

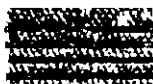


*PRACTICAL*

*JOURNALISM*



*How to enter thereon  
and succeed.*



PRACTICAL JOURNALISM:  
HOW 'TO ENTER THEREON AND SUCCEED.

# PRACTICAL JOURNALISM,

HOW TO ENTER THEREON AND  
SUCCEED.

A MANUAL FOR BEGINNERS AND AMATEURS.

BY JOHN DAWSON.

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## PREFACE.

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THIS little work on Practical Journalism (I believe the first of the kind) originally appeared in the form of a series of articles in *The Bazaar*. The argument in favour of the issue of such a book will be found in the "Introductory" chapter. I should like it to be understood that every line which is printed in the ensuing pages is addressed only to literary beginners. I make no pretensions to be considered either tutor or adviser to my experienced brethren of the Press, who, I trust, will deal as gently as they can with my attempt to smooth somewhat the path of the young journalist. Every popular author, even, had to make a beginning; and, remembering his (or her) early struggles, will, no doubt, ever be inclined to regard with kindness the aspirations of the novice.

JOHN DAWSON.

ROSALIE HOUSE,  
HIGHGATE ROAD, N.W.

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# PRACTICAL JOURNALISM,

HOW TO ENTER THEREON AND SUCCEED.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

SOME time ago, I contributed to *The Bazaar* two articles—one on "Amateur Authors" and the other on "Literary Remuneration," and the ventilation of these topics brought so many letters from young men, who wished to adopt journalism as a profession, that the idea occurred to me that a series of papers on practical journalism would be likely to find wide favour. The youths and young men, not to mention girls and young women, and persons who have arrived at the meridian of life, who desire to earn a livelihood by literary work, are countless. While a great number of these are perhaps totally lacking the qualifications essential to ensure success as authors or journalists, at the same time there are doubtless many clever young ones among them who, if they only knew how to begin, might become fairly prosperous members of the Press. We have books in the shape of guides to the Law, the Army and Navy, Medicine, and to Government appointments; but, as far as I know, we have no book which forms a thoroughly practical guide to journalism as a profession. That want I desire to supply.

A taint of Bohemianism still clings to journalism, which makes it somewhat unpopular with parents and guardians, and groundless objections are often urged against a young man adopting literature as a profession. Now, the journalist of the present day differs as much from the newspaper man of the past as the illuminating power of the electric light differs from the rays which were cast by the farthing candle. The member of the Press of the current generation is found to be just as prosperous as—and frequently more so than—the successful member of any other profession. The impecuniosity which was a common condition of the newspaper writer of the early part of the nineteenth century is seldom now seen in any man of ability connected with the Press, unless the cause can be traced to insobriety, or want of industry, or lack of perseverance—failings which would prevent an individual rising in any walk of life.

There are many examples of unsuccessful journalists; so also have we unsuccessful lawyers, unsuccessful doctors, and, unfortunately, unsuccessful members of all professions and trades. It would be wonderful indeed if journalism stood alone as a profession into which everyone who entered should succeed; and, where success is easiest, it should not be forgotten, the prizes are fewer and less in value. The prosperous journalist of to-day discharges his tradesmen's bills and pays his rent and taxes just as promptly as the flourishing member of any other business; therefore, the down-at-the-heel and shabbily-dressed literary lounge of Fleet-street should no more be accepted as the type of a Press man nowadays than the bragging, blustering individual of certain convivial haunts of the Strand should be considered a fair example of the hard-working men who adorn the Stage.

Journalism has made enormous strides, even during the last decade, and it is probable it will make still more gigantic ones in future years. Papers have greatly multiplied; and naturally, therefore, the workers who produce them must have increased, and will still go on increasing. That a great



quantity of the newspaper writing of the day is poor, is often used as an argument in favour of the view that journalistic writers are too numerous. It is true that journalists are plentiful enough, and that many of them produce only indifferent work; but these facts really point to quite an opposite conclusion to that which is commonly deduced from them. Many incapable writers produce many badly-written papers; if more capable writers were forthcoming, they would oust the "incapables" from their chairs, and usher in an era of better class newspaper literature. The existence of badly-written journals is no proof whatever that the profession of journalism is overcrowded, but rather that there are too few good writers. Every year, however, the Press is drawing to itself a better class of men. The overcrowding of other professions has something to do with this, and it is further influenced by the fact that the pecuniary rewards of journalism are now greater than they were. The action of the School Board has created more readers, and will continue to create still more; and, as this goes on, a greater number of writers will be required to produce an ever-increasing number of papers.

I have no desire whatever to tempt any young man to enter upon the somewhat intricate paths of journalism; but I can say with truth that to a youth of literary inclinations, who has received a fair education, the Press offers an open field for a prosperous career. I am quite aware that in journalism there may not be so many big prizes to be won as there are at the Bar; but I contend that in Press work there are more rewards of moderate worth than are to be found in Law or in Medicine, or in the Church, to say nothing of such artistic pursuits as painting, sculpture, or the Stage. Some apprenticeship, of course, is requisite before a young man can develop into a journeyman-journalist, just as some apprenticeship is required before a young man can blossom forth as an adept at any other calling. I would, therefore, not wish any youth to imagine that he has only to procure

an ink-bottle and a pen and a quire of paper to be at once in receipt of a handsome income from literary productions. That is the last thing I should desire any reader to suppose; but this I affirm most strongly, that no profession, perhaps, offers to a young man who is possessed of literary ability so ready and speedy a means of earning money as journalism. If he went to the Bar, he might have to wait years before he got a brief, and it is possible the desired document might never reach him at all. Were he to enter the Church, his ultimate reward might be, probably, no more than the curacy of an obscure mining or agricultural parish, of the value of a hundred or so a year. In Medicine, a young man must pass through long years of waiting before he acquires much of a practice, unless he be possessed of the capital necessary to buy one. As to the Army and Navy, we can scarcely consider either profession one which a young man would enter if he has his living to earn.

Now, I need scarcely say that a Press worker on almost the lowest rung of the ladder receives more remuneration for his services than the poor curate, or the barrister who "devils" for a more successful brother, or a lieutenant in the Army or Navy, and more guineas, usually, than the young surgeon who, unaided by friends, is making strenuous efforts to build up a practice. To what position the beginner in journalism has every chance of ultimately attaining, providing he is possessed even of only moderate ability, it will be my duty in this little book to acquaint the reader. The more clever, of course, he is, the larger will be his reward; at the same time, it is well that I should point out that it is by no means necessary a young man should be a genius in order to succeed in journalism. If only the genius wrote, we should have to content ourselves with very few newspapers indeed, while the appearance of books would certainly be few and far between. The work of the genius is, indeed, not required, as a rule, in producing newspapers; but what is requisite is the literary ability to retail news in plain every-day language, and to comment on

the same with a liberal display of common sense, fairness, and clearness. Any additional acquirements beyond these may be useful to the journalist, but the above should never be absent if any substantial progress is to be made.

I purpose in the ensuing chapters dealing as thoroughly with my subject as will serve the object in view. I shall endeavour to throw out hints regarding work which may occur to me, not omitting to mention the subjects which it is advisable a young writer should choose, and how he should treat them, in order to secure the attention of an editor. It may be possible also to indicate to the novice the channel in which he is most likely to dispose of the results of his pen, and how and where he may have the best chance of securing permanent literary employment on the Press.

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## CHAPTER II.

### *PARAGRAPH-WRITING AND REPORTING.*

*Ambitious Authors—Victims of Cacoëthes Scribendi—Shorthand and its Place—How to Write a Paragraph.*

THE great fault of the literary aspirant is that he usually aims too high. It is a good thing to aim high, as one is more likely to have greater success; at the same time, we must not forget the vaulting ambition which overleaps itself and falls on the wrong side. My experience and observation have convinced me—and I think the experiences and observations of most authors and journalists would agree with mine—that it sadly retards the progress of a young man when he begins by making too ambitious attempts in literature or journalism. Except in the case of the genius—an exalted being, to whom I do not propose to have anything at all to say—failure, on the part of the inexperienced, is nearly always the result of over-ambitious literary effort. It is necessary in writing, as it is in any other work, that one must walk before one can run. No man would ever think of earning a living as a maker of chairs or tables before he had first learnt to saw and plane a piece of wood properly. Yet the literary aspirant will frequently sit down, with an assurance which is amusing, to write a three-volume novel before he is able to pen a fairly respectable paragraph or, it may be, a grammatically-constructed sentence. Such is, of

course, a great mistake; and I wish to strongly impress it upon those who peruse these chapters with the view of profiting by the few hints which my experience enables me to offer.

*Cacoëthes scribendi* generally attacks its victim early in life, and the result often is a five-act tragedy or an epic play or poem, which generally, being doomed, never sees the light. How many such ambitious literary efforts are now lying at the bottom of boxes and cupboards in England alone! Of course, publishers and dramatic tasters are obtuse-minded, and obstinately refuse to discern the merits of a young and aspiring writer, who is perforce driven to earn his livelihood by an occupation of a less ambitious character than literature. Were the aspirant to covet more modest laurels, it is probable in many instances that success would be his reward, which would encourage him to further, and, it might be, more ambitious, efforts. Experiencing a brusque rebuff at the outset, through being too eager for speedy literary fame, discourages him very often from making any further effort; and it is just possible we may thus occasionally lose a promising recruit to the ranks of literature. I fully believe that over-ambition in the beginning is one of the causes of journalism losing not a few workers of ability.

