moon shines bright : in such a night as this
When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees,
And they did make no noise, in such a night

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Troilus methinks mounted the Troyan walls,
And sighed his soul towards the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night.

Notice this from one of Oberon's declamations :

For she his hairy temples then had rounded
With coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers;
And that same dew, which sometime on the buds
Was wont to swell, like round and orient pearls,
Stood now within the pretty flowerets' eyes,
Like tears, that did their own disgrace bewail.

Here are no cloudy splendours. The images called up are definite and precise. The dignity and beauty of the lines are not lessened but enhanced by the use of concrete terms.

Many young writers cherish the illusion that the free use of abstract words gives distinction and roundness to their style. They imagine that by this loose adaptation of words to thought, they are getting away from the commonplace. This is wrong. The first duty of a writer is to make himself understood, and he can only achieve this by cultivating a straightforward, masculine style. This in its turn can only be done by using terms that stand for real things. If you take up the Bible you will find, especially in the Gospels, abstract ideas expressed in concrete terms. Note the simplicity and directness of the following passages :

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?”

Again :

“And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!”

“Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?”

Here is English prose at its best, yet how simple and direct it is, and how *alive*! Every sentence thrusts on the mind clean-cut, vivid impressions, every word its definite meaning and value. The first two passages are simple narrative, the third is coloured by high emotion, yet how admirably adapted for both styles are the short, concrete words that compose them.

CHAPTER II

CIRCUMLOCUTION—JARGON—STYLE

AVOID CIRCUMLOCUTION.—One of the principal disadvantages of using abstract terms is that none of these alone conveys the meaning intended by the writer, so that additional nouns and adjectives must be called into service to make the sense clear. In other words, the substitution of abstract words for concrete, compels the writer to resort to roundabout phrases or circumlocution. Now, when this is done our third rule is broken. This, you will remember, runs as follows :

Choose the single word instead of the roundabout phrase or circumlocution.

From this it is obvious that abstract expression and the use of phrases for single words are very much the same thing.

We can best illustrate this by a few examples :

“He was made the object of his enemies’ attacks.”

Instead of using the term *object*, it would be better if this read : “His enemies attacked him.”

“Mr. G. was the recipient of congratulations from all sides.”

This should be amended to “Mr. G. received congratulations from all sides.”

“To be made the recipient of calumny and abuse is the lot of all leaders of men.”

This should read: “All leaders of men suffer calumny and abuse.”

“The signs of the times clearly show the necessity of repressing these malcontents with firmness and vigour.”

A better reading would be: “These malcontents must be firmly and vigorously repressed.”

“The disasters in this military campaign were due, in many cases, to the lack of foresight shown by the officers in charge of the operations.”

Eliminate “in many cases” from this sentence, and add “mostly” before “due.”

“In all cases popular discontent is due to misgovernment.”

Read, “Popular discontent is always due to misgovernment.”

“In most cases the speakers were extremists.”

For “In most cases” read “Most of.”

“The crowd was critical and watchful, but in many instances it loudly cheered the brilliant strokes of the mighty wielder of the willow.”

In this sentence the writer’s enthusiasm has been expended in a flow of jargon. “In many instances,” like “in all cases” and its variations, is meaningless jargon. “The mighty wielder of the willow” is false ornament. The sentence may be remodelled as follows: “The crowd was critical and watchful, though often it loudly cheered the brilliant strokes of the batsman.”

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WORN-OUT PHRASES.—Do not refer to the football as “the inflated sphere” or “the leather spheroid.” Leave that to the sporting journalist, who is a busy man and has little time to correct his proofs. When you refer to the weather do not put on stilts and write about “climatic conditions.” The reader will only put you down as silly and pompous if you do. Don’t call an oyster a “succulent bivalve” unless you wish the editor who reads your MS. to have an apoplectic fit. The phrase has done duty since the earliest days of journalism and its interment is long overdue. “A palpitating, struggling mass of humanity” is journalese for a *crowd* or *mob*. Motheaten phrases like “the pity of it,” “a work of supererogation,” “the psychological moment,” “the irony of fate,” “the true inwardness,” “it gives furiously to think,” “a consummation devoutly to be wished,” “the cup that cheers but not inebriates” no longer interest the reader. They only irritate. Possibly at one time, when they were first used, these phrases were telling and effective, but constant use has dulled their meaning, and they are now little better than empty verbiage. All such rubbish should be rigorously avoided.

AVOID JARGON.—In the examples of corrected sentences given on a previous page, the reader has probably noted that where the phrases “in many cases,” “in many instances,” and the like were used in the original sentences, these were struck out and single words substituted for them. The reason for

this is that the phrase is meaningless. The word "case" has a meaning of its own, but it cannot by any stretch of imagination be applied here. This and many similar phrases, as "in this respect," "as regards," "with regard to," "in respect of," "in connection with," are cant phrases or jargon. Slang may be vulgar, but it is expressive, and sometimes picturesque and humorous. But jargon has none of these merits. It is empty verbiage, a fungus growth on the tree of language. Yet it has a multitude of adherents who practise it daily with smug satisfaction. The Civil Servant and the Municipal offices draw freely on its vocabulary for their official reports and other documents. It is used by Members of Parliament and even by Ministers of the Crown. It is as vague as it is high-sounding and non-committal. In a shadowy, uncertain way it expresses the official mind, and by those who use it is referred to as official language. It is stilted and formal, and suggests sealing-wax and red-tape. It looks precise and safe, but is nothing but a smoke-screen that bewilders and irritates the reader, and buries plain meaning—if it has plain meaning—under a cloud of words. No Member of Parliament speaking in the House of Commons would dream of using the word *newspapers*. The eyes of the world are on him and he must, at all costs, be dignified, so he speaks of them as "the ordinary sources of information."

Similarly, when a Cabinet Minister answers a Member's question, he replies that "the answer is in

the affirmative" or "the negative," instead of a plain "Yes" or "No."

If you went into a newsagent's shop and asked: "Do you sell the ordinary sources of information?" and the proprietor replied: "The answer is in the affirmative," what would the shop-boy think? Would he not consider you both candidates for an asylum? Yet that would be no worse than the ordinary interchanges between Members of Parliament and Ministers.

Even Prime Ministers are not free from the vice of jargon. In his excellent little book on the "Art of Writing," Sir Quiller-Couch quotes an answer by a former Premier which is a perfect specimen of jargonese. It is as follows:

"With regard to Mr. Noel Buxton's questions, I cannot answer for an inquiry which is of *a private and confidential character*, for although *I am associated with it*, I am not associated with it as a Minister of the Crown. . . . These inquiries are of *a very careful and scientific character* and are being conducted by the ablest investigators in this country, some of whom have reputations of *international character*. I am glad to think that the investigation is of *a most impartial character*."

This must have been a very remarkable inquiry, for the answer shows it to have been "of a private and confidential character," "a very careful and scientific character," and "of a most impartial character." Indeed, it is stamped with character on every

link. What are confidential and scientific characters? Are they persons or things? And what, again, is "an international character"?

If Mr. Buxton was satisfied with this answer he must have been easy to please, for as it reads it is mere nonsense.

From these examples it is clear that jargon is a circuitous method of stating what is direct and simple, and that the choice of abstract nouns forces the writer to resort to circumlocution.

But this is not all. The writer or speaker who tries to express his ideas by the use of this meaningless verbiage generally fails to convey more than a shadowy conception of his thoughts. Instead of hitting the bull's-eye, he misses the target. When a newspaper correspondent reports that "the midnight reveller was conveyed to his residence in a state of intoxication," he means "that he was carried home drunk." That and nothing more.

Jargon is easy to write, but difficult to read with interest. The writer who is too indolent to take pains and puts down on paper the first words that occur to him quickly finds himself involved in a jungle of abstract nouns, and he extricates himself from the maze by the use of one or other of those pet phrases already quoted. The trick of writing jargon is easily acquired and quickly becomes a habit. Against this you must be on your guard and select nouns with care. When these are concrete you will find no

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difficulties in the path; but where only abstract terms will express the idea be sure that the noun used conveys its rightful meaning.

ELEGANT VARIATION.—It is an article of faith with many young writers that a name must not be mentioned more than once or twice in the course of an article or essay. Some sporting journalists entertain the same belief. In this they are wrong. The fear that the frequent repetition of a proper name will make the composition monotonous and flat is groundless. In the Gospel we read:

“Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s.”
Not “Render unto Cæsar the things that are his.”

Or, “He that hath ears to hear let him hear.”

Here there is repetition again, but it does not sound flat or unmusical. Why then give yourself the trouble of inventing phrases to distinguish your subject when you can mention him simply by name?

Besides, this trick of elegant variations, which is one of jargon’s favourite devices, causes the reader endless confusion and difficulty. Every fresh name or phrase descriptive of the subject makes him pause and consider, and every succeeding variation causes him mental disturbance. His attention is needlessly strained. Run through an article on J. B. Hobbs, the cricketer, and you will find him described in successive lines as “the century builder,” “the Surrey crack,” “the famous batsman,” “the wonder,” “England’s premier batsman,” and so on. As we

read this change of titles we watch for the next one with a fascinated interest that makes us forget all about Hobbs's innings.

Some novelists and newspaper reporters make play with a more pernicious type of variation—that of the sparkling or informative type. The following examples are self-explanatory :

"Mr. G. has taken a suite of rooms at the Queen's Hotel. *The champion long distance swimmer* is very comfortable in his new quarters."

"A wants £100; B requires £200; C insists on 150."

These verbal gymnastics only bring a weary smile to the reader's face, and are so many examples of perverted ingenuity. Variation is sometimes necessary to avoid ungainly repetition, but antics like those mentioned should always be avoided.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SENTENCES.—Having gone so far, it will be advantageous to look back for a moment and survey the road we have travelled.

We have seen that for a simple, vigorous style we must choose the familiar rather than the far-fetched word.

Also that the concrete word should be preferred to the abstract, and the single word to the periphrasis.

Hitherto we have spoken only of nouns, and must address ourselves to the other parts of speech, principally the verb and the adjective. Then from the consideration of single words we must pass to the

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phrase, the construction of the sentence, and after that the paragraph.

The use of adjectives is determined by the choice of nouns. If a weak or vague noun is used, this must be supplemented by adjectives to make the meaning clear. This produces an unpleasing effect. The great writers are economical in the use of adjectives and employ as few of them as possible. In whole paragraphs of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" there are many adverbs, but not a single adjective. Like the modern stylist Stevenson he seems to have disliked them, and used the short, expressive noun.

Adjectives should be chosen with care. The only justification for their use is that they make the meaning clearer. They should not be included for the purpose of filling or rounding off the sentence. Do not imitate the eighteenth-century writers in setting down adjectives in strings of three. To do so is to sacrifice sense to sound. Sentences with trios of adjectives may be sonorous, but they lack strength and solidity, and should be eschewed by all who would write sound, straightforward English. Many young writers have acquired this habit without knowing it. It is a complaint they should remedy without loss of time.

No rule can be given that will help the beginner to the right choice of verbs, nor can any precise directions be offered for their use. Verbs are so many and can be used in such different ways that no

definite guidance that would be of practical value can be given. But here are two hints that may be useful.

1. Where it is possible use transitive verbs instead of intransitive.

2. Use the active rather than the passive voice of verbs.

Note again, these are not rules, only recommendations. Sometimes they can be applied with effect, but very often not.

The advantage of using the transitive verb is that it connects up with its object, and makes the sentence clear and compact.

The passive voice, too, is a more cumbersome and wordy voice than the active. It is also less vital and alive.

"I was being attacked" does not sound so forceful as "He was attacking me." Nor is "I was advised" as direct as "He advised me." The participles of the passive voice also clutter up a sentence and make it weak and cumbersome.

LENGTH OF SENTENCES.—Do not attempt to model your sentences on those of writers like Milton and Dr. Johnson, whose rolling periods have been influenced by their studies of Greek and Latin authors. Nor attempt the short, epigrammatic sentences of Macaulay. Only the mighty can draw the bow of Ulysses. Instead, try to preserve a balance of the sentences by varying their length.

Think out the words of every sentence before you put it on paper, and make each one convey a definite

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thought. Every sentence should *tell*, and bear its part in building up the paragraph.

IMPORTANCE OF EMPHASIS.—When the art of writing was first seriously studied thousands of years ago, Greek and Roman authors understood and pointed out the importance of emphasis, and taught students of Rhetoric that in sentences there is sometimes one word that has extraordinary value and force. If this word is buried in the middle of a sentence it is likely to escape the attention of the reader. Whereas if it is placed at the end of the sentence it will be impressed on the reader's mind.

This is as true of English as of Greek or Latin. In English prose this is achieved by inverting the usual order of the sentence. The normal order is to place the subject before the verb, except in questions. But with inversion this is reversed. Take one or two examples :

“Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”

How much more emphatic this is than if the words were placed in the normal order: “Diana of the Ephesians is great.”

“The greatest of these is political justice.”

Here again the emphasis is on the last words, *political justice*.

If the order in this sentence had been normal, both the rhythm and the emphasis would have been weakened.

Inversion is useful for other purposes beside that

of emphasis. It strengthens the connection with previous sentences. It also makes the meaning clear and gets rid of ambiguity.

But here a word of caution is needful. Inversion in these days is grossly abused, especially by young writers. Use it sparingly and only where emphasis is needed. A succession of inverted sentences is wearisome to the reader and weakens the effect of the essay.

THE USE OF METAPHOR.—Metaphor should be used with care. No modern writer or speaker could express his views without calling it into service. Whenever we wrest a word from its original meaning we indulge our taste for metaphor. The danger of its indiscriminate use lies in this, that our language includes thousands of metaphors in various degrees of vitality. Some are almost dead; others have seen much service, but may still be used with effect; others, again, are fresh and brimming over with life. The writer must make his own choice. As the effect he produces will depend on the use of his own judgment, he would be well advised to deal sparingly in metaphor until he has gained experience. It is better to avoid them altogether than to use overworked phrases which have done duty in a thousand articles, like "paves the way for," "opens the door to," "drop the curtain on," "cries aloud for," "goes hand-in-hand with," "heralds the advent of." If no other choice is available be plain and prosaic rather

than use metaphors that have become shop-soiled and meaningless from over-use.

The phrases quoted were, when first introduced, fresh and vivid, and helped the author over many a stony place. Metaphor is one of the most useful weapons in the literary man's armoury, and enables him to express vividly in ten words what he could not convey in fifty, by using words in their literal meaning. As already said, however, the beginner should be cautious in using them, and avoid any that have passed into cant phrases. Above all, he must not mix his metaphors by telling his readers, for example, that "the General's *burning* indignation *chilled* the soldiers."

SUPERLATIVES.—In his anxiety to break the shackles of conventional style, of which he is acutely conscious, the young writer is often tempted to over-indulgence in superlatives and to perpetrate other extravagances. He feels that he must, at all costs, give free play to his thoughts. This is a healthy impulse, and does him credit. But he must not let it run away with him and indulge in needless extravagances. Among these is the misuse in superlatives. These when too freely used have a clamorous and noisy effect like that of a tub-thumper screaming at his audience. They also tend to obscure more restrained statements.

TIMIDITY A VICE.—On the other hand, do not be too timid. Don't be afraid to make a plain assertion and to call a spade a spade. Do not say a thing is

“*somewhat* old-fashioned ” if you are sure it is old-fashioned, or that the doctor’s visit “was not unconnected with the child’s whooping-cough.” Make a plain, straightforward declaration, and do not be afraid of being downright when you are sure of the ground.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION AND STYLE

DESCRIPTION A DIFFICULT ART.—The writer who has learnt to write interesting, descriptive prose has taken a long step forward in mastering the art of writing. Sound, descriptive copy is difficult to write. All art that is worth while demands study and practice, but achievement is worth all the efforts taken to obtain it. Every writer—whether he be novelist, journalist, essayist, or sermon-writer—should be able to put down his impressions on paper with vigour and exactness.

The basis of descriptive writing is close observation, and the manner of description depends on the object the writer tries to depict. A bicycle or a lady's dress would require scrupulous attention to detail. A skilled observer would look out for points of difference that distinguish the cycle and the dress from others of their kind. A distinguished French novelist once instructed one of his pupils to go to the stable and look carefully at a horse, and then, when he had done so, to write a description of it so graphic and clear, that from it anyone could pick out the horse from all others.

How the pupil carried out his task we do not know. He may or may not have overloaded his

description with a mass of details. But he would probably have best carried out his purpose by stressing one distinguishing point of the horse and filling in his background with less important details. To catalogue a mass of details is a mere mechanical process. It is when judgment is exercised in selecting them and some features are brought into greater or less prominence that it becomes interesting and reveals personality. For a writer expresses his individuality as much in description as in any other branch of art. A dozen critics witnessing a play will each receive a different impression from it. Similarly, a dozen painters will each paint the same landscape in a different way.

