[From "How to Write."]

LITERARY COMPOSITION IN GENERAL.

WORDS............SPELLING.

Spelling is *word-making*. You learned something of this long ago, from the spelling-book. Perhaps you are a good speller. But there are more than a hundred thousand words in the English language, and you can not reasonably be expected to know the orthography of them all. No man or woman, however well educated, will venture to claim perfection in this accomplishment. There is always something to learn. If we were at liberty to adopt and apply, at once, the phonetic system, in which every simple single sound is represented by a simple single sign, spelling would be no longer difficult. This is the true system, and will in due time be universally received; meanwhile, we must spell as well as we can in the old way, for bad spelling is rightly considered a great blemish in a piece of writing. Here are some brief but comprehensive rules, which the young writer will do well to commit to memory:

RULES FOR SPELLING.

1. Words of one syllable ending in f, l, or s, preceded by a single vowel, double the final consonant; as, staff, mill, pass; except if, of, as, gas, has, was, yes, is, his, this, us, thus.

2. Words ending in any other consonant except f, l, and s, do not double the final letter; except add, odd, ebb, egg, inn, err, purr, butt, buzz, and some proper names.

3. Words of one syllable, and words accented on the last syllable, when they end with a single consonant, preceded by a single vowel, double the final consonant before an additional syllable beginning with a vowel; as rob, robber; permit, permitting; but x final, being equivalent to ks, is an exception, and is never doubled.

4. A final consonant, when not preceded by a single vowel, or when the accent is not on the last syllable, should remain single before an additional syllable; as toil, toiling; visit, visited. L and s are often doubled, in violation of this rule, when the accent is not on the last syllable; as travel, traveller; bias, biassed. It is better to write traveler and biased.

5. Primitive words ending in ll reject one l before less and ly; as skill, skilless; full, fully: but words ending in any other double letter, preserve it double before these terminations; as free, freely; careless, carelessness; odd, oddly.

6. The final e of a primitive word is generally omitted before an additional termination beginning with a vowel; as rate, ratable; force, forcible; but words ending in ce and ge retain the e before able and ous; as peace, peaceable; outrage, outrageous.

7. The final e of a primitive word is generally retained before an additional termination beginning with a consonant; as pale, paleness; but when the e is preceded by a vowel it is sometimes omitted; as true, truly: and sometimes retained; as shoe, shoeless.

8. The final y of a primitive word, when preceded by a consonant, is changed into i before an additional termination; as merry, merrily: but before a vowel the y is not changed; as valley, valleys, and not vallies, as frequently written; and before ing the y is retained to prevent the doubling of the i; as pity, pitying.

9. Compounds generally retain the orthography of the simple words of which they are composed; as all-wise, blue-eyed.

You may make these rules good *helps*; but the orthography of the English language is attended with so much uncertainty and perplexity, that no rules, however carefully framed and well studied, will enable you to dispense with observation, reading (which familiarizes one with the *forms* of words), and frequent reference to the dictionary, which should always lie at your elbow while writing. Webster's "American Dictionary of the English Language," unabridged edition, is the best; but if this is beyond your means, a smaller and cheaper one will serve your purpose. But have it always at hand, and apply to it in all doubtful cases.

CAPITAL LETTERS.

The misuse of capital letters is almost as great a blemish in written or printed words as bad spelling. Fortunately, the rules for their proper use are few and plain, and may be easily remembered. To leave our readers no excuse on this point, we insert them here:

RULES FOR THE USE OF CAPITAL LETTERS.

1. The first word of every distinct sentence must begin with a capital letter.

2. All proper names and titles of office or honor, and all appellations of Deity must begin with capital letters; as James, Judge Parker, the Supreme Being.

3. Adjectives derived from proper names must begin with capital letters; as Grecian, Roman, Newtonian.

4. The names of the months and of the days of the week must begin with capital letters.

5. The principal words in the titles of books, magazines, and newspapers must begin with capital letters; as Combe's Constitution of Man, Putnam's Monthly Magazine, Life Illustrated.

6. The first word of an example, a direct quotation, or a distinct speech must begin with a capital letter; as, Emerson says: 'The mid-world is best.'

7. The name of an object personified, and conveying a strictly individual idea, should begin with a capital letter; as,

'Come, calm Content, serene and sweet.'

8. Every line in poetry must begin with a capital letter.

9. The words I and O must always be capital letters.

10. Other words of particular importance, and such as denote the principal subject of discourse, may begin with capital letters.

CHOICE OF WORDS.