Fortunately for journalism, *cacoëthes scribendi* does frequently take a more modest course than in the writing of five-act tragedies, epics, or three-volume novels. The victims of the disease are generally regarded as awful plagues or bores in their own circles, and such treatment makes matters somewhat hard for the literary beginner. The affliction of *cacoëthes scribendi* does certainly often transform a young man (an old one, too, for the matter of that) into a terrible nuisance to his relatives and friends. A passion for private theatricals has given us more than one ornament of the dramatic profession; and when the hot fever of *cacoëthes scribendi* has passed beyond its earlier stage, it has sometimes discovered a writer who it could easily be seen had acquired a considerable

knack of wielding the pen. No professional, perhaps, is particularly partial to the amateur, but we must, to some extent, be reasonable and indulgent in this respect, remembering that all professionals were amateurs, more or less, at the outset of their career.

Personally, I like to see a young journalistic aspirant modestly begin by writing paragraphs, and to find him industrious in acquiring the practical use of shorthand. It is almost sure to lead to a great deal of wasted time and labour for a very young man, whose ideas are quite raw and not particularly novel, to attempt to contribute original articles to newspapers or magazines. The qualification of writing paragraphs, coupled with the knowledge of shorthand, will commend itself sooner to the attention of an editor who is in want of a recruit on his staff than anything else. While shorthand is not, as so many young men seem to suppose, the one and only qualification of a newspaper reporter, at the same time the aspirant cannot attach too much importance to it if he wishes to succeed in journalism. There have been, I am aware, many admirable reporters who could not write a word in shorthand; nevertheless, I would strongly impress upon the beginner the necessity of acquiring the "stenographic art" if he desires to get on. It is a recommendation even for an editor or a sub-editor to be able to write shorthand, so it may be quite understood that it is a still greater recommendation for a reporter.

It is almost impossible that reporting of any sort can be efficiently performed without the assistance of shorthand; for, though speeches may not have to be "taken," yet, even for paragraph-writing, memoranda have to be jotted down, which cannot be done so readily and fully with longhand as by the use of shorthand. As to which system is the best for the aspirant to acquire, I will say nothing beyond this—that in my younger days Pitman's was considered much superior to any other. Let me here, however, impress this fact upon a young man—the great desirability of thoroughly mastering

whatever system of shorthand he undertakes to acquire, that it may be of practical service to him. I am sorry to see the great amount of time that is wasted by young men in only, as it were, half mastering a system, then ceasing its study when the progress that has been made can be of little or no use for reporting purposes—in fact, it may be worse than useless; for if the writer cannot read his notes easily, he had far better get along as best he can with longhand.

Paragraphs are so numerous in a newspaper, and indeed, generally, in almost every journal, that the beginner will do well to devote careful attention to paragraph-writing, which, by the way, is not such an easy art as some persons may suppose. It is a fact that many an able reporter cannot write a decent paragraph. (By reporter I here mean simply an apt notetaker and transcriber.) I remember being particularly struck by this fact some years ago, at a time when I was engaged as a sub-editor on a London evening paper. A young man reported for us the inquest in the well-known Bravo case, and reported it admirably, too. This task over, we sent him out the following morning to attend a suburban flower show. We only wanted a paragraph, I told him, of not more than forty or fifty lines. He duly went to the place, and returned to the office with his paragraph—a journalistic performance which I shall never forget. It was impossible that I could insert it as it was written; it was what might be truthfully termed “an awful hash.” I was obliged to turn and twist it about, and most carefully revise it, before I could let it go into the columns of the paper. I was, indeed, surprised that a young man who had so faithfully and accurately reported the inquest should have written such a poor paragraph about a flower show. The fact was, that reporting the evidence of the witnesses before the coroner called for little or no literary ability, while to write a neat paragraph needs some journalistic skill and experience. It is a sub-editor’s duty, of course, to revise the reporters’ paragraphs, but it can be scarcely expected that he should

often have to re-write them entirely. To be able to write a neat paragraph is an important qualification, and the beginner who can do so has naturally the best chance of having his paragraphs inserted, or securing an engagement on a newspaper.

In writing a paragraph, several points should be observed. In the first place, the heading, if there be one, ought to be as short and explicit as possible. If there is to be no heading, the first line or two should contain something which will let the reader know the subject of the paragraph, and not compel him to have to read further in order to ascertain if the matter is of any interest to him. The time when the accident occurred, or the inquest was held, or the lecture was delivered, as the case may be, should appear early in the paragraph. If it be written with the view of appearing in the issue of a paper of the next day, the word "Yesterday," or the phrase "Last evening," is a good way of beginning. The news thus looks recent and fresh. Of course, if the paragraph is penned for insertion in an evening paper of the same day, it should begin with "This morning" or "This afternoon."

In a simple news paragraph—that is, say, the report of an accident, inquest, or lecture—the expression of opinion on the part of the writer should be rigorously omitted. The editorial "we" should be avoided, too, in news-paragraph writing. Instead of such phrases as "We understand" and "Let us hope," write "It is understood" and "It is hoped." The young journalist is fond of airing the editorial "we" in the midst of news, but it is a decided blemish in paragraph writing. Finally, terseness is a great recommendation in a paragraph.

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## CHAPTER III.

### REPORTING.

*The Roughing Process—Provincial Newspapers—Best Training Schools—Versatility of Country Reporters—Experiences on the “Mudborough Chronicle”—“The Smart Descriptive Man”—Reporting on London Dailies—Parliamentary Reporting—The “Gallery” Man—Taking “Turns”—“Smith follows Brown”—Qualifications of a Gallery Reporter—Press Agencies—Parliamentary Committees—“Annual” and “Sessional” Reporters.*

REPORTING is a most important, if not the most important, branch of journalism. I am not so sure that the reporter has not a better claim than any other literary worker on the Press to the title of journalist. A man is often spoken of as “No journalist: a mere reporter”; but why so? Reporting is the very backbone of a newspaper, which, without reporting, would be nothing. As I understand the term “journalism,” it means keeping a journal: a journal is a diary; and, as the reporter daily takes notes of events as they occur, and writes them out or enters them up in his journal or diary, I think he has a greater claim to be denominated a journalist than has the leader-writer who comments upon the news, or the reviewer, or the dramatic-critic who pens essays upon the carpentry and scenery of the latter-day Stage. However, journalist or no journalist, in producing a newspaper we cannot do without

the reporter; and certain country newspaper proprietors so far acknowledge this fact that they employ only the reporter as a literary worker in getting out their sheets, ignoring altogether such individuals as editor and sub-editor.

The salary of a reporter varies very much. A youth on a country weekly paper may receive no more than five-and-twenty shillings or so a week, while a full-fledged Parliamentary reporter on a London daily journal would receive £5 or £6 a week. My advice to the young journalistic aspirant would not be exactly Horace Greeley's—"Go West, young man"—but it would be, "Go into the country—north, south, east, or west, it matters not." Every young reporter has to go through what may be termed a "roughing" process before he can be much of a hand at his work, and on a country newspaper he is more likely to obtain a varied training than if engaged on a London journal.

Provincial theatres are, I think, still considered to be better than London ones in which to obtain a knowledge of the elements of acting; and certainly a provincial newspaper office is greatly to be preferred to a London one, by a young reporter who is anxious to become thoroughly grounded in all the details of his chosen calling. He would get in the country a variety of work which in London it would be impossible for him to obtain. In a country town he would have to attend inquests, be sent to the police and county courts, report cricket and football matches, flower shows—or, as he would be obliged to term them, "horticultural exhibitions"—volunteer reviews, balls and parties, distributions of prizes to school children, lectures, sermons, weddings, funerals, and no end of events, not forgetting the writing of the periodical paragraph concerning the first spring lamb, or the turnip of abnormal size.

In a country newspaper office a young reporter may be asked to exercise his hands and arms, if not his brain, in folding up issues of the journal; and I have heard reporters mutter something about expecting next to be requested to sweep the

office floor, or to clean the proprietor's boots. This kind of versatility, I may inform my reader, is unattainable on a London newspaper.

In speaking of country journals, I may mention that I do not, of course, include the daily papers of such large towns as Manchester, Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Leeds, which are conducted with, in many instances, energy and enterprise equal to that of any London paper. My type of a country paper is the *Mudborough Chronicle*, or the *Mudborough Mercury*, the rival organs of a town with not more than 25,000 inhabitants. A greater number of years than I care to remember I was engaged upon the *Chronicle* of Mudborough, so I can speak of the work with some degree of authority. I was nineteen years of age at the time, I was junior reporter, and my salary was twenty-five shillings a week. I wished to go on the *Mercury*, where my salary would have been five shillings a week more, but I learnt, just in time to save me the indignity of my proffered services being declined, that on that organ of Liberalism I should be expected, in addition to my labours of reporting, to canvas for advertisements and "assist at case," the former of which I was too nervous to undertake, and the latter—not having been bound apprentice to printing—I could not do. I may parenthetically remark that I have no wish to offend anyone's susceptibilities in what I have just written. I am quite aware that the finances of many country papers will not allow them to retain the services of a large literary staff.