Through the medium of the writer's personality scenes and characters are most vividly portrayed. With imaginative insight he seizes on some significant feature or aspect of the scene before him, and then in a word-picture visualizes his impression for the reader.

To give a description by means of a word-picture in such a way that the picture bears the impress of truth requires sympathy and insight and, above all, selective judgment. Note the following from Guy de Maupassant's "La Maison Tellier":

"On either side of the road the green country stretched away. The colza, now in bloom, formed in spots a great carpet of undulating yellow, from which there rose a strong wholesome scent, a scent penetrating and pleasant, carried very far by the breeze. In

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the valley the bluebells held up their little azure heads, which the women wished to pluck, but M. Rivet refused to stop. Then in one place, a whole field looked as if it were sprinkled with blood, it was so crowded with poppies."

Here is a model of imaginative word-painting. Notice how clearly the French novelist has visualized the scene and with what economy of words and tightness of phrase. With a few deft strokes the picture stands out before us, and we see the Norman landscape as in a picture by Corot.

In the next example, from Mr. Frank Harris's story "Profit and Loss," the reader may study a detailed description based on acute observation:

"For Mrs. Tryon was one of those rare persons whose goodness inspires affectionate admiration. . . . In person, she was below medium height, of round, comfortable figure; she could never have been graceful or finely formed, but was evidently strong and healthy. Her face had both expression and charm; the oval of it was rounded by broad forehead and firm chin; the complexion had a healthy pallor; the features were regular, the brown eyes bright with a vivacity which was not wholly physical. The dark hair touched with silver alone showed her full age, which must have been about eight-and-forty."

There is always a danger in long description—the danger of tiring the reader. Descriptive writing should always be interesting, to attract and hold the reader. But details themselves are dry and uninviting. How, then, should they be presented?

We have already shown one method that dispenses with detailed description—that of the imaginative word-picture. In this, by means of suggestion, the writer conveys his own impression of the scene he describes, and does so more effectively and strikingly than would be possible in a catalogue of details. Here is a picture drawn by a master hand. It is from Mr. H. G. Wells's powerful story "The Cone":

"‘That’s the cone I’ve been telling you of,’ shouted Horrocks; ‘and below that, sixty feet of fire and molten metal, with the air of the blast frothing through it like gas in soda-water.’

"Raut gripped the hand-rail tightly, and stared down at the cone. The heat was intense. The boiling of the iron and the tumult of the blast made a thunderous accompaniment to Horrocks's voice. But the thing had to be gone through now. Perhaps, after all. . . .

"‘In the middle,’ bawled Horrocks, ‘temperature near a thousand degrees. If you were dropped into it . . . you’d flash into flame like a pinch of gun-powder in a candle. Put your hand out and feel the heat of his breath. Why, even up here I’ve seen the rain-water boiling off the trucks. And that cone there. It’s a damned sight too hot for roasting cakes. The top side of it’s three hundred degrees. It will boil the blood out of you in no time.’”

A description of a blast furnace in operation written, say, by an engineer would be no more exciting than a report of the Iron and Steel Institute. But here,

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as seen through the eye of a great novelist, it becomes a monster of writhing fire and sulphurous vapours.

Let us take another type of description, the sympathetic and semi-humorous, a type in which Mr. E. V. Lucas excels perhaps as well as any modern English writer. This extract from "Good Company : A Rally of Men" :

"Alfred Mynn . . . weighed in his active prime nineteen stone, and towards the end twenty-four, and was over six feet in his stockings. The portraits of him are like those of a prize man at the Agricultural Hall. In one of them he stands flannelled and bare headed on a village green, with a church—perhaps his own Goudhurst—behind him, a belt round his equator, a ridiculous little tooth-pick of a bat on his colossal shoulder, and a quiet smile (as of one who expected half-volleys later in the day, and would know what to do with them when they arrived) on his vast and kindly yeoman's face."

Charles Dickens relieved the heaviness of long descriptions with sprightly humour. Giving an account of the pictures in a room, he says :

"As substitute, I had four angels of Queen Anne's reign, taking a complacent gentleman to heaven, in festoons, with some difficulty; and a composition in needlework, representing fruit, a kettle, and an alphabet."

Sometimes a gifted writer conveys a definite impression in a line, as when Charles Reade says of one of his characters :

“He was only a man, but he was as faithful as a dog.”

The story writer can also make the emotions of his puppets vivid and real by a line or two of dialogue interspersed with one or two descriptive strokes :

“‘You dare to threaten me!’ said Frank, raising his clenched hand, as if to strike.

“His accuser recoiled.

“‘Are you not afraid of what’s coming to you?’ he asked, in a tone that he strove to make conciliatory.

“Frank’s eyes blazed with hatred. ‘Afraid of you!’ he exclaimed with contempt. ‘I’m not afraid of a waggon-load of *your* sort.’”

The examples given of descriptive writing illustrate the variety of methods that may be tried by the young writer. But those who wish to master this branch of the art must not confine their attention to the specimens given here. In the works of all the best modern novelists and essayists they will find hundreds of examples that will well repay critical examination.

ATMOSPHERE is closely associated with description. Indeed, the two are akin. Atmosphere is difficult to define, but is an influence, mysterious and elusive, that expresses the mood of the writer and manifests his personality. When the story is of adventure and battle the writer conveys his atmosphere in curt dialogue, rapid action, and phrases that stir the blood. Mystery, too, is imparted by the setting, and words of ghostly import.

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Words, like melodies, have associations for both writer and reader, and by their atmosphere give a tone to description difficult to define, but none less definite in effect. In Rossetti's "Blessed Damosel," the first lines—

The Blessed Damosel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven,

we have both setting and atmosphere, by the association of a few simple words.

More will be said on atmosphere in the section on Short-Story Writing.

STYLE.—In the previous pages we have discussed the essentials of a simple, vigorous, clear, and appropriate style. We have shown the beginner that he must eschew vague, abstract words; avoid circumlocution; choose familiar words in preference to the far-fetched; hold no commerce with jargon; and use transitive verbs. These and other notice boards we have set up.

What, then, remains to be said on the question of style? For it may be fairly claimed that if the novice follows the instructions already given, and practises the writing of English, he cannot fail to write simply and clearly. What more is wanted? "To learn to write a good style," is the answer a Professor of Literature would give you.

But what, then, is style?

A hundred definitions of style have been given, all more or less satisfactory.

Dr. Jowett describes it as follows :

"The perfection of style is variety in unity, freedom, ease, clearness, the power of saying anything and of striking any note in the scale of human feeling without *impropriety*."

Sir A. Quiller-Couch gives a similar definition in simpler form :

"As manifested in literature it [style] is the power to touch with ease, grace, precision any note in the gamut of human thought or emotion."

Then take Goethe. He descends from the general to the particular and strikes a new note—the note of *personality*.

"We should endeavour," he says, "to use words that correspond as closely as possible with what we feel, see, think, imagine, experience, and reason. It is an endeavour *we cannot evade* and must daily renew."

This last definition goes to the heart of the problem. Writing is an art and therefore personal. All literature is personal. Goethe tells us to use words that correspond as closely as possible with what we feel, see, think, imagine, experience, and reason; in other words, that we must express *our own* feelings, experiences, and reasons in the most appropriate language at our command. This means that we must form our own style.

Style is, then, no more than an expression of *personality*. Flaubert and other French writers may try to depress the art of writing to terms of mathematical formulæ, but the stumbling-block of *personality*

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always remains to flout their conclusions and upset calculations. Until the human mind becomes, in Huxley's phrase, a cold, logical machine, capable of spinning the gossamers as well as forging the anchors of the mind, literature will be coloured by the joys and sorrows, the loves and fears, of those who write it.

No two writers form their sentences alike, nor do they think alike. The glory of literature is in its variety. Whatever men have felt or thought or suffered has been expressed in terms of the author's own personality, and whatever charm or beauty or distinction is in his writings spring from the same sources.

The aim, then, of the beginner should be to express his own individuality, to be natural, to avoid copying the style of other writers—in short, to be himself. At all cost, avoid imitation. If you force your composition into a style unsuited to your temperament, the writing will lack the grace and ease which you have just been told on high authority, is the hall-mark of a good style.

Do not attempt to be humorous if, like the proverbial Scotsman, "you joke with difficulty," nor attempt the oracular or platitudinous if your friends tell you your style lacks solidity.

When you have something to tell the world, and have clearly thought it out, express it in sound, concrete words; in sentences of varied length that flow and balance easily. Be original. Let the message

and the manner of presenting it be your own. With practice you will develop a natural and vigorous style.

PRACTISE WRITING.—Enough has been said in the preceding pages to convince you that the art of writing can only be mastered by close study and assiduous application. Some rough and ready rules have been given which will help you to avoid a weak and flashy style. But you can only master this art as you would those of painting and music, by constant and rigorous practice. You can gain this in various ways. Letter-writing affords excellent practice. You can also learn to express your thoughts and impressions by keeping a diary. Either method will help in the struggle towards self-expression. There are many other exercises that will occur to the resourceful. Watch the scene in a busy street or market-place for ten minutes or so. Then go home and record your impressions of it on paper. Think over the play or the cinema show you saw last night, and then express your opinion of it. Read carefully a leading article in a newspaper, and then write out your own view of the subject discussed in the article. Short essays of a simple form should next be attempted. These should be on everyday affairs familiar to the writer. Longfellow's advice to the sculptor—

That is best that lieth nearest,
Shape from that thy work of art—

is equally applicable to the literary beginner. One duty the novice should not omit. Read over what

you have written after an interval of a few days. Read your letters and essays carefully and critically. You will probably find—as most beginners do—that you have been writing in a stilted, conventional style. In your anxiety to keep the trodden ways, you have been too timid to allow originality to assert itself.

Banish timidity. It is the besetting sin of the amateur. When you have mastered the plain directions already given, let yourself go. Don't be afraid to speak plainly or even bluntly. Only by overcoming your diffidence and timidity can you acquire the desirable ease and liberty in non-essentials that marks the accomplished writer.

STUDY THE GREAT WRITERS.—Everyone with literary ambitions should study the great Masters of English Literature, those “spokesmen and prophets of the human family,” as Newman describes them. In the large utterances of Shakespeare and Milton, in the noble rhythms of the English Bible, and in the writings of authors whose names everlastingly recall the heritage they have left us—Bunyan, Defoe, Swift, Steele, Fielding, Burke, Shelley, and Wordsworth—there lies the rich ore of human wisdom. In their pages is a summary of all that concerns man in his brief span of existence. The scroll of life in its thousand aspects is there unrolled so that we, the heirs of the ages, may learn and profit. English literature is a part of our national life. It has done much to mould the national character and temper. In the

great words of these writers we have found our dearest beliefs, our undying hopes, and fondest aspirations.

Read them then for profit, for the knowledge they impart, for the wisdom they instil, and the wide horizons they unfold. Read them, too, for the stimulus and inspiration they give; for the glowing imagery, the lofty thoughts; and the inimitable melody and beauty of the words and phrases in which these are embodied.

But read them principally for stimulus and inspiration. Some teachers of writing tell their pupils to read writers like Ruskin and Macaulay and then to imitate their styles. This is wrong, as a reference to the section on Style sufficiently explains. Cultivate your own style; for your own, however crude, is infinitely to be preferred to the weak imitation of a great stylist.

Be yourself. In these great exemplars you will find much to kindle imagination and fire your ambition to follow worthily in the footsteps of these authors and sustain the high traditions they have established. Steep yourself in their writings and you will find your own ideas flow more freely and your work stamped with more originality. Nearly a century and a half ago Sir Joshua Reynolds gave similar advice to his art students in his Second Discourse on the "Art of Painting":

"The more extensive, therefore, your acquaintance is with the works of those who have excelled, the more extensive will be your power of *invention*, and

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what will appear still more like a paradox, *the more original will be your conception.*"

Sir Joshua's counsel is wise, and it applies just as certainly to the art of writing as to the study of painting.

Newman's testimony is more directly emphatic:

"It will not answer to make light of literature or neglect its study; rather we may be sure that, in proportion as we master it in whatever language, and imbibe its spirit, we shall ourselves become in our own measure the ministers of like benefits to others—be they many or few, be they in the obscure or the more distinguished walks of life—who are united to us by social ties, and are within the sphere of our personal influence."

Remember always that literature is alive and vibrant. The great writers of the past speak to us not as with sepulchral voices from the grave, but in the warm, breathing tones of living men. There is an antiseptic quality in their interest in all that concerns human life that keeps them sweet and fresh for us. This will endear them also to future generations. Their works live because they are alive. For this reason, if for no other, read and study them.

PART II
HOW TO SUCCEED AS A FREE-LANCE
JOURNALIST

CHAPTER I

WHAT THE BEGINNER SHOULD KNOW

HOW TO BEGIN.—If you wish to become a free-lance journalist and have sufficient confidence in your powers you can begin at once.

You do not have to undergo a preliminary training. A budding attorney has to serve his articles. A medical student must walk the hospitals, and go through a severe course of study. Men in all trades and professions only become masters of their craft after a long term of apprenticeship. But for the novice embarking on the stormy sea of free-lance journalism there is none of this. All he requires at the outset is a table and chair, a fountain-pen, a quire of paper, and a good dictionary, and he is equipped for the fray.

Though you may not know a single pressman by sight and have no acquaintance with editors and their ways, your chance of success is just as great as that of the man whose way into the editorial sanctum has been made easy by a sheaf of introductions. There is no close corporation in journalism to protect the professional pressman from the competition of the free-lance. He may, if he thinks it desirable, bombard the editor with as many manuscripts as he can write. What is more, the editor who is always on the lookout

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for new talent will be glad—at least, at the outset—to receive them. Whether he will accept and publish them is another matter, but the beginner may be confidently assured that the children of his fancy will get the consideration they deserve.

But do not imagine from this that the road to success is a primrose path. You probably know enough from the experiences of friends and acquaintances that you will have to encounter as many disappointments and difficulties in this as in any other profession.

WHAT THE FREE-LANCE MUST KNOW AND DO.—We have already said that the free-lance has no apprenticeship to serve and requires no special training. But this is not the whole truth. He must have ideas, and be able to express them in clear, concise English. To do this he must study the art of writing, as given in the first section of this book. He should then assiduously practise writing English. When he has acquired sufficient facility in this, and can write with fluency and ease, he may begin to submit his articles and paragraphs to the editors of suitable papers. Then his real training as a journalist will begin.

It is possible, but quite unlikely, that his first efforts to market his copy will be successful; that editors will smile with pleasure when they read it, and rub their hands and exclaim: "This is just what we want." A few writers, whose names are familiar as household words, have won fame and position at a

bound, and taken Fleet Street by storm with their first contributions to the Press.

But these are exceptional experiences. Generally the beginner ploughs a very hard and stony furrow. From the very outset he encounters disappointment. His first article or story has probably cost him much anxious thought. He has written and re-written it. Added a sentence here, crossed out a phrase there, until at last when it has been polished to his satisfaction he posts it, not without qualms and doubts, and a secret elation at the quality of his work. Then about a week later the postman puts a bulky envelope in the box, and the fond author discovers to his chagrin that this treasured first child of his fancy has been returned with a politely worded printed slip from the editor, declining his offering.

Some young writers are so disappointed by the rejection of their first effort that they at once abandon the idea of finding a career in journalism. This, it need scarcely be said, is foolish. Others, with more determination, post the essay again to another editor, and then sit down and write another. This is the right spirit. Without pluck and indomitable perseverance the free-lance cannot hope to get a foothold in journalism. He must be prepared to encounter disappointment after disappointment, to face rejection after rejection with an equable mind, to touch up his manuscripts and send them out again in the hope that they will find favour in the eyes of another editor. To receive almost daily visits from the postman

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bringing back rejected MSS. has been the lot of thousands of literary aspirants. Many men who are either famous as novelists or have won established positions as journalists have gone through this heart-breaking experience. In his "Literary Recollections," Mr. Jerome K. Jerome speaks with amusing candour of those early days when his essays and stories were sent on fruitless errands to every editorial office in London. Mr. W. L. George, the well-known novelist, carefully keeps the 700 rejection slips he has received from newspapers and periodicals. Thousands of other aspirants have had similar experiences. Indeed, to be rejected is at times the lot of all who send in unsolicited contributions.

WHY MANUSCRIPTS ARE REJECTED.—An article or paragraph may be turned down for one of several reasons, but the young writer smarting under the disappointment of seeing a dozen of his cherished contributions declined with thanks attributes his failure to favouritism. He thinks that other writers have a "pull" with the editor, and that for social or other reasons he favours them.