Use simple, familiar Anglo-Saxon words in preference to those of Latin and French origin. The latter may seem finer and more high-sounding, but the former are stronger and more expressive, and you will be able to set forth more clearly in them what you have to say. If your thought is a great one, simple words will well befit it: and if it is trifling or commonplace, your grand phrases will only make it seem ridiculous. *Father, mother, brother, sister, home, happiness, heaven; sun, moon, stars, light, heat;* to *sit*, to *stand*, to *go*, to *run*, to *stagger*, are Anglo-Saxon words; as are most of those used to express habitual actions and designate persons and objects familiar and dear to us. We may say in Latin-English, 'Felicity attends virtue,' but 'Well-being arises from well doing'—Saxon-English, is a far better wording of the same idea. And mark the strength, expressiveness, and majestic movement of the following lines from Byron's 'Destruction of Sennacherib,' in which nearly all the words are Anglo-Saxon:

For the angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts beat but once, and forever lay still.

The French and Latin elements of our language of course have their place and use, and can not be left out, but the Anglo-Saxon should furnish the staple of our common writing and talk.

Avoid equivocal and ambiguous words, technical terms, unless absolutely necessary, and, above all, low expressions or vulgarisms. A man is known almost as well by the words he uses as by the company he keeps. Choose both from among the best.

SENTENCES.

Words rightly arranged, form phrases, clauses, and sentences, and become the vehicle of thought. It is important to know how to arrange them rightly. The awkwardest scribbler for a country newspaper uses mainly the same nouns, adjectives, verbs, and connectives of which are composed the charming sketches of Irving and Ik Marvel. How different the result! Wherein consists the difference? Much of it, plainly, lies in *the way they put their words together!*

Sentence-making is taught in works on grammar, rhetoric, and composition. We recommend to those who can afford to purchase them, and have time for their study, 'Goold Brown's Grammar,' 'Newman's Rhetoric,' 'Parker's Aids to English Composition,' 'Kames' Elements of Criticism,' and last but not least in real usefulness, 'How to Talk: A Pocket Manual of Conversation and Debate,' which precedes this in the series of 'Hand Books for Home Improvement.' The last named comes within the reach of all, and its contents can be easily mastered. Our plan in this book embraces only brief rules and hints, but these will, we trust, be found useful.

CLEARNESS.

The first requisite of a good sentence is clearness. Aim, then, first of all, to put your words together so that they may truly represent your idea, and nothing more. Make yourself understood, if you do nothing else; and let there be no vagueness about your statements. Every sentence should not only convey a meaning, but a *distinct* and *definite* meaning. You may fail in this point either through a bad choice of words or a wrong arrangement of them. Be careful, then, to select words which, used in their proper sense, will express exactly the idea you intend; and not to use the same word in different senses in the same connection.

In reference to arrangement the good Dr. Blair has the following capital rule, of which you can make yourself master in three minutes, and which will be of service to you as long as you live and write English:

RULE.—Words and members of a sentence, closely related to each other, should be placed as near each other as possible, that their mutual relation may clearly appear.

This rule is frequently violated, particularly in the use of pronouns and adverbs, which are prone to get astray in badly managed sentences; but which are never misplaced without involving the idea intended to be conveyed in more or less obscurity. See 'How to Talk,' and 'Parker's Aids,' for illustrations.

STRENGTH.

Next in importance to clearness is strength. It is not enough that we are understood. We wish to make an impression—to influence—to move the reader. So we must make our sentences not only clear, but strong.

To make a strong wagon, the wheelwright takes hard, tough-fibred timber and puts it together with firm, well-fitting mortise and tenon. In a like manner strong sentences are made of strong words, strongly put together. We have said something of strong words, in speaking of the Anglo-Saxon element of our language. A strong construction implies *such an arrangement of words as will exhibit the sense to the best advantage*. To be strong, a sentence must be clear, compact, and symmetrical. Unpracticed writers fall into a variety of errors, which tend to lessen the force of their composition. The following rules, judiciously applied, will enable you to avoid most of them:

RULES OF CONSTRUCTION.

1. Place the principal words in your sentence where they will make the most striking impression.

2. Never allow a weaker assertion or argument to follow a stronger one.

3. Avoid the separation of the preposition from the noun which it governs.

4. Avoid concluding your sentence with an adverb, preposition, or other insignificant word.

5. Strike out all words which add nothing to the sense.

The last rule is by no means the least in importance. The young writer's sentences, like young trees, generally admit a good deal of pruning. Words merely are no ornaments of style. If they convey no decisive meaning, they are mere excrescences and incumbrances, and should be unsparingly cut off, in revising, wherever they have unfortunately been permitted to attach themselves.

UNITY.

A sentence, though, like the human body, composed of parts having distinct functions in the general economy, should, like the latter, make upon the mind the impression of a single object.