On the *Mudborough Chronicle*, in addition to being junior reporter, I was also dramatic and musical critic, "the smart descriptive man," the reviewer of all the current literature of the day, &c. It is a fact that in Mudborough my employer, who was also an enterprising shirt manufacturer, as well as being a newspaper proprietor, frequently gave me, at ten o'clock in the morning, a handful of monthly magazines, which I was obliged to review before eleven the same morning, at which hour my services were required in the reporters' box of

the police court of the borough. Of course, I could not read the publications, which it would have been impossible to do within the space of an hour; and I tremble now to think of the reputations I may have marred, and of the false hopes I may have held out to aspiring writers, in that one hour in penning my notices of "Magazines of the Month," as I headed that feature in the *Mudborough Chronicle*. I relate these little incidents, not with the view of amusing my reader, but simply with the idea of giving him as good an inkling as I can of what will be expected of him in beginning on a country journal. Such onerous duties were to me not particularly pleasant at the time, but I smile when I look back at them now.

The reporting on a large London daily paper is carried on very differently. Such work in the office of a London daily journal is departmental. The Parliamentary reporting is done by a corps of reporters, consisting, say, of seven or eight men, one of whom is termed the "chief." The salaries of these workers may be said to average about six guineas a week each, the chief receiving a couple of guineas or so a week more. The entire corps attend in the Reporters' Galleries of the Houses of Parliament on every occasion on which Parliament is sitting. Two men, we will say, are told off to attend in the Reporters' Gallery of the House of Lords, while the remaining hands are present in the reporting department of the House of Commons. Each man takes what is called a "turn" in a reporters' box of the Gallery, a "turn" being five, ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes, or it may be even half an hour's spell at note-taking, according to the importance or unimportance of the speakers, or the early or late hour of the evening.

I wish to make this order of reporting as clear as I possibly can to the non-professional reader. If the House meets in the afternoon, the reporters may take "turns" of as much as twenty minutes each; for then there is ample time for the transcription of their notes before the demand for "copy" becomes pressing

in the composing room of the printing office of the journal; or, if the earlier proceedings of the House be of a merely routine character, half an hour's "turn" each may be taken by the men, as there are not, in this case, perhaps, many notes to transcribe. The "turns" are so arranged that the first man of the corps who enters the reporters' box is able, after leaving it, and retiring to the writing room, to get all his notes transcribed before his "turn" comes round again. As the hour approaches midnight, the "turns" are usually shorter; for little "copy" can be taken, as a rule, by the editor of a London daily paper after twelve o'clock has struck. It is the duty of the "chief" of the corps to collect the "copy" and transmit it by messengers to the newspaper office, where it is speedily set up in type, read, revised, and made ready for press as quickly as possible. The men of a Parliamentary reporting corps follow one another in regular order, one man, as he leaves the reporters' box, writing on his "copy" his own name and the name of the reporter who takes his place. Example: "Smith follows Brown."

I may here just relate a well-known little press anecdote, which arose out of this detail of Parliamentary reporting. It is well understood by compositors that any words written on "copy," and surrounded by a line, are not intended to be set in type. The omission of this trifling matter (the surrounding line) once led to the readers of a certain newspaper opening their eyes one fine morning in wonder and amazement, to see, in the midst of a report of Parliamentary proceedings, the original and novel announcement that "Smith follows Brown." Parliamentary reporters, knowing the origin of the legend, of course, were more amused than astonished when it met their gaze.

I need scarcely say that one essential for a seat in the Reporters' Gallery is that the aspirant should be a good shorthand writer. Without possessing the undoubted ability to take a *verbatim* note of a moderately rapid speaker, and accurately and expeditiously transcribe the same, it is in vain for a young

man to seek employment as a Parliamentary reporter. The qualification of efficient shorthand writing he must possess, and, added to this, a knowledge of politics will assist him in attaining his desire, as will also an acquaintance with the history of his country, and with ancient and modern languages. To a reporter, information of every kind is of service at some time or other, as endless are the themes upon which speakers will dwell, for the edification, instruction, or wearying of their hearers. The reporter has generally passed through the provincial school of "roughing it," before he secures the coveted seat in the Gallery, where even his ambition may not rest; for a Parliamentary reporter has occasionally ripened into a Parliamentary summary-writer, with an increase of salary, or left his corps to become sub-editor or editor of the journal which he has hitherto faithfully served as a Gallery man. Some reporters remain long enough in the Gallery to grow grey in its service; and, laborious as the reporting of Parliamentary debates is (for it is by no means easy work, as the aspiring reader should understand), Gallery men have continued their duties till a ripe old age. I take it that no one would think of becoming a reporter unless he possessed at least a sharp ear and good sight.

In the Houses of Parliament, in the daytime, there is other reporting to be done, beside the Gallery work which I have just dealt with. I refer to the reporting of the numerous Parliamentary Committees, which usually sit from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. This work is generally undertaken by the various Press Associations or Agencies, on the staffs of which are seldom found many of the Gallery hands. Such work might more fitly be termed summary-writing, as it is very seldom a "full note" of the proceedings of Parliamentary Committees is required. The remuneration is generally at the rate of a pound a *Times*' newspaper column, the Press Associations or Agencies disposing of the work to a number of newspapers at as low a rate as five shillings a column. The reporter, writing on manifold paper, enables the Press Association or

Agency to transmit the same report to newspaper offices of various towns of the provinces at one and the same time.

Of Parliamentary reporters, there are two kinds—"annual" and "sessional" men. The "annuals" are paid all the year round, the "sessionals" only during the session of Parliament. When Parliament is not sitting, the "annual" hands are generally employed in other descriptions of reporting, and often in recording speeches made by members who render an account of their stewardship to their constituencies. Or the Parliamentary "annual" will be occasionally given odd jobs in "paragraphing," if nothing more important can be found for him. A Parliamentary "annual" reporter is not allowed to interfere with the work of the other regular salaried reporters, whose duties all the year round are of a considerably varied character: one day, it may be, telling us all about an industrial exhibition, next day chronicling the holding of an art *conversazione*, and on another occasion tersely describing some new invention of a wonderful nature.

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## CHAPTER IV.

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### PROVINCIAL AND METROPOLITAN REPORTING.

*The "General" Reporter—Rival Newspapers—Paragraph Hunting—Obstacles in the Way—A Happy Thought—"I will kill that Dog"—The "Mercury" and Poor Dog Tray—The Effect of a Ruse—Fleet Street "Liners"—Police Court Reporters—Legal Reports—The Chief Point in Reporting.*

THE Parliamentary reporter may be considered to have reached the top rung of the ladder in the reporting profession; nevertheless, his sphere for the exercise of energy and enterprise is somewhat limited compared with that of the general reporter—*alias* the man-of-all-literary-work—on a country newspaper. The duties of the Parliamentary reporter are cut out for him, while the provincial reporter can rarely tell how much work he has to do, or what task he may have to accomplish. The fierce and often amusing rivalry of country newspapers renders the work of the provincial journalist all the more difficult. I have known rival newspaper proprietors in a country town forbid their respective reporters—if not exactly to speak to one another—to be on terms of friendship. I must say that I do not think much of any young man who submits to such dictation, even from his employer; but, apart from this, the proprietor of a newspaper may make things very unpleasant for his reporter, whose efforts he will periodically compare with the results of the labours of a reporter on a rival journal.

The *Mudborough Chronicle*, when I was engaged upon it, came



out on Thursday, which was market-day; the *Mudborough Mercury* appeared the day after (Friday). One of my duties was to go paragraph-hunting in the numerous villages around Mudborough. My paragraphs appeared in the paper under the heads or names of the different villages; for instance, under the head of "Bullocksmithy" was printed all the intelligence of that district, and under the head of "Stoke-in-the-Hole" appeared all the news of that place. One week I was not able, perhaps, to gather more than three paragraphs concerning existence in Bullocksmithy, but out would come our rival, the *Mudborough Mercury*, with four paragraphs chronicling life, death, or "high-jinks" in the same important parish. On such occasions I was summoned to present myself in the private office of the proprietor, who, after the exchange of civilities in the way of "Good evening," or "Good morning," as the case might be, would say: "You know, Mr. ———, this will never do," opening the sheet of our journal and spreading it out on his desk as he spoke. "Here," taking up the rival sheet, "the *Mercury* has got four Bullocksmithy paragraphs, while we've only three." "Well, that is easily enough explained," I would say. "We appear a day earlier than the *Mercury*. I go to Bullocksmithy and get three paragraphs; the *Mercury* man goes to Bullocksmithy and gets three paragraphs. Two of the paragraphs in each case are the same, one in each instance is not. The *Mercury*, therefore, coming out the day after us, the reporter on that journal has time to re-write one of my paragraphs, which he had not previously obtained, and so make up his number to four." My proprietor was given to pooh-poohing this explanation, though it was the true one, and in the innermost recesses of his heart I daresay he knew it.