Let him disabuse his mind of this idea at once. There is no favouritism in journalism. An editor may pay, perhaps, less critical attention to the work of a well-known contributor. He knows his man and the influence his writings exert on his readers. But if an article giving a fresh point of view that will be likely to interest his readers comes to hand from some hitherto unknown writer, the editor will have

no compunction in accepting the work of the new-comer.

The editor is a shrewd, clear-headed man, who is really the servant and literary taster of his 50,000 or 100,000 readers. If he were not this he would not hold his position long. He caters for a public who buy his magazine or paper because they like the style of its contents. The editor's job is to hold that public together and attract new readers. To do this he keeps a sharp lookout for new contributors and welcomes any that give evidence of originality in style and treatment. The beginner should realize that though he is disappointed at the rejection of his manuscript, the editor and his sub., who have carefully examined his offering, are equally disappointed, and have spent valuable time in a fruitless quest for suitable copy.

But we have still to consider why manuscripts are rejected.

The first and most obvious reason is that they are not suitable for the publications to which they are sent. Articles or stories may be excellent, and quite suitable for certain periodicals, and would, if sent to these, be eagerly welcomed and printed. But they have been sent to the wrong market. The editor who receives them knows, after a hasty perusal, that they are not the stuff his readers want, so he returns them.

This is a mistake the beginner often makes; the man of experience—never. To take one or two

extreme examples. Journals like the *Boy's Own Paper* do not want articles on Fiscal Reform or Empire Preference. Popular journals of the *Answers* or *Tit-Bits* type have no use for learned dissertations on Relativity. Nor would an article on Famous Engineering Feats interest readers of the *Feathered World*. Every periodical has an individuality of its own. Even the fiction weeklies and monthlies greatly differ from each other in the style and treatment of the stories they publish. A story suitable for *Answers* would be rejected by the Editor of the *London Magazine*, and an article that would please the Editor of *John Bull* would stand no chance of acceptance at the office of *John o' London's Weekly*. Examine a few back numbers of, say, *Pearson's Weekly* and you will find when you look at the short story or the serial that these are all of one definite type, which does not vary week by week. The Editor may not consider this the best type of fiction, but he knows from long experience that this is the class of story that exactly suits his readers, and that he dare not risk any variation from it.

From this it is clear that before sending his copy to any paper, the novice should thoroughly know the kind of copy that will be acceptable. When he has written his article there may be hundreds of journals to whom it may be sent, but only a dozen for which it would be suitable. A paper must retain its individuality or perish. If the contents of all

journals were alike in style and finish, a reader would have no reason for buying one in preference to another. Of this an editor is well aware, and strives to maintain the same tone through number after number. Unless writers are satisfied that they have caught this tone or style in the essays they write, it is foolish to court rejection by sending them in.

Another cause of articles being rejected is lack of originality in the MS. sent in. The would-be contributor may be honest as daylight, he may scorn the notion of filching other men's ideas, but, nevertheless, his article, in the editor's eyes, is nothing more than a re-hash of what has been said a hundred times before by other writers. He has yielded to the temptation to put down the first thought that flashed across his mind, and so unconsciously has revealed himself as a plagiarist.

Another cause of the novice's first failures is timidity. In his anxiety to follow the beaten path he is more conventional than the most formal of writers, and too timid to allow any originality to creep into his work; consequently his composition is lacking in freedom and ease.

By confessing, as he often does in a covering letter, that he is an amateur, the beginner prejudices editors against his MS. Nor should he seek to ingratiate himself with an editor by disclaiming any desire for remuneration, and intimating that the honour of appearing in his valuable paper is all the reward that

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is asked. Such an offer would be most properly resented by any editor of standing. A contribution that is worth printing is worth paying for. A journal of standing is always willing to pay a fair price for stories or articles that appeal to its readers. It will not take unsuitable matter at any price.

WHAT TO DO WITH REJECTED MANUSCRIPTS.—The young writer should not lose heart because of one or a dozen failures. If he cannot face the disappointment of constant rejection he had better try some other calling, for without perseverance and courage, success in journalism is impossible. Every rejection should only spur the novice to fresh effort and a closer study of the conditions. Keep on writing, but don't write merely for the sake of gaining facility and ease in writing. This is useful, but not enough to carry you to the goal of desire. Take greater pains in writing your stories. Write and rewrite them three or four times if necessary. Strive to make them clear and simple. But, above all, cultivate the habit of observation. Think your subject well out before you begin to write, and try to treat it from a new point of view. If you write up a commonplace subject in a commonplace way you are only inviting rejection. If your subject is worth writing up, it is worth all the care you can bestow on it. An article that is painstakingly written and carefully revised is less likely to be "declined with thanks" than one that has been dashed off with careless ease. There is

a saying that genius is 1 per cent. inspiration and 99 per cent. perspiration. Many able and successful writers have proved the truth of this.

The young writer will find it a helpful practice to put articles that have been several times rejected away in a drawer. Then, after an interval of a month, take them out again and compare them critically with the literary contents of the journals to which they have been sent. In this way he may learn how far his own writings conform to the standards set in these periodicals. He will also, after this interval, be able to discern the faults in his own compositions. A searching analytical study of the articles editors do accept would be a useful guide and save him from committing obvious blunders. Remember that every editor who has the prosperity of his journal at heart has definite ideals, and spends his energies in a ceaseless search for copy that will help him to attain the desired standards. If he sees in your MS. the promise of what he wants, it is not unlikely that he will write and point out some weakness or fault in technique in your story. If he does this, give careful attention to his criticism and profit by it. An editor does not waste his time in criticizing useless rubbish, and only takes an interest in contributors who may be useful to him. So that when he pays you the compliment of writing, you may be sure that he sees merit in your copy.

Some would-be journalists take no pains to amend

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or improve their copy, believing that by perseverance alone they can soften the editorial heart. They have heard many stories of beginners, who have grimly held on despite rebuffs and rejections and have finally triumphed, that they believe that determination alone will win them success. This is a wrong view. Pertinacity will never enable a writer to sell worthless copy. Let him persevere by all means, but he must expend as much of his energy in improving his copy as in trying to place it.

WHAT AN EDITOR WANTS.—The highbrow loves to sneer at what he calls “journalese,” or journalists’ English. It gives him a pleasing sense of self-importance when he discovers maltreated idiom or mixed metaphor in a newspaper article, which some overworked pressman has dashed off at furious speed. But it may be doubted if those who assume this air of superiority could write any better or even as well.

The journalist’s pen flies over the paper in an eager race with the office clock. He has to turn out his copy to the minute. He has no time to consider niceties of phrase, or the balance and rhythm of sentences. All about him is rush and bustle. The printer is impatiently waiting for his slips, minutes and even seconds are vitally important. With frenzied haste the perspiring journalist scribbles sentence after sentence and paragraph after paragraph, till at last his task is completed, and he sighs contentedly as he notices that his work is well up to time.

Professors of English who pillory his hackneyed phrases and solecisms in University textbooks may not consider his style the best. To write melodious English prose under these conditions would be impossible.

Newspaper English may not satisfy the purist, but it is none the less excellent English, and it has the vital qualities that constitute good style. It is clear and vigorous. It tells a story simply and without ambiguity. It is definite and picturesque, and there is never any shadow of doubt as to its meaning. Journalese is never mere word-spinning. It is never vague. On the contrary, it is always concrete and direct. The journalist leaves platitude to the moralist, and jargon to the politician and bureaucrat. Occasionally he may, in the haste of composition, use some phrases and circumlocutions beloved of the jargon-monger, but the editor who has an aversion for what is obscure and meaningless always uses the blue pencil ruthlessly.

In the first section of this book, the student of letters was urged to be simple and perspicuous in his composition, to be vigorous and direct in expressing his ideas. These qualities are invaluable to the free-lance. He must strive to make his meaning plain to the dullest of his readers. Thousands of articles are rejected because the meaning is obscured and bewildering. English that cannot be understood at a glance is of no use to newspaper readers

BE FRESH AND TOPICAL.—The author is a student, the journalist a man of affairs. The latter takes an active part in the life around him. Not only does he help to create public opinion, he also voices it. He must, above all, be fresh and topical. Every day new problems arise that must be explained and discussed. Every morning public affairs take on a new aspect. Every evening there is a record of some great discovery, the publication of some book, the rise of some star in the theatrical world, or some dire calamity like a great fire or railway accident. All or any of these profoundly stir the public mind, and it is the business of the journalist to render an account of them. If he is ever ready to comment on them sensibly and shrewdly, without being trite and commonplace, he has in him the makings of a good journalist.

WRITE WITH CONVICTION.—There is a popular impression that journalists are modern soldiers of fortune, who sell their pens to the highest bidder. It was believed in pre-war days that the anti-Home Rule articles in one Unionist London daily were written by Sinn Feiners, and the political articles in another Conservative newspaper, the work of fervid Socialists. These are probably wicked inventions. As in other professions, there are among journalists men who put pocket before principle, but these are a small minority. The majority of pressmen keep an open mind on public questions. It is their business to examine questions from every

point of view. Their general mental attitude is that of Lord Melbourne when he said of Macaulay :

"I wish I could be as sure of any one thing as Tom Macaulay is of everything."

There are men, too, without settled convictions who seek popularity by voicing public sentiment. This may seem an easy way of gaining editorial favour, but really it is not. There is a lack of conviction in the copy they turn out that is apparent to all but the dullest of readers.

Write with conviction and you write with power. There is moral force in the articles of a man who knows his own mind that seizes and holds the reader's interest. He is expressing his own personality, his real self. The reader may know nothing of the writer's habits, he may not even know his name, but he has had a glimpse of the real man himself in his essay. That is the writer's triumph—he has expressed himself. When he can do this he is sure of a public.

The writer with firm convictions and whose primary motive is not to write, but reform abuses or advocate some cause, will quickly gain the public ear if he can write simply and vigorously. His enthusiasm and earnestness give life and fire to his compositions. It lifts him out of the ruck, and he is something more than a mere hack grinding out words at so much per thousand.

Among present-day journalists are many whose work bears the impress of thought and conviction.

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Space only permits the mention of a few of them here, but those whose names we give influence collectively the thoughts and opinions of millions of their fellow-countrymen—T. P. O'Connor, J. L. Garvin, Robert Blatchford, Wilfred Whitten, and A. G. Gardiner.

By men of this type the best traditions of journalism are maintained, and its influence on public opinion is strengthened and solidified.

CHAPTER II

PARAGRAPH WRITING—THE NEWS PAR.—ARTICLES

TYPES OF PARAGRAPHS.—There are three types of paragraphs that interest the readers of newspapers and journals: the news par.; the par. in which opinion is expressed, generally known as the comment par.; and the humorous par.

THE NEWS PARAGRAPH.—Many free-lance journalists ignore paragraph writing. They think it unworthy serious notice because its money-making possibilities are too small. Perhaps from their own point of view they are right. We have, however, travelled far since the old Grub Street days, and a century has elapsed since Charles Lamb wrote pars. for the *Morning Post* at sixpence a paragraph. Some paragraph writers to-day do very well indeed, and find it very remunerative, but these are mostly journalists who deal with special subjects and have a ready market for their wares.

The novice should certainly try his prentice hand at par. writing, and especially the news par. Writing a news par. is excellent practice for the beginner.

At first he will find it difficult to pack into one hundred words all he wishes to say about an incident

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or event. The story he has to tell must be complete. No essential fact must be omitted. The effect of the mental picture he draws must be clear and definite.

It looks quite easy to do and the young writer approaches the task with confidence. But when he has completed his first attempt and examined his work he probably finds that he has used twice the number of words and omitted some necessary detail. He tries again and again, condensing here, expanding there, cutting out unnecessary words and phrases, and at last gets all his facts into proper perspective in the fewest possible words.

The educational value of practice of this kind is apparent, and no beginner should neglect it whether it brings him a cash return or not.

In the news paragraph the facts you have to relate are more important than the style in which they are set out.

The first point to remember in sending news pars. to the Press is that your news must be new. Don't send in stale news.

The warning seems too obvious, but you would be astonished if you knew how much information that is already moth-eaten is sent in to newspaper offices to strain the nerves and tempers of overworked sub-editors. Phone or wire your paragraph if it is sufficiently important. The next point is that your information must be correct in every detail. If you are careless in collecting your facts and you cause

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the newspapers to publish misstatements, they will register a black mark against you and be very chary of accepting copy from you in the future.

Some news items give unusual scope for the writers of paragraphs. When a railway accident has occurred there may be one or two notable people among the victims. Interviews with one or other of the injured may yield interesting information both for the daily and weekly papers. An announcement of a scientific discovery or invention, the marriage of a famous actress, the breaking of a sports record by some well-known athlete, or any such incident that excites public interest, all furnish incident for a string of pars. that may be distributed among a number of dailies and weeklies which feature this particular literary form. The writer of these pars. should not confine himself to bald detail, but should wherever possible introduce the human touch—the years of patient toil of the inventor, the tears of the bride's mother at the wedding. These are the points that attract the reader and make the narrative interesting.

PERSONAL PARAGRAPHS are always gladly received if the information they convey is first-hand. They should, of course, be free from personal bias or prejudice and be written with good taste.

SUBJECTS FOR NEWS PARS.—News paragraphs may be written on almost any and every subject, and it would be almost impossible to give anything like an exhaustive list of them. In the following list of subjects—short as it is—the young writer can see that

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ornere is scope for the exercise of his talents. But he need not confine himself to these. By the exercise of a little thought he can add to them almost indefinitely. Paragraphs under any of the following headings that are fresh and informative will be welcomed by many journals and newspapers :

Royalty, the Army, Air Force, Navy, Civil Service, Drama, Music, Parliament, Trade Unions, Insurance, Agriculture, the Churches, Economics, Sports, Art, Railways, Motoring, Road Dangers, Taxation and Rating.

COMMENT PARAGRAPHS.—Paragraphs in which opinions are expressed or comment made are best left severely alone by the free-lance, unless he is thoroughly conversant with the tone of the paper. His comments may be pertinent and his opinions well founded, but if these in any way run counter to the ideas of those responsible for the policy of the paper his copy will be turned down. A better plan is to communicate the facts and leave the editorial staff to supply its own comment.

HUMOROUS PARAGRAPHS.—There is one kind of comment par. editors are always pleased to see—the humorous par. If you have the power to stir your fellow-men to laughter, develop it and exploit it to the top of your bent. In the paragraph you will find an excellent medium for giving it expression. All but the most serious and sober journals will welcome it with open arms. In these sad, grey days the mirth producer is a public benefactor. Either in the Press

or on the stage his reward is sure, for the public is generous in its payments to those who make it laugh.

ARTICLES.—The most popular literary form for the free-lance is the article. There is a great demand for articles varying in length from 300 to 1,500 words.

In the *Daily Mail* short articles of 300 words appear daily, and are handsomely paid for. For other journals 500 to 1,000 words is a useful length. Articles for the newspapers should deal with matters of current interest, with subjects on which public attention is focussed at the moment. Topics such as Alien Immigration, Unemployment, Dearness of Food, the latest Test Match, Domestic Pets and how to Treat Them, Problems of Love and Marriage, are of interest to all readers when dealt with crisply and with freshness. Then there are others like Domestic Problems, the Change of Fashions, Country Life, Gardening, etc., that are of importance to large classes of readers.

The young writer should exercise care and discrimination in choosing his subject. Although the topic he proposes to treat may be one that interests readers, it may have been written up many times before, and if that is so a single glance at the title will prompt an editor to turn it down. He should therefore diligently study the newspaper columns daily, and satisfy himself that his subject will be new and attractive.

Another important consideration is the method of

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treatment. Before attempting to write an article for the Press, the novice will find it to his advantage to make an analytical study of a number of the best articles of experienced and competent journalists. He should note carefully how they begin and end, the general tone of the composition, and the skilful manner in which fact and comment are interwoven. If when he has completed this examination he is confident that he will be able after a little practice to write something that will conform to the standard of what he has read, by all means let him try his prentice hand. At his first attempt he will probably feel much discouraged. At every stage of his essay he will find himself confronted with difficulties.

“Is the opening not too tame and vapid? Surely an editor would not pass such clumsy sentences as these! How lacking in smoothness and ease the composition is!”

These and similar thoughts flash through the author's mind as he compares this first attempt with those of practised journalists. He sees, if he is endowed with a modicum of critical judgment, that his work is clumsy and amateurish and that it has all the faults of immaturity. So he wisely decides to tear it up and try again. In adopting this course he acts wisely. Editors are busy men and have little time to waste in wading through the first bungling attempts of would-be literary craftsmen.

After his first attempt the beginner finds the task

of composition less difficult. His ideas are still crudely expressed and his style is formal and conventional, but there are signs of improvement. Thus encouraged he tries again, and for some months practises writing articles and paragraphs, until at last he has acquired the ease and fluency of the ready writer.