Lack of unity arises, oftener than otherwise, from crowding together, in a sentence, ideas so slightly connected that they admit being divided into two or more sentences. Shun this fault, even at the risk of making too many short sentences; and use as few parenthetical expressions as possible.

HARMONY.

Sense should never be sacrificed to sound; yet harmony is by no means an unimportant quality in literary composition. To promote it, avoid harsh-sounding words and discordant combinations, blend as far as possible long and short syllables, and pay particular attention to the closing cadence. Whatever is easy to the organs of speech, is pleasant to the ear. Such words as *wrong-headedness, unsuccessfulness, cursorily, summarily, peremptoriness, holily, sillily, lowlily*, should be avoided.

PARAGRAPHS.

One or more sentences form a paragraph. Paragraphs are not mere arbitrary divisions of a piece of writing, as some seem to suppose, but, like sentences, mark natural pauses or breaks in the discourse. Still, it is not easy to lay down rules for forming them. Some writers make fewer and longer ones than others. It is safer for the young writer, as a general rule, to make them short.

A quotation of any considerable length, when in the direct form, and following a colon, should be made a distinct paragraph; as should each distinct speech in a dialogue or colloquy.

The first line of each paragraph should begin about an inch farther from the left-hand margin of your paper than the other lines.

SECTIONS AND CHAPTERS.

Books and other long pieces of writing are generally divided into sections and chapters, and sometimes into "parts;" but letters, short essays, and newspaper and magazine articles, only occasionally have these divisions formally marked. This book is an example of close and somewhat methodical division. We have hoped, by making the subject of each chapter and section a distinct head, to enable the reader to readily find any rule, direction, or remark he may seek, without reference to an index.

METHOD.

Whether formally stated or not, every essay, discourse, story, letter, or other piece of writing, of any considerable length, has its natural divisions or heads—its distinct but related parts, a proper arrangement of which is in the highest degree important. The mere ability to construct clear, strong, compact, harmonious sentences does not constitute one a good writer.

Having a subject—one about which you *know something* of course, the next thing is, *to think it into shape*. Until you have acquired clear ideas, not only of its parts taken separately, but of their relation and consequent arrangement, it is vain to expect to write clearly, or in any way satisfactorily upon it.

We will suppose you are to write an article for a newspaper. You have several facts to state, or several arguments to present. Consider what these distinct points are, and unless you are sure that you can retain them all, in their proper order, in your memory, proceed to set them down on a slip of paper, as they occur to you. A single word will often be sufficient to indicate to your mind the point for which it stands. Now determine the natural or logical order of these divisions and number them accordingly, and you have a plan, in outline, of your composition, and can set yourself understandingly about writing it.

In planning or laying out your work, you will of course exercise your own taste and judgment. The same diversity exists in method as in style. The following general directions may, however, be profitably borne in mind:

1. Each division should have a direct and obvious bearing upon the general purpose of the piece.

2. Each division should be independent of all the others, not including any thing included in another.

3. All the divisions, taken together, should include the whole subject—or the whole idea of your piece.

We can hardly lay too much stress upon the foregoing directions. The best facts and thoughts fail to make their proper impression if presented in a jumble; and the difficulty you will experience in presenting them will be in proportion to the confusion in which they exist in your own mind. Adopt the course we have indicated, and you will be surprised at the ease and effectiveness with which you will write. Next to a lack of ideas, want of method is the greatest difficulty with which the young writer has to contend. Remember that

'Order is Heaven's first law;'

and that it makes all the difference between chaos and a beautiful creation.

PUNCTUATION.

Correct punctuation, though very rare, is very important. The omission or misuse of points, in writing, as clearly involves grammatical error, as the false collocation of words does; and as inevitably involves the writer's ideas in obscurity.

In punctuation, as in spelling, there is some diversity in the practice of writers and printers. The following rules have been condensed, with a few slight modifications, from Wilson's excellent work on English Punctuation. We have endeavored to exemplify them in the pointing of this book.

RULES OF PUNCTUATION.....THE COMMA. [,]

1. Two words of the same part of speech and in the same construction, if used without a conjunction between them, are separated from each other by a comma; as, 'We are fearfully, wonderfully made.'

2. In a series of words, all of the same part of speech, a comma is inserted between each particular and that which follows it; as, 'Industry, honesty, and temperance are essential to happiness.'

3. Words and phrases in apposition, unless closely connected should generally be separated from each other, and from what follows, by a comma; as, 'The twin sisters, Piety and Poetry, are wont to dwell together.'

4. Contrasted words and phrases must be separated by commas; as, 'False delicacy is affectation, not politeness.'

5 No point is admissible between the subject or nominative and the predicate; except in cases where perspicuity, or the intervention of some other rule absolutely requires one.