Journalists who have had experience on papers in small provincial towns, will, I have little doubt, fully appreciate what I have stated above, and forgive me the little ruse which I felt obliged to resort to in order to demonstrate to the proprietor of the *Mudborough Chronicle* that I was neither lacking in industry nor enterprise.

Disconsolately I wended my way one afternoon from the village of Bullocksmithy towards the town of Mudborough. I had succeeded in getting four paragraphs on this occasion, yet I was not exactly happy. "That confounded *Mercury*," I thought, "will come out with five paragraphs of Bullocksmithy intelligence as sure as a gun, and the *Chronicle* will be one behind as usual.—Ah! very nearly! just missed!" The Bullocksmithy omnibus, coming lumbering along the road just at this moment, nearly ran over a blind man and his dog, who were crossing from one side of the highway to the other. "I have it now"—the thought suddenly flashed into my mind—"I will kill that dog." Reader, do not start. I had no intention of literally taking the life of this member of the canine species. I simply meant that I would write a paragraph in the *Mudborough Chronicle* detailing the incident which I had just witnessed, with the *soupeçon* of imagination thrown in that the dog had met its death through being run over by the passing omnibus. "Why?" you ask me. Read on, please. I gave my paragraph the side-head, "A NARROW ESCAPE." The intelligence ran to the effect that the poor blind man had narrowly escaped with his life, while his poor dog, less fortunate, was killed. This was a piece of "news," I flattered myself, which my rival could not pick up. Into type my paragraph went, and out we came a day or two afterwards.

I eagerly awaited the appearance of the *Mudborough Mercury* on the following day, when I found, just as I had expected, that our rival sheet contained the particular item of "news" which I have just referred to, but, of course, entirely and very carefully re-written. The *Mercury* headed the intelligence, "POOR DOG TRAY." I need scarcely say that I took the earliest opportunity of enlightening my proprietor as to this matter. When I had placed a copy of the *Chronicle*, and also a copy of the *Mercury*, before him, and explained things so far, he replied, "Well, the *Mercury* reporter has heard of it. You saw it, but he picked up the intelligence." "But the dog wasn't killed," said I. "Oh-h-h-h-h!" he hummed. "I am not in the habit

of manufacturing news in such a manner," I felt obliged to add, by way of apology for being guilty of such a breach of conduct in the faithful discharge of a reporter's duties. If the reader will not think that I am talking about my own smartness as a reporter, I should like it to be known that I never had any more complaints from the proprietor after this, and that I stayed for a longer period on the *Mudborough Chronicle* than, without resorting to this pardonable little ruse, I should otherwise have done.

The paragraphs in a London daily paper come from all manner of sources, and from all quarters, and only a very small proportion of them are done by salaried men on the staff. In London there is a contingent of reporters who are attached to no paper in particular. These workers may be considered to be on the lowest rung of the journalistic ladder. They are termed "liners," from the fact that they are paid for their services at the rate of so much a line. The "liner" was formerly known as the "penny-a-liner," but it should be stated that nearly all the London daily papers now pay 1½d. a line, and one or two of them 2d. a line, for paragraphs which they accept from reporters who are not on the salaried staff. The "liner" is often spoken of in a somewhat contemptuous tone by ambitious young journalists who ought to know better, and by members of the public who do not know what they are talking about; but those who are learned in the ways and mysteries of Fleet-street are aware that the income of the "liner" is frequently a very considerable one indeed. I have known a "liner" who would not have undertaken the sub-editorship of a daily paper, had such a post been offered to him, simply because he was in receipt of larger earnings than he would have secured as sub-editor. He might seldom be paid more than 1½d. a line, but even 1½d. a line, with his paragraphs appearing in half-a-dozen papers or more the same day, amounts in the total to no inconsiderable a sum. The earnings of the "liner" are, of course, precarious, and while one week, with a murder case, he may make £12 or

£15, or even more, another week he may barely earn as many shillings.

The business of "lining" is not such a good one as it was a generation ago, for the simple reason that daily papers are now more enterprising, and retain a much larger staff of regular salaried reporters. Nevertheless, there is still a lot of hole-and-corner paragraphing in the Metropolis which can only be done by "liners." The "liner," curiously as it may appear to those who are unacquainted with journalism, is generally busiest in the so-called "dull season," when Parliament is not sitting, for it is then newspapers are most glad to get spicy items for their columns. Among the work of the "liner" may be mentioned the reporting of inquests, fires, street and railway accidents, important sales of property, and, occasionally, cases of interest in the county courts. Police court reporting is done by men who can scarcely be called "liners," though they are occasionally paid by the line by some papers, while other journals retain their services at salaries of a nominal amount. In every London police court there is one regular or recognised reporter, who confines his attention to one court year after year; but there are usually two or three other reporters who will hang about the same court, ready at any time to snap up any case which may be of particular interest to some class journal. Occasionally, too, the regularly recognised reporter of the police court may have quarrelled with a daily paper, which will then prefer to take "copy" from one of the odd men, who are only too glad to supply it. I have no wish to enlighten the journalistic aspirant as to the shady side of reporting, otherwise I might inform him how men, not always reporters, who hang about the London police courts, contrive to add to their incomes.

In addition to the reporting of the police courts, there is the reporting of the higher courts of justice to be attended to. A regular reporter is found daily during the sitting in the Queen's Bench Division, the Chancery Division, the Court of Appeal, Divorce and Probate Divisions, and in every one of the

other courts. This gentleman manifolds his report, and thus supplies the same "copy" to all the London daily papers, excepting the *Times*, which is credited with receiving its law reports from members of the Bar. The legal reports appearing in the *Times* are as near perfection in respect to accuracy as it is possible to make them, and on this account "the leading journal" well deserves its name, as in this respect it is far ahead of any other paper. In order to intelligibly report a case in one of the higher courts of justice, considerable legal knowledge is necessary, and only men who are duly qualified should undertake such work. A true and correct account of a case is often hard enough for the average newspaper reader to understand; I leave you, therefore, to imagine how a muddled report is likely to puzzle the public. I take it, however, that the would-be reporter will at first covet more modest laurels than are to be won in the correct reporting of a judgment delivered in the Queen's Bench Division or the Court of Appeal.

The chief point to be observed in all reporting, no matter of what kind, is to endeavour to render a correct and clear account for the information of the newspaper reader. The exact words uttered by a speaker need not necessarily be given; indeed, if the exact phrases of many speakers were set down, a report would often be perfectly unintelligible. The reporter should listen attentively, so as to catch the *sense* of the speaker, for it is scarcely likely that if he does not himself understand the subject of discourse, newspaper readers will easily comprehend his "report." A good reporter will frequently make a speaker's meaning more clear to the readers of his paper than the speaker himself was able to make it to his hearers at the time of delivery. Such is the triumph of reporting, which has done so much to make the English Press what it is, and spread useful information far and wide over the surface of the globe.

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## CHAPTER V.

### SUB-EDITING.

*Duties of Sub-Editor—Chief Sub-Editor on a London Evening Paper—Condensing—"Make-up" Paragraphs—"Dressing up" Law and Police—Morning Reports—The First Edition—"Marking Out" for the Next Edition—Stereotyping the "Formes"—Instructing Reporters—Coolness and Common Sense—Sub-Editing a Sedentary Occupation.*

To contribute towards the making of a good journal no one is so essential as an efficient sub-editor. Indifferent reporters you may have, a wavering editor directing the tone of the paper, the leader-writers perhaps not penning the most faultless English, the foreign correspondent not always receiving his information on "good authority"; but, if the journal is to "go," the sub-editor must know his business. I think my brethren of the Press will agree with me that the sub-editor does more even than the editor to influence the success or non-success of a journal, particularly if that journal be a daily newspaper, or weekly sheet of general news. Everybody reads news, but very few indeed peruse leading-articles, dramatic *critiques*, or the columns of matter which are frequently unjustly dignified by the name of art criticism.

Setting aside the original matter—namely, the leading-articles, dramatic and art criticism, &c., which the editor takes under

his own control—all the literary contents of the journal are accepted, managed, and arranged by the sub-editor and his assistants. It will, therefore, be readily understood how highly important it is that the services of a good "sub" should be secured if a newspaper venture is to succeed. Thoroughly capable "subs" are very rare on the Press, and the paper which possesses a thoroughly efficient man as the occupant of the sub-editorial chair may consider itself truly fortunate. The reason good sub-editors are rare is that they occasionally develop into leader-writers, or editors, with, of course, a considerable increase of salary. I am inclined to think that a qualified sub-editor, like the poet, is "born, not made."