Not till this stage is reached should the beginner court the rebuffs of an editorial staff. By adopting this course he will safeguard himself from many disappointments, and also show consideration for editors whose good-will he hopes to gain.

Before he begins the actual writing of his article the novice should have the outline of it clearly arranged in his mind.

He should also endeavour in his opening sentences to arrest the reader's attention. Many young writers are excessively timid at the start, and instead of taking a bold plunge into the subject, waste a large number of words in introducing it. This makes the reader impatient, and takes up space that should be devoted to developing the theme. The interest of an article is greatly lessened when a disproportionate amount of attention is devoted to preliminaries, and the writer who slowly wades into his subject, instead of plunging in, gravely prejudices any chance he may have of getting his article accepted.

There are a few "don'ts" that every young writer should remember when writing for the Press.

Don't be vague or use words loosely. The more definite the picture you draw the more clear and

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sharply cut will be the impression you make on the minds of those who read your article.

Don't be wordy and try to express your meaning in a dozen words when two will answer the purpose. Remember that you have only a limited number of words in which to get your effect, and that you will probably need them all.

Don't introduce cheap humour in a serious article. Humour is always welcome to the reading public in its right place, but, as an American writer says, to upset a freight-load of consecutive reasoning for the sake of a battered witticism is folly.

Don't use jargon or phrases that have become meaningless by over-use. You can express your meaning clearly and fully by using simple nouns.

Be economical in the use of adjectives. If you hit on the right nouns you will find you can dispense with many adjectives.

When you have completed your article, put it away for a day, and then read it critically and make any necessary corrections. If you are then satisfied with it, send it to a newspaper or periodical and try your luck.

For the writer who is painstaking and willing to spend time and labour in collecting interesting facts, popular papers like *John Bull*, *Answers*, and *Tit-Bits* offer a fair field. Short and snappy articles written in a popular style are always acceptable to papers of this class.

The illustrated magazines also offer a happy hunting ground to the enterprising free-lance. Only here the illustrations are as important as the letterpress, and if the writer can submit both in an interesting form his work is more likely to be favourably considered than an MS. alone.

The free-lance has a big choice of subjects that are suitable for illustration. For an example, "Among the Legal Luminaries" would make a good title for a bright and chatty article about Judges, counsel, and court functionaries. A few photos of leading lawyers would round off the article and make it attractive. In the same way, such subjects as Golf Amateurs, A Boxing Festival, Actors at Home, Bird Life in London, Historic Inns could be written up and illustrated in a way to please magazine readers.

In doing articles of this kind, which involve a great deal of labour, make quite sure before the actual work of writing is begun that the ground has not been covered before by some other writer. This can best be done by making periodic visits to a reading-room where all the leading magazines are taken. Here you can run through the titles of all the articles printed, and where you find one that treats the subject you propose to write up, read this carefully and find out if it covers the same ground as the one you intend to write.

If you are an acute observer, and can write in a vein of tolerant and kindly humour, you will find in

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the streets and markets of any great town an unending succession of subjects for pen and pencil.

The most heinous of all journalistic crimes is dullness. Both editor and reading public will forgive you many faults if only your copy is lively and entertaining. Ruthlessly cut out every sentence or phrase that does not help to build up your thesis or make your meaning clear. Leave rhetorical flourishes to the politician, and platitude to the parson. Aids to effect like these will not help you. You may or may not be original, for originality is hard to compass, and nearly everything that can be written on any conceivable subject has been said or written before. But if you cannot be original you can at least interpret life in terms of your own experiences and emotions. The old proverb says: "So many men, so many minds." In other words, there are as many different minds as there are men. This is true, and just as true that every mind surveys life from an angle of its own, and that through the medium of his own personality every man sees everything in a different way to his fellows. It is the business, then, of the writer to accentuate that difference, to express his own individuality, and to portray life as he sees it from his own point of view.

If you can present this, your articles will be fresh and vivid, and you will make a real contribution to the sum of human experience. For your writing will have the human touch that attracts readers as flowers attract the bee. The people who will read your

articles have thoughts and experiences similar to your own, and they love to gain a glimpse of the personality behind the pen.

One word of warning. Do not in endeavouring to express yourself try to cultivate an affected or exaggerated style. Be natural. The public has a keen sense of the ridiculous and laughs at eccentricity.

CHAPTER III

SPECIALISM IN JOURNALISM—LITERARY AGENTS, ETC.

THE WRITER WHO SPECIALIZES.—Goethe defined the well-educated man as one who knows “something of everything, and everything of something.”

Whatever the merits of the definition, it is unquestionably true that the man or woman who knows everything of something, or is at least conversant with the latest knowledge on the subject, enjoys respect and authority denied to others with greater general knowledge and experience.

This is the age of the specialist. In the learned professions, as in the arts, the man who knows commands the ear of his fellows and reaps the reward of his knowledge. In journalism the man who concentrates on one subject and can write about it with expert knowledge earns much more money than those who devote their attention to miscellaneous topics.

The journal of to-day is infinitely more informative and interesting than it has ever been. Fifty years ago John Morley alluded, in his book on “Compromise,” to “that mighty engine for keeping discussion on a low level, the daily newspaper.” Since then, and principally through the influence of that great journalist, the late Lord Northcliffe, the whole

tenor of the Press has been transformed. In former times the range of subjects discussed in the newspapers was strictly limited. Turn up old files of *The Times*, in what are still spoken of as "the spacious days of Delane," and you will find sheets of deadly dullness containing little else beside arid discussions of current politics. Then compare it with recent issues of the *Daily Mail*. In these you will see beside articles of Politics, Economics, Sport, disquisitions on a hundred other topics ranging from deep sea fishing to love problems.

The public that reads the periodical Press is also immensely greater. Forty years ago no daily newspaper had a circulation of 200,000. Now the sales of the principal dailies runs into millions. More than ever can the Press make good its claim to be the Fourth Estate of the Realm. As the authority of Parliament has declined, so has that of the Press vastly increased. The average Member of Parliament may speak slightly in the periphrastic phrase he affects of newspapers as "the ordinary sources of information," but he knows quite well how full and accurate that information is, and he is eager at all times to make use of the influence and publicity of the printed broadsheet.

With this rise of influence has ^{come} a public demand for first-hand information. The easy generalities of the professional journalist no longer satisfy the reader. He demands precise and definite information, and as a consequence of this we find

on the "splash" pages of our morning newspapers authoritative articles written in popular style over the signatures of ex-Cabinet Ministers, leading economists, trade union leaders, famous athletes, dramatists, actors, clergymen, and even by queens of petty Eastern States. Journalists who earn their livings by the use of their pens have legitimate cause for grumbling at this outside competition when they reflect that it comes from men whose own preserves are most carefully guarded. But journalists make no complaint. The secret of the power and influence of the Press lies in the fact that it is free and open to all, from the Prime Minister to the poorest citizen. Those who have anything to say have only to put it in writing and send it to the newspaper, where it will be judged on its merits, and according to these will be printed or rejected.

For the writer who has a thorough knowledge of a subject, or group of subjects, journalism offers excellent opportunities. Editors and public alike will always listen with respect to the expert. He has, moreover, a confidence and sureness of touch that wins attention. Many journalists have discovered, to their surprise and satisfaction, that when once they discarded general writing and adhered to one theme their incomes were doubled. Some who have become recognized authorities on their subjects find their earnings more than quadrupled.

For the writer on special subjects there are many

openings. The principal London and provincial dailies do not offer many of these, as most of them have their own staff writers on topics like Football, Cricket, Boxing, Lawn Tennis, the Drama; but where the specialist's subject is not too technical and can be treated in a popular and interesting style, the dailies provide the special writer with opportunities he should not neglect. Some provincial dailies, like the *Manchester Guardian*, publish large special supplements from time to time on Banking, Insurance, Advertising, Finance, Commerce, and other kindred subjects. The specialist on any of these subjects should not neglect any chances these may offer. Special articles on Finance, Industrial questions, Food Prices, and Labour topics are always welcome where the treatment is fresh and free from bias.

But the dailies do not exhaust the opportunities of the specialist writer. There is a very wide field before him. In London more than 700 periodicals are published, and there are many others in the provinces. Many of these, of course, can be of no service to the man who deals only with a special subject, but others, again, are almost ideal for his purpose.

Trade papers like the *Chemist and Druggist*, the *Grocer*, the *Cabinet-Maker*, the *Furniture Trade's Organizer*, the *Optician*, the *Mechanical World*, the *Engineer*, the *Co-operative News*, the *Architect*, the *Watchmaker and Jeweller*, *Commercial Art*, *Colour*,

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Drawing and Design, the Railway and Insurance journals, Financial journals and magazines are all useful targets for the free-lance.

Then there are journals devoted to special pursuits and pastimes, like *Poultry*, the *Small-Holder*, the *Radio Press*, Football, Cycling, and Motor journals, the *Gardener*, papers devoted to Photography, Lawn Tennis, Cricket, all of which present openings. If you have a real knowledge of any of these subjects you should not find it difficult to place your contributions.

For the addresses of the journals dealing with the above-mentioned topics, consult a Press Directory. These you will find in any free library.

THE WOMAN FREE-LANCE.—The woman with a talent for writing has an excellent chance in journalism to-day. Every daily paper, including *The Times*, has a woman's page devoted to topics of feminine interest. Many, too, have a Children's Corner, in which simple fairy stories are published. Women who can write interestingly on fashions, dressmaking, aids to beauty, domestic work, or can write bright, snappy social notes have excellent outlets for their energy and enthusiasm. In addition to the dailies there are many journals, like *Eve*, the *Girl's Own Paper*, *Home Notes*, *Home Chat*, *Woman's Work*, the *Home Magazine*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Woman's World*, *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's Life*, and *Woman's Friend*, which are written by women for women. These journals consist largely of fiction, but all print

articles on subjects on which a competent woman journalist should be able to write with familiarity and ease.

LITERARY AGENCIES.—Some journalistic aspirants who know how easily well-known writers sell their copy through the medium of literary agencies may be tempted to try and dispose of their manuscripts in the same way.

The beginner would be well advised not to do this, but instead to send his literary offerings direct to the journals he thinks will publish them.

The literary agent can do no more for the beginner than he can do for himself. The agent may be on most excellent terms with the editorial staffs of all the leading papers. He may be a man whose judgment is relied on, but he cannot on that account persuade an editor to take an article or story which is not suitable for the paper. As we have said before, there is no favouritism in newspaper offices. The obscure writer has just as good a chance as the proprietor's son of getting his copy accepted.

To the writer who has made his mark the literary agent is a valuable ally. The quality of the author's copy is known and has a definite market value. The agent sells his client's wares on commission, and as the amount of commission depends upon the price he gets, he sells them at the highest rate possible. As he has experience and a comprehensive knowledge of markets in which to sell, he generally makes a better bargain for the author than that gentleman could

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make for himself, and in addition saves him the trouble of selling his own manuscripts.

The best class of literary agencies only charge a commission on the articles and books they sell. They ask for no fee or preliminary expenses.

Another class of agents exact fees from their clients, and delude them with fairy tales of their wonderful triumphs in placing the work of other authors.

Do not under any circumstances pay a fee. If an agent asks it you may be sure that he has no hope of selling your work. If he had, he would be content with the commission he earned by the sale of it.

Be your own salesman. You may at the start be handicapped by lack of experience and knowledge, but you will soon discover the best markets in which to offer your writings, and you will then have the satisfaction of knowing that any success you attain will have been achieved by your own unaided efforts.

SELLING TO SYNDICATES.—Among the possible markets open to writers of articles there are, in addition to newspapers and periodicals, a few syndicates who buy articles and stories outright and resell them to a number of provincial journals. This is an outlet the young writer should not neglect. Among the best of these are Tillotson's Newspaper Literature Bureau, Bolton, Lancs.; the Northern Newspaper Syndicate, Kendal; Newspaper Features, Ltd., 8, Princes Street, S.W. 1.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE TO SEND YOUR WRITINGS

IN the previous chapters of this section we have given general indications of the best outlets for the young journalist's work. We shall now point them out more specifically.

No definite advice can be given showing where a particular article or paragraph should be sent. That depends principally on the subject of the article and largely on the style of treatment. The counsel given in a previous chapter may be appropriately repeated here.

Before you send a contribution to any newspaper or periodical, make yourself thoroughly familiar with the class of work it contains. If your writing is of the same class, you have more than a sporting chance of getting your article printed. This is much better than acting in a haphazard way and posting your contribution to the editor of the first paper that comes to your mind.

Among the London daily newspapers that welcome contributions from outsiders are the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Graphic*, the *Daily News*, the *Daily Chronicle*, the *Daily Sketch*, the *Daily Mirror*, *Daily Telegraph*, and *The Times*.

The three London evening papers, the *Star*, the *Evening Standard*, and the *Evening News*, and the Sunday papers, the *Weekly Dispatch* and the *Sunday Times*, also give consideration to the free-lance.

The young writer may also regard the following provincial dailies as providing a suitable outlet for his paragraph and articles: the *Yorkshire Post*, Leeds; the *Yorkshire Observer*, Bradford; the *Leeds Mercury*, Leeds; the *Daily Dispatch*, Manchester; the *Manchester Guardian*, Manchester; the *Liverpool Daily Post*, Liverpool; the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Sheffield; the *Birmingham Daily Post*, Birmingham; the *Newcastle Daily Journal*, Newcastle-on-Tyne; the *Nottingham Daily Guardian*, Nottingham; the *Western Mail*, Cardiff; the *Bristol Times and Mirror*, Bristol; the *Western Daily Press*, Bristol; the *Yorkshire Herald*, York; the *Lancashire Daily Post*, Preston; the *North Mail*, Newcastle-on-Tyne; the *Hull Daily Mail*, Hull; the *South Wales Daily News*, Cardiff; the *Scotsman*, Edinburgh; the *Glasgow Herald*, Glasgow; the *Dundee Advertiser*, Dundee; the *Dundee Courier*, Dundee; the *Staffordshire Daily Sentinel*, Stoke-on-Trent; the *East Anglian Daily Times*, Ipswich; and the *Bath Herald*, Bath.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but there are papers enough here for the novice to try his prentice hand on with short articles on general subjects. Nearly all of them also welcome news para-

graphs, the payment for which depends on the importance of the news contained in them. Would-be contributors should also note that all the provincial newspapers, the names of which are given above, and many others publish London letters daily. Paragraphs for these, which must be sent to the London office of the papers, should contain news or comment on some aspect of life in the metropolis.

The following London papers also publish many paragraphs: the *Star*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Sketch*, the *Daily Graphic*, the *Daily News*, and the *Daily Chronicle*.

Paragraphs may also be offered with confidence to weekly periodicals like *Truth* and *John Bull*. But here, again, the contributor should carefully study the style and treatment in back numbers before writing any copy for them.

London weeklies and monthlies offer an immense field for the free-lance, but it would be impossible within limited space to give even an approximate list of the journals suitable for his purpose. For his guidance we append a short list with a description of the class of journal. A complete list may be found in the "Literary Year Book" (Black), or from Willings' or Sells' Press Guides.

All Sports Illustrated (Weekly), Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.—Publishes news and articles on all subjects dealing with sport.

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Answers, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.—Short, crisply written articles on topics of the day. Must be simply and brightly written.

Boys' Cinema, Fleetway House, E.C. 4.—Short articles on the cinema.

Boy's Own Paper, 4, Bouverie Street, E.C. 4.—Articles on boys' hobbies, sports, etc.

British Weekly, Warwick Square, E.C. 4.—A religious weekly. Has discovered many new writers.

Bystander, Tallis Street, E.C. 4.—Topical, well-written articles and sketches.

Country Life, 20, Tavistock Street, W.C.—Articles on country hobbies and sports.

Eve, 6, Great New Street, E.C. 4.—Short sketches and articles on fashion, art, society, and motoring.

Field, Bream's Buildings, E.C. 4.—Articles of sport.

Gentlewoman, 70, Long Acre, W.C. 2.—Articles interesting to women on fashions, etc.

Girl's Own Paper, 4, Bouverie Street, E.C. 4.—Articles for girls and women.

The Graphic, Tallis Street, E.C. 4.—Accepts short articles. Must be well written.

Home Chat, Fleetway House, E.C. 4.—Articles on love and matters of domestic interest.

Home Notes, 18, Henrietta Street, W.C. 2.—Articles of domestic fashion and love interest. New writers encouraged.

Ideas, 46, Shoe Lane, E.C. 4.—Bright and snappy articles considered.

John Bull, 93, Long Acre, W.C. 2.—Smart and cynical articles, including revelations and exposures wanted.