6. A comma should be put before a relative clause, when it is explanatory of the antecedent, or presents an additional thought; as, 'Study nature, whose laws and phenomena are all deeply interesting.'

7. Parenthetical phrases and clauses should be separated from the context by commas; as, 'Books, regarded merely as a gratification, are worth more than all the luxuries of earth.'

8. Expressions in direct address are separated from the rest of the sentence by commas; as, 'My sister, a brother's love is thine still.'

9. Adjectival, participial, adverbial, and absolute phrases must be separated from the rest of the sentence by commas; as, 'Cradled in the camp, Napoleon was the darling of the army.' 'On the other hand, let not the imagination be ungovernable.'

10. A transposed or inverted phrase should be set off by a comma from the rest of the sentence; as, 'Of all our senses, sight is the most perfect and delightful.'

11. Two clauses, one depending on the other, are separated by a comma; as, 'Wealth is of no real use, unless it be well employed.'

12. Two or more phrases or clauses, in the same construction, are separated by commas from the rest of the sentence; as, 'Regret for the past, grief at the present, and anxiety respecting the future, are plagues which affect the generality of men.'

13. Where a verb is understood, its place should generally be supplied by a comma; as, 'A wise man seeks to shine in himself; a fool, [seeks] to outshine others.

14. A short quotation, not in the direct form, should be separated by a comma from the clause which precedes it; as, "There is much in the proverb, 'Without pains, no gains.'"

THE SEMICOLON. [;]

1. When two clauses, the one perfect in itself and the other added as a matter of inference, are united by for, but, and, or an equivalent word, they are separated by a semicolon; as, 'Economy is no disgrace; for it is better to live on a little than to outlive a great deal."

2. A series of expressions, having a common dependence, if they are either laid down as distinct propositions, or are of a compound nature, should generally be separated from each other by a semicolon; as, 'Philosophers assert that Nature is unlimited in her operations; that she has inexhaustible treasures in reserve; that knowledge will always be progressive; and that all future generations will continue to make discoveries, of which we have not the slightest idea.'

3. When several short sentences, slightly connected in sense, follow one another, they should be separated by a semicolon; as, 'Stones grow; vegetables grow and live; animals grow, live, and feel.'

4. A semicolon should generally be placed between two or more parts of a sentence, when these parts, or any of them, are divided by commas into smaller portions; as, 'The noblest prophets and apostles have been children once; lisping the speech, laughing the laugh, thinking the thought, of boyhood.'

5. A semicolon is put before as, viz., namely, or that is, when they precede an example, or an enumeration of particulars; as, 'Many words are differently spelled in English; as, inquire, enquire.

THE COLON. [:]

1. The colon should be put after a clause which is complete in itself, but is followed without a conjunction, by some remarks, inference, or illustration; as, 'Virtue is too lovely and useful to be immersed in a cell: the world is her sphere of action.

2. When a sentence consists of two members which are united by a conjunction or adverb, and either of them is divided into clauses by semicolons, a colon should be used before the connecting word; as, 'As we perceive the shadow to have moved along the dial, but did not see it moving; and it appears that the grass has grown, though nobody ever saw it grow: so the advances we make in knowledge, as they consist of such minute steps, are perceivable only by the distance.'

3. A colon should be placed before a quotation, a speech, a course of reasoning, or a specification of particulars, when formally introduced; as, 'The words, literally translated, were these: "The winds roared and the rains fell, when the poor white man, faint and weary, came and sat under our tree."'

THE PERIOD [.]

1. When a sentence is complete in itself, and is neither connected with what follows, nor of an interrogatory or exclamatory nature, its termination is marked with a period; as, Truth is the basis of every virtue.

2. A period must be used after every abbreviated word; as, 'Geo. Marsh, M.D.'

INTERROGATION AND EXCLAMATION. [? !]

1. The mark of interrogation is placed at the termination of every question; as, 'Are there not seasons of spring in the moral world? and is not the present one of them?'

2. The mark of exclamation is put after interjections; after expressions in direct address, when emphatic; and after expressions denoting strong emotion; as, 'Oh! you are wounded;' 'This, O men of Athens! my duty prompted me to represent to you;' 'Alas, my noble boy! that thou shouldst die!'

PARENTHESES AND BRACKETS. [( )]

1. Parentheses should inclose only those words which break the unity of the sentence into which they are thrown, and which may therefore be omitted without injury to its sense or its construction; as, 'I have seen charity (if charity it may be called) insult with an air of pity.'

2. Brackets are used to inclose words, phrases, or sentences intended to supply an omission, rectify a mistake,