Let us take a very brief glance at his duties. I was engaged for a considerable time as an assistant on a London evening paper, and we will here confine our attention to the literary duties on such a journal. The sub-editor and his two assistants of the *Repeater* arrive at the office at 8 A.M., and punctuality is in few walks of life more important than in journalism. The "chief" (that is, the chief sub-editor) finds at that hour the London morning papers on his table, and these he immediately seizes, and at once begins his duties. He cuts out a report, say of three columns in length, of a meeting of the previous evening, from one of the journals, and hands it to one of his assistants, with laconic instructions that it is to be cut down to half a column. From another journal he cuts out another report of the same meeting, and hands it to the same assistant, with the intimation that this report may contain something which the other paper has missed. From a third journal he cuts out still another report of the same meeting, his sharp eye having instantly noticed that this last report contains the names of a number of prominent persons who were present at the meeting, an interesting detail of reporting that the two previous journals omitted. The assistant, in the course of a few minutes, by the aid of his pen, scissors, and paste-pot, has produced a neat

condensed account, in the space of half a column or so, of the meeting, a report of which occupied three columns or more, in the morning paper. Of course, much has to be left out in this rapid system of condensing; but the chief aim is to give the points of the matter or matters discussed, and omit all verbiage, or what may be termed mere talkee-talkee.

To the other assistant the chief sub-editor hands a report of something else, with instructions to cut it down to a quarter of a column, or, it may be, to devote to it an entire column of the paper. Perhaps some paragraphs may have been handed to the second assistant, who cuts them down, or entirely rewrites them, as the case may be. It is very seldom matter is taken from one paper and inserted in another without some alteration, however slight. Some of the paragraphs are marked "make up," which means they are to be used by the printer in making up, or, in other words, filling up, columns.

In case I may be misunderstood in making use of the phrase "filling up," I had better offer a word or two in explanation. It is popularly supposed that an editor is often driven to his wits' end to fill his paper. No supposition could be more erroneous. The difficulty with an editor or sub-editor of a newspaper is not to find matter wherewith to fill his columns, but to make room for all the items of importance which he finds ready to his hand. The "making up," or the "filling up," to which I have referred, simply means using paragraphs for what is called "justifying" columns. For instance, a long report may finish within six lines of the bottom of a column, and it would not look well to begin another long report of a totally different subject closely following on such a finish; so a "make-up" paragraph is put in to complete the column, and the other report is made to begin at the top of the next column.

Briskly the work of the sub-editor and his assistants proceeds in the office of a London evening paper, as the morning wears on. The "chief" himself is writing a summary of the news of the previous twenty-four hours, one assistant is com-



piling a neat epitome of foreign intelligence, while the other assistant is "dressing up" the "Law and Police," or, it may be, marshalling a few facts culled from the London morning and provincial daily journals (which latter are now coming to hand) under the head of "Work and Wages."

Noon approaching, reports of "This Day's Law and Police" begin to arrive at the office, and these are at once dealt with by the sub-editor or one of his assistants, an effort being made to squeeze them into the first edition of the paper, which goes to press punctually at 12.30 of the clock. The great hurry, worry, and scurry of the work of a sub-editor of a London evening paper may now be considered to be over for the day, though he has not yet finished all his daily duties. What I wish the reader to understand is, that the bulk of the work is now over, and the remainder may be performed without any undue haste. Shortly before noon the printer appears unto the sub-editor to announce that he is now full (meaning that he has enough matter to fill up his columns), or to intimate that he requires half a column or so more matter.

The first edition of the paper having gone to press, the sub-editor and one of his assistants may betake themselves to a well-earned luncheon. So close has been their application to their labours that the morning has apparently flown away. One assistant is left in charge of the office, and he at once sets about preparing "copy" for a second edition of the paper. "Copy" now comes in rapidly in the shape of Law and Police reports, paragraphs of Metropolitan news, and telegrams of provincial and foreign intelligence. It is important and highly desirable that the sub-editor now on duty should deal with all "copy" immediately it reaches him, and this, chiefly, for two reasons: first, so as not to permit of the work unduly accumulating; and, secondly, that the matter accepted may be put into type as speedily as possible. This edition of the paper is timed to go to press at 1.45 P.M., and, of course, before the fresh matter now in type can be inserted, a portion of the

columns must be "deleted," or, in other words, taken out. In the sub-editor's room this process is called "marking out," and the printer now brings a copy of the previous edition to the sub-editor on duty, in order to ascertain what old matter will have to be sacrificed in order to get in the new. The third page of a paper like the *Repeater* is usually worked on for this purpose.

I presume my readers are aware that a London daily paper is printed from stereotype plates of a semi-cylindrical form, and not from the type itself, which, locked up in the "formes," rests on a horizontal surface. Successively operating on the third page in taking out old matter and putting in new, in arranging the subsequent editions of the journal, it generally happens (at about 5.30 in the evening, when the special edition is being talked about) that none of the news of the previous day is left on that page which can be removed to make room for late intelligence. Then it becomes the duty of the sub-editor to instruct the printer to re-stereotype page 2, or it may be page 4, of the journal, in order to insert in the "Special Edition" all the important news to hand.

It is one of the duties of the sub-editor to arrange all the reporting in connection with the paper, and, of course, in order to do this well, he should be possessed of discernment as to the capabilities of the reporters who are about him. One reporter will be found to be good at one class of work, and another reporter good at another description. It is for the sub-editor to set the right man about the right task, though, of course, in this respect sub-editing is not all plain sailing. The reporter who is best fitted for certain work which crops up, may be just at that time engaged on another task, consequently the "chief" must, perforce, fall back on a less efficient worker. The occupant of a sub-editorial chair finds he has to contend with numerous difficulties of this sort, and it is for him to endeavour to do the best he can under the circumstances.

I have already referred to the difficulties of finding a good

sub-editor. You can find a score or more of efficient reporters for every one capable sub-editor, who is more difficult to find than the leader-writer or the editor. The popular idea of a "sub" is a man who is constantly using the scissors, and eternally dipping into a paste-pot. It is true that the paste-pot and scissors play prominent parts in the room of a sub-editor of a newspaper; but these articles require just as much skill and experience to use them with effect as are requisite in artistically wielding the pen. Good judgment, an unbiassed mind, a cool head, the power of saying "No," are all most important essentials. The sub-editor should know what will interest the public or the particular constituency for which his journal caters. The average newspaper reader is more readily caught by the details of a sensational murder case or a breach of promise suit than by a report of the most learned lecture on astronomy, or of the progress of civilisation among the Cherokee Indians. Being possessed, therefore, of what may be termed a good eye for perspective in the matter of news of interest to the public, he gives full particulars of the murder and the breach of promise, while he condenses, as much as he can, the reporter's notes of the lecture on astronomy, and would altogether omit any account of the speech that was made on behalf of the benighted Cherokees, were it not that a newspaper must contain something about everything, even if it be but a line.

The work of sub-editing is of an intensely sedentary character, therefore a liking for close application to one's desk is greatly in favour of a young man who aspires to that duty. The salary of the sub-editor is, as a rule, slightly higher than that of the reporter. The really clever "sub" is so rare that a newspaper proprietor would do well to pay him almost anything rather than lose his services. I remember seeing it stated in *Chambers's Journal* that an editor had been known to decline to insert in his paper articles written by his assistant, who was a thoroughly efficient and

practical man, the reason being that if he found he succeeded as a writer of articles, the editor then would be most likely to lose his services as a sub-editor. This was stated as a fact, and I can say that I believe it, as during my experience I have noted more than one similar case.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### EDITING.

*The Editorial Mind—Qualifications of an Editor—Editor of Evening Paper—Leader Writers—The Political Writer—The “Social” Man—The Editor’s Letter Box—Public Grievances—Correspondents Abroad—New Books—Threatening Letters—Actions for Libel—Amateur Fire Brigade—Two Scamps—Trade Journalism—The Hero of the Hour.*

EDITING is a higher branch of journalism than sub-editing, and demands greater literary and intellectual qualifications. The sub-editor has only to judge of the importance of news, and of its interest to the public or the readers of his journal, while the editor has to rule the tone of the paper, and direct the line of policy it will take on all questions, whether Political, Literary, Social, or Dramatic. The sub-editor, too, in his operations must be guided to an extent by the channels of thought through which the editor and his writers seek to influence the opinion of the public.

The editorial mind is far from common. Mere writing or literary ability will go a very little way towards fitting a man for the position of editor, unless he be well qualified in other respects. It is essential that an editor should possess tact, judgment, a cool head, perception of ability in others, and the power of saying “No.” It is of great importance to

the proprietor that a suitable man should be found to fill the editorial chair. An unqualified sub-editor may be sent about his business, without having done much harm to a journal; but not so with the incompetent editor. A mistake in policy, the taking of the unpopular side of a great question, or, it may be, little more than a mere slip of the pen by one of the writers, may so affect the sale of a paper at a critical period in its history as to render its return to power an impossibility.

The idea is commonly entertained by the public that an editor writes the principal leading-article matter of his paper. It is true he may do so in the case of a weekly journal; but on a daily paper the editor is too busily employed with other editorial details to have any time to devote to writing articles. Perhaps it will interest the reader if we just take a brief glance at the duties of the editor of a London evening paper, the same as we have done with regard to the sub-editor.