John o' London's Weekly, 8-11, Southampton Street, W.C. 2.—Articles on books, art, the drama, and history.

Lady's Companion, 18, Henrietta Street, W.C. 2.—

Articles devoted to domestic affairs, dressmaking, and household management.

London Opinion, Southampton Street, W.C. 2.—Short concise articles, light and humorous.

Passing Show, 93, Long Acre, W.C. 2.—Humorous articles and topical skits.

Pearson's Weekly, 18, Henrietta Street, W.C. 2.—Pointed and convincing articles. New writers welcomed and encouraged.

Punch, 10, Bouverie Street, E.C. 4.—Short humorous articles.

Sketch, Essex Street, Strand, W.C.—Personal and stage articles favourably considered.

Woman's Friend, 18, Henrietta Street, W.C.—Bright articles on domestic subjects.

Woman's Weekly, Fleetway House, E.C. 4.—Articles on fashions, domestic and women's subjects.

Chambers's Journal, 339, High Street, Edinburgh.—Articles of general interest.

Connoisseur, 1, Duke Street, St. James's, S.W.1.—Articles on bric-à-brac, antiques, and rare curios.

London Magazine, Fleetway House, E.C. 4.—Articles must be of a striking character and well written.

In the above list periodicals like the *Spectator*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Nation and Athenæum*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, the *Cornhill Magazine*, the *Nineteenth Century and After*, the *Contemporary*, and the *Hibbert Journal* are not included. These represent the high-water mark of journalism and take only the work of well-known writers. Until he has won his spurs the young knight of the pen would be well

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advised to confine his attention to the list given above.

One word of advice in conclusion—do not regard an article as worthless that has been rejected three or four times. Possibly there are three or four editors ready to welcome it with open arms. *Nil desperandum* is an excellent motto for the budding journalist.

PART III
HOW TO WRITE SHORT STORIES

CHAPTER I

THE ART OF THE SHORT STORY

WHAT A SHORT STORY IS.—The literary beginner who feels a strong impulse to write short stories, whose imagination calls up pictures of strange and moving incidents, and whose ingenuity is taxed with thoughts of plots and crises must, before he takes up the task, find a satisfactory answer to the question, “What is a short story?”

No cut and dried definition gives him an answer. He has read hundreds of short stories and feels that he could write others just as good, but he wishes to know the limitations of the art, what he must do and what he must refrain from, what rules, if any, he must obey. It is the purpose of this section to answer these questions.

In the lively and illuminating introduction to the “Country of the Blind, and other Short Stories,” Mr. H. G. Wells tells us in unmistakable terms what the short story is:

“The short story is a fiction that may be read in something under an hour, and so that it is moving and delightful, it does not matter whether it is as ‘trivial’ as a Japanese print of insects seen closely between grass stems, or as spacious as the prospect of the plain of Italy from Monte Motterone. It does

not matter whether it is human or inhuman, or whether it leaves you thinking deeply, or radiantly but superficially pleased. . . . It may be horrible or pathetic or funny or beautiful or profoundly illuminating, having only this essential—that it should take from fifteen to fifty minutes to read aloud.”

At its best the short story gives an impressionistic picture of life, the details of which are filled in by the reader's imagination. The short stories of Tourguenieff, Mérimée, Maupassant, Balzac, and Henry James give unforgettable pictures of life; life stripped of rhetoric, prejudices, and padding. These masters were as much artists in life as artists in style. They used words less for their own sake than for what they had the power to convey. They put life on paper with the flimsiest of verbal scaffolding about it.

THE ENGLISH SHORT STORY.—In England the short story has rarely been popular as a form of literary art.

The great Victorian novelists ignored it, preferring to work on a larger canvas. Only in *Blackwood's* and one or two other high-class magazines did it find any exponents. Then in the late 'eighties, Rudyard Kipling wrote those wonderful collections of short stories, beginning with “Wee Willie Winkle” and the “Drums of the Fore and Aft,” that revealed the blazing colours and mysterious enchantments of the Orient, and portrayed our Eastern

Empire more vividly than all the State dispatches that were ever written. Kipling's short stories created a greater sensation than anything that had been published since the days of Charles Dickens. They were read and discussed everywhere. Long and portentous articles were devoted to them in the critical reviews.

Not only were they read by the man-in-the-street, but what is more important, they were read by the man in the back street. For a time they formed the staple literary food of all classes. The average Englishman was as familiar with Ortheris and Learyoyd as the Athenian citizen with the attributes of his legendary heroes. Kipling's stories sprang at once into a popularity they have never since lost. They possessed that quality of universality that stamps them as the work of genius, and made an instant appeal to men of every race and class.

Kipling had a host of imitators. His stories were used as models for innumerable essays in fiction. Magazine editors began to see possibilities in the new form, and implored famous novelists to send them short stories. The public, too, whose appetite had been whetted by Kipling, clamoured for fiction in tabloid form. The short story became a craze.

In the next ten years a greater number were published than had appeared in the previous century. The younger writers took this new literary form very seriously. It became a theme for endless dis-

cussion and criticism. The young lions of the *National Observer* urged its claims and proclaimed its ideals with missionary zeal.

Frank Harris enlivened the pages of the *Fortnightly Review* with some perfect short stories.

W. W. Jacobs and Pett Ridge showed the possibilities of the humorous tale.

H. G. Wells painted cameos unforgettable in their beauty and richness of imagination.

Barrie, in his "Window in Thrums" and other collections of stories, depicted with rare insight and delightful humour the life of the Scottish peasantry.

Joseph Conrad and Morley Roberts told us sea stories that set the blood a-tingle and roused the spirit of adventure.

"The Yellow Book" exemplified the new spirit in some beautiful and strangely moving narratives.

For a time nothing damped the ardour of short-story writers. Their fecundity was amazing. The position of this new form as a vehicle of literary expression seemed to have become established.

Then, as suddenly as it had arisen, the new-born craze passed away.

Wells and Barrie found in the more exacting forms of the novel and drama greater outlets for the expression of their genius.

Other writers, too, who had made the short story a thing of beauty turned to other methods of self-expression. Since then the literary short story has had few exponents.

In its place has come the short story of action which enlivens the pages of the illustrated monthly magazines and popular weeklies.

It is the purpose of this section to examine these, to explain their method of construction, and to guide the beginner in the art of writing them.

The story of action may not have the high merit of the stories just mentioned, but it is, none the less, a sound form of literary art, and it is difficult to compass except by those who have knowledge of its technique. Those who affect to scorn the magazine short story should remember the poet's line :

That less than highest is good, and may be high.

THE SHORT STORY AND THE NOVEL.—The short story, which may run from 2,000 to 7,000 words, differs from the novel in style and treatment as well as in length.

In the 80,000 of a novel a much more complicated plot is unfolded. Often there are minor plots connected with the main theme. In it many incidents and events are described. The characters of the chief actors in the story are fully drawn, and there are as well a number of minor characters who play their part in the development of the plot.

From this the short story greatly differs. It is concerned only with one incident or happening, the development of which in an interesting and moving form is the concern of the writer. When this incident has been narrated, after a succession of climaxes,

and its point disclosed, the story is ended, however long or short it may be.

The plot of the short story, however complicated, is concerned only with this one idea. In it there is no room for long digressions or for a slow and gradual development of the story, as in a novel. The short-story writer must crowd everything within the confined limits of a few thousand words. He must grip the reader's interest at the beginning, and must provide a setting or background for his characters, develop the plot intensively as it moves from crisis to crisis, introduce dialogue and local colour, and reach his final climax with the utmost economy of words. Every sentence must help to build up the story to its culminating pinnacle. The writer must exercise his judgment in deciding what to leave out and what to put in the narrative. But in rejecting and selecting the author must not be content with mere outline. He must breathe into its bones the breath of life, and the story itself must be a living, pulsing entity.

Here, then, is the writer's problem. The short story may not tax an author's intellectual resources as the writing of a novel does. He has not to introduce a great variety of characters. His hero and heroine may only have to reveal themselves at one angle—in relation to the main incident of the story. But in one respect his task is infinitely more difficult. The novelist offers a panoramic view of life; the short-story writer has only a small group to show,

sees in their moods and experiences a counterpart of his own. Unconsciously he identifies himself with them and so becomes a passive actor in the drama.

This is the realism that convinces and gives the reader a sense of actuality. When it does this it is literature. For literature is more than a record of life; it is a part of life itself.

The incidents in a story may be purely imaginary, the characters figments of the author's mind, but if the incidents are such as might happen under exceptional circumstances and do not outrage our sense of probability, if the characters are moved by the same impulses and passions and ambitions as the men and women we know—in other words, if they exhibit human traits—then the story bears the hallmark of truth. It is this antiseptic quality of essential truth that makes a story alive and a-quiver with actuality.

All stories, however abnormal or fantastic, must have this quality of reality if they are to count and carry conviction. Even the most amazing and unnatural of Mr. Wells's inventions convince us of their reality. We know that the events recorded in the most improbable of his fictions might have happened to us or our next-door neighbours.

The artist who tells a story must group and select his details like the painter who draws a landscape. The painter surveys the scene before him. There is much more than could be included in one picture, so he proceeds to choose his subject. Possibly in this

there is a house, a group of trees, with a field or two, and a pool of water in the foreground.

Now, having chosen his subject, he must again exercise his judgment in selecting the details he will show in the picture. Manifestly he cannot include every leaf and branch and twig of the trees before him. To do so would destroy the harmony and rhythm of the picture. Instead he tries to get on his canvas the general effect of the scene before him, and paints in just as much detail as will enable him to get this.

In the same way the writer must plan out his story before he puts down a sentence. He must have a clear picture in his mind of the effect he means to produce, and rigidly exclude any details or any record of events that will weaken this effect or deflect the reader's mind from it.

THE PUBLIC YOU WRITE FOR.—There is an immense number of readers awaiting the skilled short-story writer, and many outlets for his work.

In addition to a large number of periodicals like the *Pictorial Magazine*, *Truth*, *Tit-Bits*, *Answers*, *Pearson's Weekly*, *Chambers's Journal*, and many others that feature fiction, there are about thirty magazines (most monthly) that are entirely devoted to short stories. The *Red*, *Yellow*, and *Violet* magazines of the Amalgamated Press appear fortnightly.

Of the different publics to which these periodicals cater and the particular types of stories they publish,

more will be said later. At present it is sufficient to say that the demand for cleverly constructed and well-written short stories is greater than the supply. This is not because there is any slackening of industry on the part of short-story writers, but because the majority of stories submitted are utterly lacking in interest, or are ill-constructed and badly written.

It is intended in the following chapters to point out the various pitfalls and difficulties the young author may have to encounter when he ventures on the path of short-story writing and to show him how he may avoid them.

CHAPTER II

THE PLOT

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PLOT.—“Young authors,” said the well-known editor of a fiction magazine, “make many mistakes. Too often they begin the story in the middle instead of following the natural order. Many of them let out the secret of the ending before the story is half told, and so kill the interest. Others, again, make their characters act inconsistently. But the worst fault of all is weakness of plot.

“Without a good plot a short story has little chance of acceptance by a modern magazine editor, unless it depicts character with the picturesque charm of the skilled writer.”

In the construction of the short story the plot is of first importance. It is the framework of the building, the skeleton of the body.

HOW TO CONSTRUCT PLOTS.—Here is the answer to the question frequently asked by the novice, “How shall I begin?” and the answer is, “First construct your plot. Get the main idea of the story worked out well. Then write out a synopsis and see how it looks.”

But again the novice asks: “How am I to find a new plot?”

The answer to this is less definite and satisfactory. A subject that is quite new is almost impossible to find. Authorities who have analyzed the classic short stories assert that there are only three or four dozen themes, and that all stories that have been written are variations on these. In this contention they are probably right. But there is still scope for the writer's imagination and ingenuity if not for his originality. The themes on which he can write may be few, but the variations and adaptations possible with these are endless. A striking illustration of this is found in the many fresh and vital stories that have been written on themes hackneyed beyond description. But editors do not care for plots that are worn out by constant use and have lost the qualities of surprise and interest. Themes like these are difficult to treat with freshness, and demand experience and skilful treatment that is only at the command of the accomplished writer. If he is to win the attention of the fiction editor, the novice must strain every effort to produce good plots. From these he may confidently hope to produce attractive stories. Without them his prospects are hopeless. But again he may ask: "How am I to find new plots?"

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMAGINATION.—The first answer to the question is: "By the development of the imagination."

We are all endowed with Imagination, in a greater or less degree, and we all exercise it more or less. Now, imagination, like any other faculty of the mind,

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can be trained and developed. Like the muscles of the body it requires exercise to strengthen it. Every time we read a poem or a novel or fairy tale we call it into action. It is kindled into activity at the prospect of a gorgeous sunset or a lovely landscape, by a beautiful picture, by the contemplation of all that is strange and mysterious, perplexing and amazing in the enigma we term human life.

But this is not enough. For those who would strengthen and develop it the exercise of the imagination must be, not occasional and spasmodic, but regular and systematic.

In cultivating it, develop also the faculty of close observation. Let your imagination play on the familiar objects you see around you. In the preface to his collection of short stories, Mr. H. G. Wells gives us an interesting glimpse at his own methods when framing the plots of these inimitable tales :

“I found that, taking almost anything as a starting-point and letting my thoughts play about it, there would presently come out of the darkness in a manner quite inexplicable some absurd or vivid little incident more or less relevant to the initial nucleus. . . . I would discover I was peering into remote and mysterious worlds, ruled by an order logical indeed, but other than our common sanity.”

MAKE A STUDY OF PLOTS.—Plots are worthy of special study, and everyone who aspires to be a successful short-story writer should devote as much

attention to them as possible. After you have been to the cinema or the theatre write out a synopsis of the cinema story and the play. Then make a careful analysis of them, showing how the story opened, indicating the successive crises, and a note of the ending. Also give a description of the characters introduced in the story.

You will find this an instructive and stimulating exercise, and quite as amusing as cross-word puzzles.

Read also the great masters of fiction—Fielding, Scott, Thackeray, Dickens, the Brontës, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Kipling, Arnold Bennett, O. Henry, but, above all, that prince of short-story writers, Guy de Maupassant.

It has been pointed out in another part of this book, but is well worth repeating here—the reading of works that have enriched and glorified our literature, not only instruct and elevate, they stimulate the *powers of invention*.

As stimulating the power of invention is precisely the object the beginner in short-story writing has in view, he will find the recommendation just given useful for his purpose.

He will find the short stories of Maupassant, Kipling, Wells, W. W. Jacobs, and O. Henry particularly worthy of careful study. He should not be satisfied merely with reading and re-reading them, but should make a careful synopsis of all that appeals to him as striking and vivid.

Some virulent critic of the English short story in

the nineties explained the distinction between the short story and the anecdote. "The short story," he said, "was Maupassant. The anecdote was damnable."

This reflection on English short-story writers of that period was ill-deserved. The implied compliment to Maupassant his just due. Whatever the defects of his style—and there is some justification for the criticism that it is morose, and sometimes even brutal—this French author was incomparably the greatest of modern short-story writers.

Maupassant's stories are unequal in quality, but all are worthy of study by anyone who wishes to excel in the art. Take the rustic tale "Boitelle," quaintly pathetic, tender, and sad.

Boitelle is an old peasant who works as an agricultural labourer for meagre wages. He has a wife and fourteen children. They are doing well. The neighbours cannot understand why he endures the lowest forms of drudgery. He explains that his parents would not allow him to marry as he wished. When he was young he met in Havre a young negress, with eyes like jet beads and glittering teeth and head-dress of yellow and red, and he fell in love with her. She agreed to marry him, and he took her into the country to see his parents and get their consent. The negress tried to ingratiate herself with his parents, and turned up her sleeves to help his mother in the kitchen, and was cheerful and respectful in demeanour. But all to no purpose. The parents

would have none of her. She was a blackamoor, and they refused their consent to their son's engagement. Young Boitelle was broken-hearted, and in a spirit of deep dejection took the negress back in all her finery to the railway station, whilst everyone in the countryside flocked across the fields to see a weeping black woman walking arm-in-arm with her disappointed lover. Like the true French peasant that he was, Boitelle would not dream of opposing his parents' will. But the disappointment broke his spirit, and his life was never the same again. Afterwards he married, but this brought him no happiness. He became indifferent and sunk lower and lower in the social scale. Once Happiness had beckoned to him, but he had failed to grasp it. Henceforward life meant only soulless drudgery.

Then there is the story of "Mlle. Fifi," who joins a number of German officers in an orgy at a château in Normandy during the Franco-German War in 1871. One of these officers, a fierce, dandified, little man, blows the smoke from his pipe into the mouth of the French girl, and then breaks out in a flood of contemptuous vituperation of her fellow-countrymen, who have just suffered humiliating defeat. Stung to the quick by these insults, the girl snatches a knife from the table, stabs the officer, and escapes from the château. She is hidden in the belfry of the church by the village priest. The German officers, beside themselves with rage at this outrage, scour the countryside for a month, but fail to find her. After

the war she is married by a "patriot without prejudice."