The editor has to be as early at work as the sub-editor. Shortly after 8 A.M. his leader-writers come upon the scene, and he must be prepared to set them about their respective tasks. He should, by this time, have mastered the important political news, both home and foreign, which the morning papers contain, and have definitely made up his mind as to what his paper is to say on the prominent topics of the hour. Indecision is a fatal weakness in an editor; for it would frequently be most likely to result in the leader-writers managing him instead of his managing them. Horses trot all the better when they feel that a master has hold of the reins, and writers are less likely to kick over the traces when they are aware that the one who is driving the journalistic coach knows what he is about.

In a few jerky sentences the editor instructs the political writer as to what he is to say, and then turns to the social article man, who has just entered the room. Several matters are rapidly discussed with a view of finding a subject for the latter gentleman, and, ultimately, the editor observes,

"Ah, Mr. Popkins, you had better let me have something about the Charity Distribution Society. You will see from their published balance sheet in the morning papers that their expenditure for the past year is twenty-four thousand odd pounds, and that they have spent eight thousand odd pounds in office expenses, which, I think, is disgraceful. It should not cost £1 to give £2 away, Mr. Popkins, and I should like you to thoroughly argue the matter out in your article." Mr. Popkins, the brilliant social leader-writer, needs no further instructions; he knows precisely what to say, and at what point he should stop in his censure of the Charity Distribution Society; and in little over an hour he has produced as able and readable a journalistic performance as will be found in any other paper of the day.

Having set his leader-writers to work, the editor turns to the letters which the morning's post has brought him. Only those who have sat in the editorial chair know how varied are the communications which the envelopes contain. Some are from acknowledged contributors, and these are either passed to the printer to be set in type, or put on one side for future perusal. Others are volunteered contributions, good, bad, and indifferent; the good are ever welcome, and the bad and indifferent the curse of an editor's life. Letters to the editor intended for publication in the paper, are, of course, not regarded from any high literary standpoint, but are inserted if they are likely to interest the public. Then pitiful communications have to be gone through. One poor woman has just lost her husband, who has left her with five small children, and she wishes to know if "Mr. Editor" can do anything for her to enable her to start in business. Another woman has had a daughter ruined by a scoundrel, and desires to know whether the editor can make the facts of her case public, or in any way help her to get redress for her grievance. Another correspondent is the inventor of some wonderful contrivance which will be of "universal benefit to mankind," and asks if the editor could not lend him the money, so that he may

patent the article, and so reap the pecuniary fruits of his ingenuity! Still another ingenuous correspondent seeks the simple information of how many miles it is to Australia, and encloses a stamped and addressed envelope, so that the poor long-suffering and busy editor may send him a reply by return of post, as he wishes to sail for the Antipodes the day after the morrow. This is no exaggeration, as many editors know only too well. Communications from fools, bores, and unfortunate wretches are too often found in the letter-box of the editor of a newspaper.

The duties of the editor of a London evening paper, of course, extend much beyond reading MSS. and inspiring leader-writers, though to efficiently discharge the two duties named would be enough work for any ordinary mortal. The editor to-day has to write a letter to a Continental correspondent informing that gentleman that he must really exercise a little more care in the selection of matter for his letters in future; and has a still more difficult task, perhaps, to discharge in finding a man who can write an appreciative review of the Poet Laureate's last volume of poems which is just out. Mentioning a book and an author reminds me that an enterprising editor should ever be on the alert to procure an early copy of every book of importance as soon as published. Fabulous sums are reported to have been paid by editors for early copies of works by celebrated authors; but I think, if the editor keeps a sharp look out, he will be able, in most cases, to secure such coveted literary treasure himself without employing any agent, and thereby effect a pecuniary saving to the paper. I am no advocate of a cheese-paring policy in journalism; at the same time, I think that money is often unnecessarily expended in conducting a paper. This observation applies to the literary department generally, and not to any detail of that department in particular.

A by-no-means small worry of an editor's life—and particularly the life of the editor of a daily paper—is to receive letters threatening action for libel from persons who imagine that



they have a grievance against the journal. It is seldom that the matter complained of is really a libel, though, when such is the case, editors are only glad enough to come to a speedy settlement without going to law. Occasionally, the person aggrieved will not rest satisfied with anything but an action at law for damages, which he may or may not obtain. Sometimes, again, the threat of action is a mere threat and nothing more, written, perchance, with the view of procuring a contradiction of some statement which has appeared in the paper.

I remember once, while I was editing a London weekly, finding occasion to make some unfavourable comments concerning two scoundrels who were masquerading as members of an amateur fire brigade, and collecting subscriptions from the foolish public. A day or two after the appearance of the issue of the paper containing my remarks, the proprietor received a solicitor's letter threatening him with an action for damages if we did not retract what we had said. In an awful state, and with an air of "Now you've done it, Mr. ——," the proprietor came to me. "What should we do?" "Nothing," I replied. "Take no notice of the letter; I am sure the men are swindlers, and we shall hear no more about it." The proprietor allowed me to have my way in the matter; and it is true we did not hear anything more of it, save that the worthies were taken into custody, and afterwards sent to prison for obtaining money under false pretences. The "Amateur Fire Brigade" existed only in their lively imaginations.

There is a good deal of sameness about the sub-editorial work of different papers, but I cannot make a similar remark regarding the editorial. I should say that there are no two papers which require editing exactly alike. With respect to trade journals, it is an open question whether the man who is thoroughly acquainted with the trade, but no journalist, or the man who knows little of the trade but is a thorough journalist, is the better to select to fill the editor's chair. I might be inclined to give my verdict in favour of the former, providing he would accept the occasional advice or assistance of his sub-

editor or assistant—who is presumably a practical man—in matters of doubt; otherwise, I should myself rather choose the worker who is a thorough journalist simply. It is, at any time, a most difficult thing to find a suitable editor for a class or trade paper, and fortunate indeed should a proprietor consider himself who gets the right man in the right place.

A young man will naturally feel a certain amount of pride on his appointment to his first editorship. In the event of one of my readers being likely to allow the position to cause him to "lose his head," I may be permitted, by way of a friendly hint, to conclude this chapter by an extract from some papers, entitled "Gentlemen of the Press," which I contributed to the *St. James's Magazine*, in 1881-82: "The editor is invariably surrounded by a crowd of people who will cringe and fawn, and do almost anything in order to get a few lines as a favour at his hands; but it is not the editor personally that they fawn and cringe to, rather his influence and position. An editor to-day, but no longer an editor to-morrow, these same people would turn their backs on him, and probably not so much as recognise him if they met him in the street, and this fact alone ought to prevent the editor at any time losing his head at the attentions and flattery of his presumed friends and admirers. It is the editor they worship, not the man; and, forsaking the editorial chair, he becomes as common clay, no longer to be feared, no longer to be courted, and is left to filter his way through life the best way he can. He has his exceeding great reward, however, in the calm quietude that the cessation from editorial labour brings with it, and daily thanks his stars that the bores have left him, and that his slumbers are no longer disturbed by visions of that ink-stained demon, the printer's devil."

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## CHAPTER VII.

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### LEADER-WRITING.

*“Leaded” Type — “All-round” Writers — Specialists — The “Hot-Gospeller” — The “Social” Man — When and How Leaders are Written — The Editor’s Duties — The Leader-writer and his Opinions — Signed Articles and Anonymous Writing — The English Press and Anonymity — Versatile Journalists — The Style and Tone of Leaders — The Value of Concentration.*

WHAT is a leader? As we now know it, it is a column or so of comment on an important item of news, or on the occurrence of a remarkable event. Formerly it was a more simple literary performance. The “leaders,” in the early days of the *Times*, were no longer than are the “Notes” in the evening papers to-day. It is generally assumed that the leader, or leading-article, received its name from its forming the principal contribution of a paper; but where half-a-dozen leaders appear in the same issue of a journal, it is obvious that the derivation of the term is no longer appropriate.

In the early days of newspapers there were no leaders at all; they were solely made up of news, and letters to the editor, or to the printer, as it was then customary to address communications. Advertisements, the prop and mainstay of journals now, were then unknown.

When comments on news began to be inserted in papers,

the matter, or type, was "leaded," that is, a lead was placed after every line, so that the bottom of the type of one line did not touch the head of the next line of type, which gave an appearance of openness, pleasing to the eye of the reader. News is usually "set solid," that is, without leads between the lines. The "leaded article," in my opinion, gave rise to our present term of leading-article. The name has come to be shortened to leader, and we speak of the author as the leader-writer.

There are men on the Press who call themselves "all-round leader-writers," but they are not usually employed on London daily papers. The man who can write on every subject can rarely handle particularly well any special topic. In order to excel in leader-writing, it is necessary that the beginner should cultivate a branch for which he has a special aptitude. A man who can write good political articles, and political articles only, would be more sure of employment on a leading journal than the man who can tackle, only with moderate ability, articles on political, social, literary, legal, and agricultural topics. Of course, the all-round ability may at times prove of advantage to a writer, but first-class journalism is rapidly enlisting in its ranks the services of specialists. On a London daily paper, and also on the daily papers of such large towns as Manchester and Glasgow, the political writer confines his attention to political subjects, the social man to social topics, and the legal man to questions of law. By this arrangement editors obtain thoroughly sound and reliable opinions on the questions considered or discussed.

Different papers have different ways of arranging the work of their leader-writers; but on one London morning paper it is the practice of the leader-writers to put in an appearance every day of the week, except Saturday, about noon, in order to be given their subjects. They come trooping to the office in Fleet Street like school children, to be set their respective tasks by their master, the editor. The political man is given his text, and is also made to understand that it will be essential

for him to return to the office at night, for Parliament is sitting, and events may occur which may necessitate a change in the tone of his remarks. A text is easily found for the legal gentleman, as the reports of the Law Courts are prolific of subjects. The "hot gospeller" of the paper finds his subject for a column or more in a news paragraph of half-a-dozen lines, which records how a bench of county magistrates have sent a poor little girl, twelve years of age, to prison for a month for plucking a flower out of a churchyard. The social man is left to find his own subject, and chooses, perhaps, the weather, or the holidays, or manages to occupy a column concerning the appearance of London in the genial spring time. There is a story told of an editor once remarking to his social article writer, that the only subject he could give him that day was simply "Nothing," and that the gentleman went away and wrote a very readable article on the difficulty of finding a subject on which to write.

Having received their subjects, the leader-writers file off to do their work. One, perhaps, goes off to the Reading Room of the British Museum, where he wishes to look up some fact to introduce into his article. The legal man, it may be, returns to his chambers in the Temple, where he has every reference book which he may require ready at his hand. Another writer, perchance, hastens back to his snug suburban villa, writes his article, and sends it to the office in the evening by messenger. The major portion of the leader matter of a London morning paper is expected to be ready by about 6 P.M. or 7 P.M., when the editor and the assistant-editor are at the office to receive it. Political leaders are, of course, frequently not written till midnight, and after, when anything of an important character is being discussed in Parliament. On such occasions it is often necessary for the leader-writer himself to attend at the House, so as to avoid waiting till he sees the reporter's notes in order to get material for his remarks. In the evening the editor and the assistant-editor are found at the office, with the results of the labours of

the leader-writers before them. Proofs of the leaders are pulled on slips of paper with wide margins, so as to permit of corrections being made in the matter. The articles now are compared with previous articles which the journal has contained on similar subjects, it may be a week, a month, a year, or ten years ago. A journal must be consistent, and it is scarcely likely to find favour with the public it contradicts to-day what it said yesterday. Sometimes a leader is so altered by the editor or his assistant that the leader-writer is scarcely able to recognise his own work when he sees it in next day's paper. Occasionally an article will be entirely re-written, the writer of the article in the first instance having wrongly interpreted the editor's wishes. A young leader-writer is prone to complain when his work is the subject of such extensive editorial corrections; but it is certainly wiser for him to hold his peace in the matter, for the probability is, in the event of his complaining, he would be told that he is paid for his article, however much it may be altered afterwards, and that if he does not like such treatment he had better go elsewhere.

The duty of the leader-writer is not necessarily to write what he thinks himself, but the opinions of the paper. The editorial "we" is the expression of the journal itself, or of its staff (editor, assistant-editor, and writers), and not a mere substitution of the personal pronoun, plural, "we," for the personal pronoun, singular, "I," meaning the leader-writer. A young leader-writer has been heard to say that he would not accept an engagement on a Liberal paper, because he held Conservative views himself, and going on a Liberal paper he would have to write contrary to his own opinions. This remark argued a good deal of conceit. The public are not dying to learn any young man's views on the great questions of the day: they want the united opinions of mature minds, and such are what they get in an ably-conducted journal. There is nothing wrong in a leader-writer penning sentences which he would not care to utter in private life. The case is exactly

parallel with that of a barrister who defends a murderer. The barrister knows that the man is guilty of the crime with which he stands charged, yet he uses all his powers of argument and eloquence in the endeavour to persuade both judge and jury that the poor creature is innocent. Still, among his friends, the barrister would never think of contending that his blood-stained client is guiltless. The barrister follows his profession as a profession, and the same remark will hold equally good as regards the journalist.

Recently we have heard a great deal concerning signed articles in papers. It is contended that there is no reason why newspaper writers should remain anonymous. I am of opinion that those who urge such a claim on behalf of the journalist know little or nothing of journalism. The English Press stands first in the journalism of the world, and it has all along been most strictly anonymous. The very anonymity of the Press is the true secret of its power, for it may be observed that the less we know of the writers of a paper the more powerful or influential is the paper. Less is known of the writers of the *Times* and *Spectator* than of the writers of any other journal; and no one will deny that the two journals named stand first in English journalism.

One argument, which is often urged in favour of signed articles, is, that we should thereby get fairer criticism. That I very much doubt. If the signature obliged the writer to put into his article only that which he knows is truth, I am afraid he would often withhold the truth, feeling that it might be painful to some person or persons concerned. Still, in the case of a man who has made a special study of a subject, his signature at the end of the article would be of value and carry conviction to the mind of the reader. But the leading-articles of a newspaper are seldom written by men who have studied only one subject; besides, the leader-writer does not, as a general rule, pen his own views, but the views of the journal which employs him.

Does anyone imagine the leaders in the *Times* would so

greatly influence public opinion if at the head or end of them appeared the names, "John Smith," "Robert Robinson," or "Peter Tomkins"? I am inclined to think that we should then not regard them as the powerful opinions of the *Times*, but rather as the personal views respectively of "John Smith," "Robert Robinson," and "Peter Tomkins." It has been further argued, that if journalism did not benefit by discarding the anonymous system, the journalist would. It is quite the other way. The prosperity of journalism betokens the prosperity of journalists. The greater the success of the paper the higher salaries can it afford to pay its writers.

The adoption of signed articles would stop the practice of the enterprising journalist who writes a Conservative leader in the morning and a Liberal leader in the evening of the same day, unless he took unto himself a *nom de plume* in order to sign one of the articles. This peculiar remedy would be worse than the disease; we might just as well almost have anonymous articles as writers masquerading in several *noms de plume*. Where a writer is allowed to write pretty much what he chooses, like Mr. George Augustus Sala in the *Daily Telegraph*, of course we might as well have the signature at the end of the article as be without it, so that we may know to whom our thanks are due for the amusement and entertainment, not forgetting instruction, which we receive from such an able man as Mr. Sala.

The young leader-writer should carefully study the *Times'* leaders, which are as near perfection as possible. Gentlemanly in tone, temperate in expression, and admirable as regards English, is, as a rule, the leader matter in the *Times*. It would be well for English journalism if, in these respects, every paper strove to follow its example.

A trying thing to a leader-writer is, that he has often to do his work at a moment's notice. Where time will permit of it, however, it is always wise for him to thoroughly think out his subject before putting pen to paper. There are some men who cannot think till they have got a pen in their hands, but this



is a feeling which the beginner should check. The more thought that is given to the subject beforehand, the better is the article likely to be. A leader should have a beginning, middle, and finish; or, in other words, a head, body, and tail. The leaders in the *Times* are almost invariably divided into three paragraphs, and this is the best typographical form which such literary performances can take. In the first paragraph you, as it were, state your case; in the next paragraph you adduce arguments for or against the question under consideration; and in the third and last paragraph you draw the conclusions which may be deduced from your previous remarks.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

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### REVIEWING.

*How it is Done in Country Offices and on Influential Journals: a Contrast—Newspapers which Ignore Reviewing—The Proper Place of Reviewing—The Capacity of the Critic and the Requirements of Reviewing—The Critical and Creative Faculty—True Art—Caution and Conscientiousness—The Reviewer's Commandment: How to Fulfil It—Work for the Would-be Reviewer.*

IN the chapter on "Reporting" reference was made to the amusing work which I frequently had to do in the department of "reviewing" while engaged on the *Mudborough Chronicle*. I did not consider the handful of monthly magazines which I was obliged to "review" in the short space of an hour, was reviewing at all. Unfortunately, criticising books and magazines without reading them is only too common on the Press. It is, perhaps, frequently unavoidable in the case of small papers, which cannot retain a large staff of literary workers; but on influential journals, books and magazines are invariably read by the reviewer before an opinion is expressed concerning them. No one can form an estimate of the merits or demerits of an author's production unless he reads it, notwithstanding the remark made by a famous writer, who declared he never read a book which he had to review, because it "prejudiced him so."

On influential journals, books and magazines are invariably read by the reviewer before an opinion is written concerning them. It occasionally happens, however, that the person who reads and reviews the volumes does not understand them. Every experienced journalist will agree with me that no department of journalism is so badly done as reviewing. Of course, in making this assertion, such journals as the *Athenæum*, *Saturday Review*, *Spectator*, *Academy*, *Nature*, *Science Gossip*, *Journal of Science*, &c., whose special line is the work of reviewing, are excepted.