Another, "Deux Amis," is very short, but is one of the masterpieces of fiction. The plot is of the slightest. Two Parisian shopkeepers during the siege go fishing outside the fortifications. They are caught by the Prussians. They refuse to give the password and are shot as spies.

The story is told with austere restraint and supreme artistry. Those who would learn the value of economy of phrase in the development of a dramatic situation should read and re-read this marvellous little story.

The short summaries given here are but a trifling sample of the rich fruit to be found in Maupassant's horn of plenty. In the twenty-five volumes he bequeathed to the world before his career was tragically closed, are many short tales that reveal his genius for laying bare the springs of elemental emotions, and the secret things that lie crushed and withered in human hearts.

The student of mankind, as the short-story writer must be, cannot do better than give his days and nights to the study of Guy de Maupassant.

Among the best of his short masterpieces are :

"Boule de Suif," a story of the German invasion of France and the rigorous winter of 1871. It is notable as Maupassant's first essay in fiction. The most casual reader in scanning this story cannot fail to note how exact and acute is the writer's observation.

"La Maison Tellier," a brilliant story, the theme of which, as Mr. Henry James says, illustrates "the capacity for sudden innocent delights latent in natures that have lost their innocence."

"L'Abandonné," a tale of an old couple and their unacknowledged son.

"Miss Harriet" portrays an English spinster who distributes tracts to the Norman peasants and falls in love with a fascinating French painter. She throws herself into a well when she sees him kissing the maid-servant.

"Adieu" illustrates the sadness of age, which turns the handsome youth into a decrepit old man, and a graceful, exquisite girl into a stout, red-faced woman.

"La Confession" tells the story of a long-hidden crime and its confession.

"Mademoiselle Perle," a tale of thwarted affection.

"L'Héritage" is a terrible indictment of bourgeois miserliness and baseness.

The stories summarized and mentioned here are among the most famous of Maupassant's works. There are many more, covering a great variety of subjects. As the reader has probably noticed, the plots of some, like that of "Deux Amis," are slight and uncomplicated, and relate only to one incident. But, then, Maupassant was a writer who could make the trivial and the commonplace absorbing. He displayed acute observation, described everything

with strict fidelity to truth, grouped events with a delicate appreciation of their dramatic values, and got his effects by the most sparing use of words. He does not tell us that Fifi was panic-stricken when she plunged the knife in the German officer's breast, or that the two fishermen displayed great heroism in refusing to give the password, or that they gave their lives for their country. No, he simply records the events. The reader's imagination does the rest.

Without the same artistic resources the novice is more dependent on a strong plot. In reading the stories of the great French master, he may, in addition to studying the style and treatment of the tales, gather many useful hints that will serve him well when collecting material for his own plots.

Maupassant's stories are mostly of the Norman peasantry, amongst whom he lived for many years. He knew them intimately and well, and they supplied him with plots at first-hand. In the same way the novice, by directing his powers of observation to the study of the men and women with whom he mingles in everyday life, may find ample material for his purposes. The man who lives next door, the people you encounter in business, the friends you meet at the club or on the cricket field, may all yield material for interesting stories. Many fiction writers have found inspiration and plots at the local police-court. Others have gathered material at the Central Criminal Court. The writer who is alert and in-

genious will have little difficulty in finding all the information he requires from these sources.

If he has not time or opportunity for making these researches he can still fall back on the newspaper. In this continuous world history, comedy, tragedy, and farce rub shoulders with each other in every column. Here are the yarns in abundant variety from which the weaver of fiction spins his finest gossamers or rich-coloured cloths. If he can read between the lines and clothe the bald printed statements in the rich hues of fancy, the beginner need not look to any other source for his plots.

In one day's newspaper alone he may find the material for a dozen short stories.

A husband returns from abroad after twenty years' absence from his wife; an old gentleman bequeaths £400 a year to his personal attendant; a parent forbids the banns of his daughter's marriage; a wealthy City merchant commits suicide by throwing himself on the railway lines; a famous musical conductor accidentally hears a boy on the street singing and offers him an immediate engagement at a good salary; a man once wealthy is found begging his bread from door to door; a clerk embezzles thousands of pounds of his employer's money.

Here is the stuff from which romance is made, and plots should not be difficult to find from these and similar sources.

WORK OUT YOUR PLOT FULLY.—Having got the outline of your story, do not be in too great a hurry

and begin writing before the idea is thoroughly digested in your mind. There is still much to be done, and the story must be advanced several stages before you take up your pen. Many writers find the original idea of the tale impracticable when they come to consider the order of events in the narrative or the characters that have to be fitted into the story. Atmosphere and setting have also to be taken into account, and, above all, the end. These are essential points that demand mature thought. Many an excellent idea has been rendered valueless by careless and thoughtless treatment. Be sure, then, that you get the right setting and atmosphere for your story, that the characters are essential to it, that the ending is unexpected or surprising, though natural, after the events that have led up to it. If these varied elements blend well and the story is well told, holding the reader's attention from the start and increasing in intensity of interest to the end, then you have a story that is worth the writing.

UNSUITABLE PLOTS.—But before you get to this stage and launch the creation of your fancy on the sea of romance, you must learn something more of the hidden rocks and shoals that may wreck your precious craft.

Assure yourself first that your plot is not too simple and obvious. When reading a story of this kind, an experienced editor can often tell, before he has read a page of the type-script, what the ending will be. This will not do for the magazine reading public,

for when once they know the end of a story their interest in it dies.

Do not use worn-out, hackneyed themes. If you think the plot you have prepared bears too close a resemblance to others you have read, give your readers the benefit of the doubt and tear it up. Then start afresh on a new one. In doing this you will save the editor's time as well as your own.

There is nothing the editor of a popular magazine so much dreads and dislikes as the plot that is worn and tattered with over-use. Yet of the shoals he receives the great majority are turned down, because they are written round themes that have done duty a hundred times before. The editor encounters the same experience month after month and year after year. Constant rejection does nothing to lessen this stream of stories on old and battered themes sent in by novices, who only wonder why editors are so hard and prejudiced.

Now, editors of fiction magazines are not hard and prejudiced. On the contrary, they are fair-minded and tolerant, and they are always eagerly on the lookout for new talent. But they have also a responsibility to their readers, and they cannot inflict on them stereotyped stories on moth-eaten themes. So when they examine new type-scripts and find them merely hashed-up versions of plots they have rejected more times than they can say, they give them short shrift.

It may be difficult for the beginner who has not

read a great many short stories to avoid hackneyed themes. But if he does not know what other writers have done in the same line, he must make good the defect as quickly as he can. It is his business to know all there is to know about the art he means to practise, and a study of the short stories other authors have written is part of his education. A careful perusal of the fiction magazines published during the post-war period will sufficiently enlighten him, and he will learn what to avoid and what is permissible.

Plots should be dramatic, but melodrama should be avoided.

Another point, let your plot form the basis of a healthy, wholesome story. Steer clear of the gruesome and gloomy. Problems of sex are best avoided by the beginner.

To summarize: search diligently for your plot as you would for lost treasure; do not sit down and wait for the happy idea, but look out for it in the directions indicated in the previous pages.

When you have got the outline, think out the whole story, decide on the setting, characters, and the method you will adopt in telling it. After this you have only to write it out.

CHAPTER III

CHARACTER—DIALOGUE

PLOT AND CHARACTERS.—In working out a plot the author must form clear conceptions of the characters or actors that are to play their part in his story. Round these the interest gathers.

Without the human element a short story would be less inspiring than the multiplication table. "The proper study of mankind is man," said Pope—a study of absorbing and perennial interest to everyone, he might have added. In a well-written tale the reader visualizes the hero and other characters as people whom he might know and meet, and in proportion as they are real to him so he is interested in their fortunes and adventures.

In many magazine stories action is the outcome of fate or accident, and the actors are merely the sport of chance. Others, less fatalistic, show how characters react to these influences.

The second of these types of story is more fascinating because it illustrates the life of man in his eternal struggle with natural forces.

A scientist on the threshold of a great discovery is struck blind by lightning. What happens? Does he murmur, "Fate," and fold his hands in quiet resignation, or is he able to pursue his investigations despite the handicap of blindness?

A young man meets a beautiful girl at a picnic, and he feels that at last he has met the one person in the world who can make him happy. He pays her marked attentions, and is still more charmed by her conversation and manner. But a heavy down-pour of rain puts an end to his love-making and the picnic. He sees her hurriedly depart in a motor-car. As he is leaving the neighbourhood on the morrow his chance of seeing the lady again is remote. What course does he take?

A little boy is washed up from a wreck on the coast of Africa. He is adopted and brought up by natives, and for many years sees no white man. Then, by chance, he meets other Englishmen, and finally comes back to England. What happens?

A colonist who has invested his all in a farm sees the produce of his labour and capital swept away in a cyclone. He is plunged in despair. Has he the courage to face Fate bravely?

The reader is eager to know the answers to these questions, for not only do they complete the stories, but they also throw a flood of light on the different actors in the tales and show how much grit and determination there is in their characters.

But there are still two other types of story. In the first of these the play and interplay of human emotions and passions provide the motives for the action of the story.

In the other, character dominates the story, and the plot is a minor consideration.

The latter type is one that should not be attempted by the beginner. Editors are glad to get good "character" stories, but to atone for the lack of plot they must be very cleverly written, and even then have not the same chance of acceptance as an action story.

CHARACTERS IN NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES.—In the novel the various actors in the story are described at length, and the writer has space and leisure to dwell on their foibles, habits, and peculiarities. But in the short story there is no space for this, nor does the reader care to read minute and discriminating details of the hero or heroine's appearance or demeanour. Instead of the full-length portrait we have the sketchy outline limned in a few bold strokes. Sometimes only one trait or quality is shown for each actor in the story, and this, helped out by a description of personal appearance, serves to present the character visually to the reader.

In Kipling's story, "Only a Subaltern," the hero, Bobby Wick, is described at the outset as "an officer and a gentleman." After four or five pages of the tale we are further enlightened in some scraps of conversation :

"When the spring died Bobby joined in the general scramble for Hill leave, and to his surprise and delight secured three months.

"'As good a boy as I want,' said Revere, the admiring skipper.

"'The best of the batch,' said the Adjutant to the Colonel.

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"So Bobby departed joyously to Simla Pahar with a tin box of gorgeous raiment.

"'Son of Wick—old Wick of Chota-Buldana? Ask him to dinner, dear,' said the aged men.

"'What a nice boy!' said the matrons and the maids."

Only a disjointed sentence or two, but we have learnt something of Bobby Wicks that prepares us for what follows in the story. His untiring industry, self-abnegation, and personal magnetism are suggested rather than described in the remainder of the story.

Another character outline, taken from Bret Harte's story, "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," will interest the young writer :

"As Mr. John Oakhurst, gambler, stepped into the main street of Poker Flat on the morning of the 23rd of November, 1850, he was conscious of a change in its moral atmosphere since the preceding night. . . . Mr. Oakhurst's calm, handsome face betrayed small concern in these indications. Whether he was conscious of a predisposing cause was another question. 'I reckon they're after somebody,' he reflected; 'likely it's me.' He returned to the pocket the handkerchief with which he had been whipping away the dust of Poker Flat from his neat boots, and quietly discharged his mind of any further conjecture."

Here we have a description of character with the setting of the story and its atmosphere all set out in one short paragraph.

O. Henry has an individual style of his own, as

in the following from "The Buyer from Cactus City":

"Miss Asher came, and Platt, of Navarro and Platt, felt for the first time the wonderful bright light of romance and glory descend upon him. He stood still as a granite cliff above the cañon of the Colorado, with his wide-open eyes fixed upon her. She noticed his look and flushed a little, which was contrary to her custom.

"Miss Asher was the crack model of Zizzbaum and Son. She was of the blonde type known as 'medium,' and her measurements even went the required 38—25—42 standard a little better. She had been at Zizzbaum's two years and knew her business. Her eye was bright, but cool, and had she chosen to match her gaze against the optic of the famed basilisk, that fabulous monster's gaze would have wavered and softened first."

From this description the author develops the girl's character in crisp and witty dialogue, and depicts her convincingly as a vital, emotional woman whose vivid personality fascinates and controls the reader.

CHARACTER IN LITTLE THINGS.—Students of human nature know that character is disclosed in the most trivial actions and habits. Wordsworth, in a most beautiful poem, speaks of—

That best portion of a good man's life,
His little unremembered acts of kindness and of love.

Life is made up of a multitude of little things, and we all unconsciously betray individual traits in

the most insignificant acts. In the same way, the writer of the short story must give personal significance to the slightest actions of the characters in his tales. Every action and word should contribute to the impression of the character that the writer seeks to convey. If he is hasty and impulsive his speech should be jerky and spasmodic, and his demeanour and actions ought to betray the same qualities. Some of the best short-story writers confine themselves to this method. They give no detailed description of the children of their fancy, but let them disclose their individuality by their conversation, mannerisms, and actions.

THE POWER OF SUGGESTION.—Suggestion is often much more effective than direct statement, and properly used is one of the most potent weapons in the writer's armoury. By its use a few well-chosen words will convey the meaning more forcibly than pages of description. In Kipling's story, "William the Conqueror," the courage and resource of Martyn's sister William are revealed in a few conversational sentences :

" 'She's as clever as a man, confound her,' Martyn went on. 'She broke up the bungalow over my head while I was talking at her. Settled the whole outfit in three hours—servants, horses, and all. I didn't get my orders till nine.'

" 'Jimmy Hawkins won't be pleased,' said Scott. 'A famine's no place for a woman.'

" 'Mrs. Jim—I mean, Lady Jim's in camp with him. At any rate, she says she will look after my

sister. William wired down to her on her own responsibility, asking if she could come, and knocked the ground from under me by showing me her answer.'

"Scott laughed aloud. 'If she can do that she can take care of herself. . . . There aren't many women, sisters or wives, who would walk into a famine with their eyes open. It isn't as if she didn't know what these things mean. She was through the Jaloo cholera last year.'"

CHARACTERS MUST BE CONSISTENT.—Character, like plot and dialogue, must be consistent. Nothing should be written in the course of the story which weakens or contradicts the first impression you have given at the outset. A shy, hesitating man does not suddenly become self-confident and aggressive in manner, nor does a refined and gentle lady use the language of the gutter. As already said, every word and act should help to complete the portrait as you have originally designed it. Unless this is done the illusion of reality will be destroyed.

DIALOGUE.—In the hurry of ordinary conversation we use many words and phrases that are redundant or meaningless, and many people much addicted to talking repeat their pet phrases and catchwords in almost every sentence.

This will not do for short-story dialogue.

Dialogue when well written and apposite is an excellent feature in a magazine tale and helps to make it saleable.

It intensifies the human interest of the story and

makes it more attractive to the reader, who is always curious to know what the different actors in the little drama have to say for themselves.

Editors also like it, because in setting, it looks much more attractive than long, unbroken pages of type.

DIALOGUE AN INDISPENSABLE WEAPON.—As already explained, it is also an excellent device for portraying shades and points of character, for explaining motives, and for developing the action of the story. In serving these purposes it tends to economy of words, as an experienced author is able to convey an idea or explain a situation in a few words of dialogue instead of hundreds in ordinary description.

But, for reasons already given, it would be useless to take the conversation of everyday life as a model for short-story dialogue.

In the short story everything must be condensed, conversation included. Meaningless phrases must be ruthlessly cut out, and there must be no vain repetitions.

In writing the story the author's purpose is to develop and follow the line of the plot, and every feature of the story must conform to this purpose. If dialogue helps to achieve this, well and good, but conversation is only used when it does so.

Polished epigram and aphoristic wisdom are merely

garish ornament if they do not serve to carry the story forward to its culminating point.

Conversation should be terse and pointed. The sentences chosen should express the personality of the man or woman supposed to use them. If a chorus girl is speaking, make her talk as a chorus girl. If you put into her mouth the well-balanced sentences of a young lady from Girton, the magazine reader will only throw your story aside. On the other hand, if your commercial traveller talks and acts like "commercial" you have met, then the picture is true to life and you have strengthened the reader's interest.

DIALOGUE SHOULD BE ILLUSTRATIVE.—If your hero, Frank, is manly and direct in speech, it is not enough to explain this to the reader. You must illustrate it by giving specimens of his conversation that demonstrate these qualities. When we read that Hilda Jones is shrewd and witty, it only exasperates if no sample of her wit is offered. We wish to judge for ourselves, and concrete examples of qualities are more illuminating and convincing than all the adjectives in the dictionary.

Read "A Harlem Tragedy," by O. Henry, contained in a volume of short stories entitled "The Trimmèd Lamp." In this you will find many snatches of conversation that throw a flood of light on the characters of the various personalities in the story. Take the following extract from the scene where

Mrs. Cassidy is exhibiting the black eye she has received from her husband :

“ ‘I wouldn’t have a man,’ declared Mrs. Cassidy, ‘that didn’t beat me up at least once a week. Shows he thinks something of you. Say! but that last dose Jack gave me wasn’t no homœopathic one. I can see stars yet. But he’ll be the sweetest man in town for the rest of the week to make up for it. This eye is good for theatre tickets and a silk shirt waist at the very least. . . .’ ”

“ ‘Don’t it hurt when he soaks you?’ asked Mrs. Fink curiously.

“ ‘Hurt!’ Mrs. Cassidy gave a soprano scream of delight. ‘Well, say, did you ever have a brick house fall on you? Well, that’s just the way it feels—just like when they’re digging you out of the ruins. Jack’s got a left that spells two matinées and a new pair of Oxfords—and his right! well, it takes a trip to Coney and six pairs of openwork, silk lisle threads to make that good.’ ”

No literary tool is so valuable as dialogue when properly handled. The greatest characters in English literature are revealed through this medium. To speak of it, as some critics do, as a modern development is absurd. By its use alone Shakespeare expressed his genius and left an imperishable heritage. His portrait gallery holds the mirror up to Nature with unerring fidelity—Othello, Hamlet, Lear, Portia, Hermione, Viola, Macbeth, Sir John Falstaff, and a host of others are all limned by a genius whose sole medium was dialogue.

Many of the learned essays of Addison and Steele are forgotten, or are of interest only to the literary student, but they live for us in the gallery of exquisite and delightful figures that adorn the pages of the *Spectator* and the *Tatler*, and these become embodied shapes and creatures of flesh and blood in the quaint sayings and odd snatches of conversation we find there. Who that has read "She Stoops to Conquer" or "The Good-Natured Man," by Goldsmith, or "The School for Scandal" and "The Rivals," by Sheridan will deny the potency of dialogue as a literary weapon. The chief claim of Charles Dickens on our affection and esteem rests on the characteristic sayings of his inimitable creations—Sam Weller, Mr. Pecksniff, Mr. Mantalini, Uriah Heep, Sairey Gamp, etc. In our own time "The Dolly Dialogues" of Mr. Anthony Hope and the diverting conversation of Mr. W. W. Jacobs' inimitable sailormen show the value of clever dialogue.

DIALOGUE MUST BE NATURAL.—We have seen that dialogue must be condensed and that it can be used not only for portraying character, but also for illustrating it and making it convincing, and that it also helps by conveying information, sustaining the action and speeding it towards the culminating climax.

But there is still another important point to consider. Dialogue, to be effective, must be natural. It must flow simply and easily.

Clever epigrammatic conversation is rarely satisfactory, and never convincing. Only on the stage are

bon mots and epigrams ordinary verbal exchanges. In a story, as in real life, they seem artificial and forced. In Oscar Wilde's "Picture of Dorian Grey," which is full of this kind of conversation, there is a hard brilliance in the aspect of life it presents which separates it entirely from the world in which we move and have our being.

If the person in the story is depicted as a clever and witty conversationalist, dialogue of this sort is permissible.

Natural ease is much to be preferred to brilliance in dialogue; and the best way to achieve this is in writing the conversation to present it from the point of view of the person speaking. The author must become for the time being the man or woman for whom he speaks. He must study the character he has created carefully, look at life from *his* point of view, and endeavour to express some aspect of that character in every sentence he makes him utter. If he can do this, as the successful actor does, he will convince those who read, of the reality of the people in his story.

Enough has been said to show the value and importance of dialogue as a medium of expression. To the short-story writer as well as to the novelist it is invaluable. When it is used with discretion it intensifies the interest and tightens the writer's grip on the reader. How far it should be used in a story must always depend on the plot. If this calls for much action very little dialogue will be needed. On

this point the author must judge for himself. Some writers find this form of expression so useful that they almost discard narrative. In "The Dolly Dialogues" everything is told in conversation, but Mr. Anthony Hope's successful exploitation of this form in his little classic is scarcely to be commended to the beginner as an example to follow. He will derive profit and instruction from studying it, but at the outset he would be wiser to try less ambitious flights.

Dialogue is, as stated earlier in this chapter, a means to an end—that of telling the story. That is the purpose for which this and every other literary device is used, and this purpose the aspirant should keep constantly in view when deciding what method of expression he will make use of.

CHAPTER IV

WRITING THE STORY

HOW TO BEGIN.—We have considered the plot of the short story, the characters that are to appear in it, and the use that is to be made of narrative and dialogue. We have now to consider the writing of the story.

But at the very outset the novice finds himself faced by a difficulty.

“How am I to begin?” he asks.

To this there are almost as many answers as writers.

The most obvious reply would be: “You know the story you wish to tell. Begin at the beginning and tell it as naturally and simply as you can.”

This advice is quite good in its way, but not sufficiently explicit for the novice.

The problem of the start is often difficult to solve, and sometimes puzzles even the experienced writer of fiction, as he knows how important it is that he should awaken the reader’s interest at the very start.

For the beginner the problem is especially difficult. Like any other aspirant to popular favour, he has to excite the curiosity and interest of the public. Unless

he can do this the people will only yawn and turn their attention to one of the other thousand attractions that will titillate or amuse them. The actor has the aid of scenery and footlights, the orator the magic help of personality and voice, but the writer of fiction has only cold print to offer. A famous author, secure in his hold on public favour, can afford to begin quietly and in an unobtrusive manner. Readers who are drawn by the magnetic attraction of his name at the head of the story read the dry and uninviting details with which it opens with the confident assurance that there will be thrills and excitements in plenty, before they have gone far in the narrative.

But the novice has none of these aids. No glamour attaches to his name. He must win out by his own unaided efforts, and capture the reader's imagination at the outset.

But again he is acutely conscious of the limitations of his art. The pinions of his fancy are confined. He cannot soar into the empyrean, but may only flutter within the narrow confines of a few thousand words. There are many original and striking things he has to say, so many remarkable and profound sayings he would like to put in the mouths of the characters in his story, but there is no space for these. How, too, can he make the beginning fresh and vivid when he has to introduce his principal characters and provide background and setting at the outset?

Then, again, there is that wonderful episode where

the hero rescues the heroine at the peril of his own life. That would make a thrilling opening. But here again he is held in check by the rules of the game. He must tell the story in its natural order. No self-respecting editor will tolerate inversion; and that scene comes in the middle and not at the beginning of the narrative.

A story writer of established reputation may write a long detailed introduction for the purpose of giving an air of reality to a tale of riotous fancy. But the beginner must not venture on this. His story must pulse with life from the first word.

How, then, is he to begin?

The best advice that can be given is—take a header and plunge right into the narrative. This is infinitely better than timorously wading in as so many amateurs are prone to do. Have a clear mental picture in your mind of the opening scene, then paint it in with a few bold strokes.

“But how is the picture to be painted in?” again asks the novice.

This may be done by descriptive narrative or by dialogue. The former serves the purposes of providing setting, introducing characters, and creating atmosphere. Sometimes the writer introduces the tale with some philosophic observations which strike the keynote of the story, but these should be confined to one or two sentences, unless the philosophy is salted with a little humour, as in some of O. Henry's stories, when a longer preface is permissible.

Let us take an example of the narrative style of opening from the writer just mentioned. Mr. Henry begins his story "The Social Triangle" as follows:

"At the stroke of six Ikey Singglefritz laid down his goose. Ikey was a tailor's apprentice. Are there tailor's apprentices nowadays?"

"At any rate, Ikey toiled and snipped and basted and pressed and patched and sponged all day in the steamy feter of a tailor's shop. But when work was done Ikey hitched his waggon to such stars as his firmament let shine."

Here one of the principal characters in the story is introduced and described. The reader can form a shrewd guess from this opening the kind of story he is going to read, and his attention and interest are agreeably aroused.

Another example of a narrative opening is from Kipling's strange and pathetic story "Little Tohrah":

"'Prisoner's head did not reach to the top of the dock,' as the English newspapers say. This case, however, was not reported, because nobody cared by so much as a hempen rope for the life or death of Little Tohrah. The assessors in the red court-house sat upon him all through the long, hot afternoon, and whenever they asked him a question he salaamed and whined. Their verdict was that the evidence was inconclusive, and the Judge concurred."

In the last chapter the value of dialogue as a tool of the writer of fiction was pointed out, and the

young writer has discovered that it can be used for almost any and every purpose. Knowing its utility it is surprising that experienced craftsmen do not make more use of it as an opening. For no other device is quite so good for catching the attention of the reader as well as for providing setting and conveying atmosphere. An excellent specimen of the dialogue opening is given in Mr. H. G. Wells's short story, "The Red Room":

"‘I can assure you,’ said I, ‘that it will take a very tangible ghost to frighten me.’ And I stood before the fire with my glass in my hand.

"‘It is your own choosing,’ said the man with the withered arm, and glanced at me askance.

"‘Eight-and-twenty years,’ said I, ‘I have lived and never a ghost have I seen as yet.’

"The old woman sat staring hard into the fire, her pale eyes wide open. ‘Ay,’ she broke in; ‘and eight-and-twenty years you have lived and never seen the likes of this house, I reckon.’"

Here we get character, setting, and atmosphere, and the clash of different personalities—the young man's easy optimism, and scepticism of the uncanny; and the old woman's contempt for his ignorance.

It would be easy to multiply these examples a hundred-fold, but the young author must do this for himself. It has been said before in these pages, and is well worth repeating—the best preparation for short-story writing is to read as many specimens of the art as he can. By carefully comparing the different tales of this kind, and making a note of

all variations in methods, and, above all, by practising openings of your own, you will discover a method that suits your mentality and temperament. If you have a pocket-book in which you record the plots that occur, it will be a stimulating exercise to take each of these plots in turn and write out an experimental opening for the story. It need not be longer than a dozen lines. When you have written it, put it aside for a day or two, and then look at it again and apply the tests that have been suggested in this chapter. Is it arresting and striking? Does it convey setting or indicate character? Does it give information and detail that is essential to a proper appreciation of what is to follow?

If the opening supplies satisfactory answers to these questions, then it is a good one.

Sometimes a young writer in his eagerness to grip the attention of the magazine public commences his story like this:

“Mr. Brown reclined in an easy-chair in his garden and gazed at the gorgeous summer flowers that surrounded him. Suddenly a gleaming knife flashed in the gloom. Without a sound Brown fell back, in a huddled heap—dead.”

The difficulty with an opening of this kind is that the note of deep intensity it begins with is difficult to sustain. It is not enough to grip the reader's attention at the beginning. It must be sustained and intensified as the story proceeds. But if you

begin at a point of high dramatic interest that order must be reversed. After the scene just described, the author must narrate the circumstances that led up to it. He must give enough information about Mr. Brown to make the reader interested in his fate, and add details that will distinguish this murder from other crimes of the same class. In other words, having started at a high point of emotional interest he drops down into the slough of detailed description, and the reader whose curiosity has been aroused to a high degree of expectancy by the sharp surprise of the opening feels that he has been cheated.

It is better to start on a lower note and to intensify the reader's interest as the story proceeds. If you tell the story simply and directly you will achieve this effect. But do not forget that you must first attract his notice. The student who gives careful thought and study to this part of the subject will discover when he puts his knowledge to the test of practice that the difficulties he first encountered looked greater than they really were and speedily disappeared on the application of those potent solvents, experience and application.

THE BODY OF THE STORY.—Some teachers of short-story writing tell their pupils that after the plot and characters the only important considerations are the beginning and end of the story. But this can scarcely be so when we remember that the reader would not be satisfied with a tale that began well, continued in a tame narrative, and ended in a blaze of fireworks.

He reads a short story because he derives entertainment from it; because he takes an interest in the imaginary figures who play their parts in it; and chiefly because he is kept in a state of suspense until the final secret of the story is disclosed.

NO RIGID RULES IN SHORT-STORY WRITING.—There are no rules to follow in short-story writing. It is one of the most plastic of the arts. The magazine tale may take any form you choose to make it so that it is attractive and interesting. Your only real guide can be found in the short stories other authors have written before you. From these you may gather several useful hints in technique. But no rigid rules fetter the writer's fancy. If these were imposed and he was compelled to work according to well-defined formula, his performances would become mechanical and would lack originality and spontaneity.

He may, if he will, write the tale in either the third person singular, or in the first. Stories in the first person, in which the writer either makes himself the hero or one of the minor characters, are a favourite form with some authors, because the narrative seems more actual and real when it seems to concern the fortunes of the person who is writing it. Then there is the diary form, in which the tale is told in the form of extracts from a diary. In the same class is the story formed from a number of letters.

But neither of these latter forms are suitable for the beginner.

CONDENSATION.—The chief consideration the beginner must keep before him is condensation. In writing a short story there is no room for digression or for the explanation of motives. Give the reader all the necessary facts and he will do his own philosophizing and discover the motives for himself. If you are describing character a sentence or two should suffice, though a more effective method, as shown in the chapter on Dialogue, is to suggest the personalities of the people of the story and their emotions by action or dialogue.

Illustrations of this may be found in almost any well-written story. The following example is from "A Straight Flush," by Frank Harris, published in the *Fortnightly Review* in the nineties:

"Mrs. Slater, a gambler's wife, enters the card-room of her house after midnight and finds a young bank-clerk sitting alone there in an attitude of deep dejection. She questions him and discovers he has lost money to her husband.

"‘Tell me everything,’ said Mrs. Slater. ‘You know you can trust me.’

"‘There ain’t much to tell. I just lost at poker, that’s all,’ and he moved uneasily as if about to rise.

"Mrs. Slater placed her hand on his. "Was it much? Come, tell me—how much?"

"With a short laugh to simulate recklessness, he answered, ‘Twelve hundred dollars.’

"Again he tried to laugh, but the laugh ended in a bitter sigh, and his face grew set and hard, as if against unendurable suffering.

“‘Where? How?’ And her hand tightened its clasp. Morris didn’t answer, but stared towards the table as if stupefied.

“Impatiently Mrs. Slater shook the hand she had covered with hers, and exclaimed authoritatively: ‘Do speak. How did you get it? You know I’ll help you if I can.’”

Again, further on in the same story:

“‘Don’t cry!’ she said a little roughly as she rose, for his tears hurt her. ‘That won’t do any good. Stay right here till I come back. I may be an hour, but don’t go away. I guess I’ll help you if I can. There! Don’t look so scared. It’ll all come right, I reckon. You just wait.’”

Note Mrs. Slater’s eager sympathy, indicated in the phrases “Mrs. Slater placed her hand on his,” “her hand tightened its clasp,” and “Impatiently Mrs. Slater shook the hand she had covered with hers.” And, again, her decision and keen emotion as expressed in the sharp, staccato sentences in the paragraph beginning “Don’t cry!” Observe, too, the sharp contrast of the young man’s despair depicted in a few graphic sentences: “With a short laugh to simulate recklessness,” “Again he tried to laugh, but the laugh ended in a bitter sigh,” “Morris didn’t answer, but stared towards the table as if stupefied.”

In this extract the characters of two of the actors in the story are etched with a few masterly touches. There is no padding, no literary decoration. Every word is relevant to the theme.

Frank Harris was one of the great exponents of short-story writing in the palmy days of the art. The novice cannot hope at the outset to rival his wonderful skill. But examples such as this should stir in him a spirit of emulation, and make him persevere and practise so that in time he will turn out work, that will bear comparison with that of these great pioneers of the past.

ACTION MUST BE RAPID.—The story should not drag. The action must, if it is to interest the reader, move steadily forward all the time. Events should follow each other in apparent inevitable sequence. Every detail that can be dispensed with and does not help to elucidate the main theme should be cut out. Make no comment on the actions of the different people in the story. Leave the reader to make his own deductions.

KEEP THE INTEREST ALIVE.—One of the principal faults of short stories submitted to editors is that of inversion. In other words, the events and incidents are recorded in the wrong order. This is a more serious fault than many young writers think.

It destroys the artistic symmetry of the story and robs it of one of its most valued attributes—suspense. But not only this—it wearies the reader, who is anxious to know what comes next. In this mood he dislikes being carried back instead of forward.

The beginning of the story sets the tone, provides the setting, and is really the foundation on which the

writer must build, and every incident should follow in natural order until the edifice is complete. All details and information necessary to a proper grasp of the story should be set out at as early a stage as possible. This can be done, as already suggested, either by direct description, or indirectly in the form of dialogue.

Nor should the end of the story be either disclosed or hinted at, until the last paragraph is reached. Quite an appreciable number of stories are spoilt in this way. Once the reader knows the end of a tale his interest evaporates, and anything that follows is mere padding.

CONSISTENCY IN TONE AND INCIDENT.—A story must be consistent throughout in tone, incident, and character. Most stories that go to the “returns” basket are disfigured by faults like these.

The unities must be respected.

Film producers may make Thomas Hardy’s “Tess” a shingled-hair frequenter of night-clubs, but short-story writers must avoid such anachronisms. Do not let Victorian young ladies dance the tango or talk golf slang, nor young men of the same period scorch about on motor-cycles.

Nor should any detail, however trivial, be inconsistent with another. If you make the heroine’s hair auburn at the beginning of the tale and black farther on you will destroy the illusion of reality for many of your lady readers.

The appearance of a character should not belie his

or her real nature. How often, to take a familiar example, do we see a girl with auburn hair, short, *retroussé* nose and upper lip, described as of a quiet, calm, and firm nature.

Fiction writers who endow characters so described with these qualities have not studied their friends and neighbours very closely.

In real life the men and women we meet are often inconsistent in their words and actions. But in fiction this is not recognized except by writers whose genius makes them independent of the conventions. There is in the short story so little space to outline character that any inconsistency in its presentation weakens and blurs the effect. So that if your hero is generous and impulsive, all his sayings and doings in the story should indicate these qualities. In this way, by the cumulative effect of a number of actions and speeches, the character stands out clearly.

But, most important of all, the story should be consistent in tone. Readers should know as soon as they have dipped into the tale the type of story it is going to be. If you begin in a humorous vein you must continue so to the end. A story that promises sensation should not degenerate into farce. Nor should your tale of pathos tail off into sentimentality. The emotional note you strike at first should be maintained throughout. The importance of this cannot be too strongly emphasized. You may surprise your reader, and he will be grateful. You

may mystify him, and he will pay you the compliment of giving closer attention to your text. But you must not disappoint him; and you will assuredly do this if the tone of your story is not consistent with its opening paragraphs. Consistency in incident, character, and tone will make the story a complete artistic entity.

SALIENT POINTS IN THE STORY.—There are teachers of fiction writing who endeavour, for the benefit of their pupils, to split up a short story into its component parts, and by elaborate analysis to find a formula, by which the author must work. These efforts are ingenious. What is more, they are praiseworthy and interesting, and even illuminating. But, alas! they are also futile and vain.

Short-story writing is an art, and a plastic art. Like other arts, it is not governed by rules and laws. The story teller is free and unfettered, and is a law unto himself. "So that it is bright and moving"—to quote Mr. Wells once more—he can cast his story into any form that he wills. Stories may be similar in tone. They may be detective or mystery yarns; stories of adventure or action; humorous or pathetic; thrilling or love stories. But there the resemblance ends. Their variety is infinite.

Some have simple plots. Others have as many complications as a full-length novel. In some the story covers a period of less than an hour. In others, it extends to centuries. Some are airy fantasies;

others realistic and matter of fact. In many the characters are shadowy. Others are elaborate character studies. All are individual and vary in style and treatment. Only in tone do they bear the impress of class.

As already said, the tone of a story is, or should be, consistent throughout, but there are points in which the emotional waves rise higher than at others, and a crisis is reached where the interest is intensified—as where the lover is rejected because of a misunderstanding, or the wanderer returns to find the old home empty and deserted, or the fortune seeker finds the key to the treasure. The number of these emotional points depends, of course, upon the plot. There may be one or half a dozen, but there is always at least one in which the interest is exalted to a pitch that compels the reader to look eagerly for what is to follow and carries him forward to the culmination of the story.

THE VALUE OF RESTRAINT.—This part of the narrative will test the author's powers of graphic and vivid writing to the utmost. He must feel the emotions that sway the actors in his story, and form a clear, mental picture of the scene he is to depict.

The best advice for this task is—write simply. Describe this crisis in the fortunes of your hero in the plainest and most forceful words at your command. Use no hackneyed phrases. R. L.

Stevenson, one of the greatest masters of this kind of writing, was content to use short common nouns, that were expressive enough to need no qualification. But he also employed homely similes that bit into the reader's mind like acid. In introducing Long John Silver in "Treasure Island," he tells us that his face was "as big as a ham." Another master of the art of description, Bunyan, got his effects by the use of the simplest words. Note the following from "The Pilgrim's Progress":

"Then Apollyon straddled quite over the whole breadth of the way, and said, 'I am void of fear in this matter; prepare thyself to die; for I swear by my infernal den that thou shalt go no further; here will I spill thy soul.'"

Be restrained. A simple statement of what happened is generally more forceful than a long account of the feelings of the characters in the scene.

An experienced writer of fiction does not waste many words in describing the emotions of characters. He illustrates or suggests them. Stanley Weyman's "Tilly had a look on his face that sent men to their prayers" is more convincing than pages of description.

A slight study of moving pictures shows how graphically emotions can be expressed by simple gestures and actions. These in their turn can be translated into simple phrases, as: "He sank into the chair," "He gripped his stick convulsively,"

"She bit her lips," "Her eyes flashed," "His face paled," "He clutched the pistol in a shaking hand," "He smiled faintly."

*Dialogue also answers the same purpose in the use of exclamations and short sentences:

"The paper," he cried, "the paper—give it to me. I must have it."

"All is ended—between us," she whispered.

"I will—I must do it!" exclaimed John.

"Go now," he threatened, picking up a ruler from the writing-table.

"Heaven protect me," she moaned.

When you have written the story as far as this first emotional point, read it over with care, and unsparingly cut out every sentence and phrase that has no direct bearing on the theme. Even those neat little turns of speech which pleased you so much when you wrote them must be deleted ruthlessly if they do not help the story forward or throw light on the characters of the chief actors. With every deletion the composition gains in strength.

When you have finished the ungrateful task lay the story aside for a few days. You will then be able to criticize it as an independent reader would. Examine it carefully to see if the events follow each other in logical sequence, if they are clearly narrated. Think out any new incidents that will make the motives of the actors plainer. You can then judge whether the effects are so arranged that the idea of the story is revealed artistically.

Possibly when you have examined your MS. and considered these points you will be heartily dissatisfied with what you have written. If so, try again and keep on trying until you have got the first two parts of the story into the form you want them.

CHAPTER V

THE CLIMAX AND ENDING

THE FINAL CLIMAX.—That ancient saying, “The end crowns the work,” is more true of the short story than of many other forms of art.

Without an appropriate ending a short story would be meaningless and void of purpose. Like a wasp without a sting or a ship without a rudder it fulfils no definite function.

All the interest of the story culminates in the final climax. It is for this the reader waits patiently as he wades through details that don't specially interest him, but which must be understood for an intelligent appreciation of the end of the story. In the final climax the idea which the author has been gradually unfolding is at last fully disclosed, and the characters whose doings and fortunes have been described at last receive the rewards or punishments the author allots them. At this point all the strands of the story are united, and the reader inspects the texture of the fabric that has been woven in the author's fancy for his pleasure. In this brief final scene, when the chief actors appear to make their final bow, the emotional interest rises to the highest pitch of intensity. Then the lovers are united and

the villain sent packing; the detective lays his hand on the shoulder of the criminal; the fortune seeker finds the vanished will, and the adventurer the shining pinnacle of desire.

It should be the purpose of the author to impress the reader with the story's emotional appeal. If the tale is one of pathos, then that mingling of tender sympathy and sadness of which pathos is compounded should react on the reader's consciousness with insistent force. The climax of the story should be told as crisply as possible, and in words decisive and pregnant with meaning. To be clear and definite should be the author's aim.

The climax should not outrage probability. Even if the ending is one in which the writer springs a surprise, it should appear as natural and proper to the reader. It ought not to cause magazine buyers to murmur: "That's all very well in a story, but it never takes place in real life."

If readers make this criticism then the writer has failed to preserve the illusion of reality.

In writing up to the final climax the author must take the same pains as in writing up the earlier points of his story. He must choose his words with the same care and deliberation and arrange his scenes with the utmost dramatic effect.

THE CONCLUSION.—When the final climax has been set out there may still be some explanations to be given. This is often so in mystery and detective stories, where the investigator explains the methods

by which he made his discoveries, and makes matters clear that have puzzled the reader in the earlier parts of the story. But as the secret of the story has now been revealed and the principal characters disposed of, the interest of the story droops, and such explanations come as an anti-climax. These should therefore be short and crisp and the conclusion reached in the fewest possible words.

Beyond these few hints no further guidance can be given the fiction writer in approaching the problem of the ending. As said before, the only real help is to be found in the many examples of short stories already written. Study these in their infinite variety and practise writing endings, and in time you may gain a proficiency that will reward your application and industry.

STYLE IN WRITING SHORT STORIES.—So much has already been said in the first two sections of this book on the question of style that it is unnecessary to make more than a short reference to it here.

The general principles on style already enunciated apply in like measure to short-story writing as to every other form of composition.

There is a popular impression that any sort of slipshod language will serve in short-story writing, and that writers of fiction are independent of the rules of syntax. This is due to the barbarous manner in which some popular novelists ill-treat the English language.

Do not take these writers as your guide. They

are not popular because they murder the King's English, but because they have stories to tell and know how to tell them. To those that know the secret of this art much is forgiven.

To the fiction writer this advice may be reiterated—learn to write simple, clear, vigorous English. Do not disdain the common word. On the contrary, prefer it always to the far-fetched. Avoid jargon. It sounds imposing, but is only meaningless and pompous.

Be sure you know the meaning of every word you use. Good dictionaries are cheap and should always be consulted when in doubt.

Use concrete nouns, transitive verbs, and employ the active voice if you would write in a vigorous, masculine style.

It is unnecessary to resort to slang or foreign words to make your meaning clear. There are 80,000 words in the English Dictionary. Among these there must be many that will serve your purpose as well as slang.

Of course, you may put any kind of words or phrases in the mouths of your characters; but apply a higher standard in your own descriptive writing.

CHAPTER VI

HOW TO SELL YOUR STORIES

THE MAGAZINE EDITOR.—To the young author the completion of his first story marks a definite stage in his progress.

He feels a sense of mastery and the glow of achievement. The task he set out to do he has accomplished. He has triumphed over technical difficulties which at first seemed insuperable, and he realizes that he has gained experience and knowledge.

In after years his little story may seem a stilted and clumsy piece of work, but now it is very precious, and he treasures it as a token of his ingenuity and perseverance.

But this mood of self-gratulation is quickly followed by another, and he asks himself a little anxiously: "Now I have written the story, what am I to do with it? How can I dispose of it?"

He has heard weird tales of the ruthlessness and cold indifference of editors. He knows how genius has been buffeted and discouraged by their ignorance and stupidity, and numbers among his friends other budding novelists whose manuscripts have been rejected. He feels that there is a general conspiracy among editors against the novice, and that

their one aim and purpose is to stifle rising talent. Only influence, he imagines, will secure their favour.

This attitude of mind, common among amateur authors, is altogether wrong.

The editor, like the rest of us, is human, and sometimes makes mistakes. He may have received angels unawares, and coldly and politely shown them the door. He may occasionally send back stories that would have sent up the circulation of his magazine by leaps and bounds.

But these lapses are few. If they were many, he would quickly vacate his chair.

The editor of a good-class popular magazine holds a difficult and responsible position. He has to gauge and satisfy the tastes of his hundred thousand readers. They demand certain types of stories treated in a certain way. It is part of his duty to satisfy that demand.

He has no staff writers to write the stories he requires. On some regular contributors and well-known authors he may depend, but for the rest of the copy he wants he must search diligently among the unsolicited stories sent in for consideration.

HIS ATTITUDE TO NEW CONTRIBUTORS.—He does his work under the watchful eyes of a board of directors, who tell him from time to time that sales are rising or falling and spur him to fresh efforts. He does his best.

He carefully scans type-script after type-script that have been passed on to him by his assistants, in the

hope that he will find something to titillate the jaded palates of his subscribers. He is a shrewd, clear-headed man, who knows their tastes to a nicety, and is ever unwearied in his search for something that will please and satisfy them. If in his search your story comes under his scrutiny and he finds it contains just what he requires, his eyes will light up with pleasure, and he will feel that his toils have been well rewarded.

A magazine editor is constantly on the lookout for fresh talent, and he spends many fruitless weeks and months in the search for it. Like the philosopher's stone, it seems constantly to elude him, and he sighs wearily as he tosses script after script, that have failed to meet his requirements, into the returns basket.

Make no mistake about it—the editor is not your enemy. He is more than ready to welcome your contribution if it is up to the standard of merit he demands.

Unknown writers receive just as much consideration as others. Every script is judged on its merits. This test applies in every case. A well-known name in a corner of the MS. may predispose the editor to look favourably upon it, but he accords it the same impartial judgment as the rest. His sole test is the suitability of the story to his readers.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT MARKET.—Few beginners in short-story writing choose the right market for their wares. Most of them make no choice at all. They

simply pack the script into a large envelope and send it off to the first magazine they happen to think of. If in thus trusting to blind chance the story has been sent to the wrong type of magazine, its rejection affords the author no criterion as to its merits. It may be an interesting and readable story, and might be acceptable to any one of half a dozen magazines, but having been sent to the wrong one has met the fate of tales of inferior merit.

Do not trust to blind chance in sending out your contributions. By so doing you are only wasting an editor's time as well as your own.

Study the contents of the magazines to which you propose to send your stories. Compare the tales in them with your own. If they are similar in style and treatment then you can be sure you are on the right track. Don't send an adventure or detective story to a journal that specializes in romance. Jot down the titles of the magazines that publish your type of story, then send it to each of them in turn until it is either accepted or has been rejected five or six times.

DO NOT BE DISCOURAGED if your first efforts end in failure. Others before you, writers of the highest talent, have had to undergo the same trying experience. Rejection has been the lot of all but a favoured few.

Instead of being dejected when your stories come back, try to learn from your failures. Read the rejected stories critically and strive to discover their

blemishes. Try to put yourself in the place of the editor and study the MS. impartially. If you can do this, and discover what is wrong with your effort, you will gain valuable experience that will stand you in good stead when you write the next story.

A WIDE MARKET.—There is a wide market for magazine stories, and there are periodicals catering for fiction readers of every class, from the cultured to the illiterate. Hundreds of short stories are published every month, and most of them are the work of outside contributors.

In this the position of the short-story writer is much happier than that of the free-lance journalist. The staff of a newspaper leave but few openings for the free-lance to fill. The magazines depend almost entirely on the work of outside writers.

With such wide opportunities the author who can write an interesting story, and tell it with point and vivacity, has every chance of seeing his MS. in print.

All MSS. should be typewritten and on one side of the paper only.

The name and address of the author should be written in the left top corner of the first page of the script. Underneath, the number of words in the story should be given.

The typing of the story should be double spaced.

The pages should be numbered consecutively and fastened with a clip or paper-fastener.

A stamped addressed envelope should be enclosed for the return of the MS.

Send the story in a large envelope so that it does not require folding. A rolled MS. causes irritation and waste of time.

Do not bombard editors with long covering letters. They are too busy to attend to them.

If your stories have been accepted by other well-known magazines you might mention the fact.

Do not stipulate for any special rate of payment. All journals of repute pay fair rates, and if you are lucky enough to get your stories published at the outset you should be well satisfied with the cheques you get in return.

Among the best of the fiction magazines are :

The Blue Magazine, Lancaster Place, Wellington Street, Strand, W.C.

Cassell's Magazine, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, E.C. 4.

The Corner Magazine, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, E.C. 4.

The London Magazine, *The Premier*, *The Red Magazine*, *The Violet Magazine*, and *The Yellow Magazine*, all from Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.

The Grand Magazine, *The Happy Magazine*, *The Strand Magazine*, all from 8-11, Southampton Street, Strand, W.C.

The Home Magazine, Henrietta Street, W.C. 2.

Hutchinson's Magazine, *Adventure Story Magazine*, *Mystery Story Magazine*, *Sovereign Magazine*, all from Hutchinson and Co., 34-36, Paternoster Row, E.C. 4.

Nash's Magazine, 1, Amen Corner, E.C. 4.

New Magazine, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, E.C. 4.

The Novel Magazine, *Pearson's Magazine*, *The Royal Magazine* all from 16-18, Henrietta Street, W.C. 2.

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Pam, *Twenty Story Magazine*, *Romance*, all from Long Acre, W.C. 2.

The Windsor Magazine (Messrs. Ward, Lock, and Co., Ltd.), Salisbury Square, E.C. 4.

For a fuller list the reader is referred to the current Writers' and Artists' Year Book, in which much information useful to the writer may be found.

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