After this chapter appeared in *The Bazaar*, a correspondent, under the *nom de plume* of "Glyptodon," pointed out that reviewing was admirably performed by several other journals than those I then named. For the past ten years he had had the pleasure of contributing reviews of the best works published (he never touched anything that had not some reputation to back it, or some promise apparent on the face of it), on subjects demanding considerable special knowledge on the part of the reviewer, to more than one of the most influential of the London weeklies. Thus, he had very frequently seen books which had passed through his own hands reviewed in the *Spectator*, *Athenæum*, and *Saturday Review*, and was therefore in a position to estimate the ability with which they were treated. To the *Spectator* he awards the palm for knowledge of the subjects of those books they undertake to criticise; and they refuse no branch of literature. Occasionally, though rarely, there has been evidence that the editors of the *Athenæum* and *Saturday Review* had let a book slip into the hands of gentlemen who were fain to hide the shallowness of their knowledge under the wordy pretence of learning. The same writer says the *Field* is extremely careful in selecting reviewers fully acquainted with the subject of any book handed to them. He has frequently seen in its columns far the best criticism of important works, say on zoological or geographical science, to be found in the critical literature of the day. As an example, he cites the *Field*,

*Nature*, and the *Academy*, as the only journals which really understood the subject matter of Darwin's "Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex," published in 1871; the *Times* knew nothing about it, and even misrepresented the text.

Some newspapers ignore reviewing altogether, and take no notice of new literary productions. This is, perhaps, a better plan than doing the work badly. Other journals which attempt it do it in a half-hearted, haphazard sort of style. Reviews of books are frequently used to fill columns when other matter is scarce. To my mind the *Times* shows some scorn for the working literary men of the day in placing its reviews of books in its "outside sheet," which is rarely looked at except for advertisements.

Speaking generally, we should be delighted to see reviewing take a higher platform in the Press. Reviewing—that is honest and conscientious work—is to literature what gardening is to vegetation. Therefore young journalists might, with advantage, ponder over this fact with the view of bringing about a better state of things.

The work of reviewing is not without difficulties, which fact will answer to some extent for the scant justice it receives in the majority of the newspapers. It may seem an easy thing for a man to read a book and then write a notice about it, and certainly it is by no means a hard task if the reader understands his author. Books which reach a newspaper office for review are unfortunately not all on the same subject, otherwise the task would be simplified. If our reviewer understands botany, it does not follow that he is equally learned as regards astronomy. Hence, while he may be able to write an appreciative notice of a work on the former subject, he is totally incapable of saying anything of a critical character with regard to a volume on the latter science. Proprietors of country weekly journals can rarely afford to engage a man solely as a reviewer; but even if they did so it would avail them little. It is not a bad plan to get the reviewing done among

the various members of the staff of the paper. We generally find that each individual is better acquainted than his fellows with one subject, and is therefore able to write appreciative or depreciative notices of works on particular topics.

Let us briefly glance at the requirements of reviewing. Lord Beaconsfield told us that critics were men who had failed in art. There is more truth in this observation than perhaps Lord Beaconsfield himself saw. I would take the statement in a kindly sense, without the flavour it possessed when his lordship uttered it, smarting as he was at the time under adverse criticism. Certainly a man who has tried his hand at writing a book, and failed to write one well, cannot be without many qualifications to fit him for the work of reviewing or criticism. He, at least, knows how difficult is the author's task. It does not follow that because a man does not paint a picture he is unable to criticise one, nor is the man who paints a picture to be shunned as a critic. An author who can write a good novel is all the more qualified to pass an opinion on novels—good, bad, and indifferent—written by other people. We have many examples of the eminent author and qualified critic being united in one and the same person. As an instance, take Mr. Walter Besant, who can not only write a good novel himself, but instruct others how a good novel should be written. What Lord Beaconsfield should have said is, that *some* critics were men who had failed as artists; and he might have added, too, that many artists would altogether fail as critics. The critical faculty and the creative faculty are two different things.

The promising literary aspirant should set himself seriously to work to study the canons of criticism. Our forefathers had a critical genius in Hazlitt, and we are not without our clever critics nowadays, though, as a rule, most of the so-called criticism written in the newspapers is of the flimsiest possible character, and either marked by abuse or fulsome flattery.

The true work of the critic is not, as many journalists seem to suppose, to discover the bad and belaud the excellent, which

everyone can see is excellent; it is to discover the good, which everyone cannot see is good because it lies in out-of-the-way places, as genius is often found to do. Bad writing should certainly be condemned, but I think it is quite possible to discourage incapable writers without resorting to the "sledge-hammer," which many seem to use when they take an indifferent book in hand for review.

Let me impress upon young journalists the seriousness of criticism. I do not suppose that it often occurs that criticism kills, as we are told it did in the case of the poet Keats. It cannot be a pleasant thought to reflect that a hastily written review has given intense pain to a fellow mortal. I am aware that reviews of books are perhaps more often on the side of praise than the reverse. The simple reason is that one need not read a volume to praise it, while one must read through the work before one can discover its faults. Want of time has much to answer for as regards flimsy reviewing, the journalist putting forth the plea that if he were to read the books he has to notice he would be unable to gain a livelihood in his profession.

An adverse review may kill the author but not the book. John Keats died: his poems live. The reviewer's commandment should be to do unto others as he would wish others to do unto him. If he has a giant's strength, he should be merciful, and not use it like a giant. A reviewer should place himself in imagination in the position of an author, and consider for a few moments the enormous amount of labour that must have been devoted even to the writing of an inferior book. A writer's first effort should not be measured by such a high standard as the work of an experienced author. If the workmanship of the young novelist shows the 'prentice hand, his plot may be new; if his descriptions of scenery are somewhat wearisome, his characters, perchance, indicate the gift of originality. Praise the good; firmly, yet kindly, condemn the bad; and altogether seek rather to encourage than discourage a young writer if signs of improvement can be discerned. It

has often happened, it should not be forgotten, that a failure has been a better stepping-stone to ultimate success than a brilliant "hit."

The young reviewer should not attempt the task of dealing with a book which he does not understand. If the work be of a scientific character, at least some knowledge of the science with which it deals is necessary in order to write a readable review. Without the desired knowledge the result would probably be a fulsome notice of the commonplace things of the book, while the original matter put forth by the author would be left entirely unrecognised.

How can I get work to do? asks the would-be reviewer. Prevail upon an editor to give you a book or two on subjects which you understand, and then set to work and review the volumes as well and conscientiously as you possibly can. If your task be accomplished to the satisfaction of the editor you will soon get other books to review. Reviewing is not usually the most paying work in journalism, but, at any rate, it gives a young man an opportunity of showing what is in him, and probably leads to other commissions of a more remunerative character. Some of the leading journals pay handsomely, and make it worth the while of men of critical acumen to devote themselves exclusively to this class of work.



## CHAPTER IX.

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### *THE DRAMATIC CRITIC.*

*The Position of the Theatrical Critic—New Plays and "First Nights"—Qualifications of a Critic—The Drama and Stage Carpentry—French Plays and English Dramatists—"Behind the Scenes"—The Playwright and the Actor—Knowledge of Music and the Opera Bouffe—Well-known Critics—Temptations in the Way—"Chicken and Champagne."*

IT is some time since I read in a small guide book for literary beginners, written by a publisher's reader, the statement that "the gentleman who is a theatrical critic has an enviable position. . . . So (*sic*) he sends a regular supply of 'copy' to his newspaper, he may take his time, and is never 'pushed' to much extent." Probably the publisher's reader has had little or no practical experience of journalism, however well he may understand his own business. True, the "gentleman who is a theatrical critic has an enviable position," and so may every post on the Press be said to be enviable; but I do not wish my readers to think the dramatic critic "may take his time and is never 'pushed' to much extent." The dramatic critic is one of those gentlemen of the Press who cannot "take his time," and is frequently "pushed" to a very great extent. These points ought to be clear to anyone who possesses the most elementary knowledge of journalism.

On the production of a new play, the dramatic critic has,



after sitting out the performance, to hurry from the theatre to the office of his journal, and then and there write an elaborate and careful *critique*, which is found in a newspaper lying on the breakfast table next morning. If this is what is called "taking your time," and "never being pushed," the publisher's reader is right. Practically, it is the reverse. You cannot take your time, and you will be very much "pushed" frequently, if you mean to discharge promptly the duties attaching to the position of dramatic critic. If you are engaged on a daily journal, you will often have to write your *critiques* the same evening as that on which the play is first produced, and new pieces are now seldom introduced on the evening of Saturday. When "first night" happens to be a Saturday, the dramatic critics of the daily papers are fortunate, as they have all Sunday in which to prepare their criticisms. On the other hand, a Saturday "first night" means, for the dramatic critics of the Sunday papers, "push" to a considerable extent.

As to the qualifications of a dramatic critic. What should he know? In the first place, he should have a thorough acquaintance with the history of the stage; he should be well read as regards old plays, and be more familiar still with the dramatic productions—if it be but in book form—of the present century. He is also likely to write more readable criticisms if he has seen all the best pieces which have been produced in his own time.

The drama nowadays is not solely literary. It is the drama also of stage carpentry, of the effects of the scenic artist, and of costume, not forgetting the machinist, the upholsterer, and the gasman. Plays are rarely ever of the closet order—that is, suitable for reading in the quietude of the study. The modern drama depends, perhaps, more for its success on the ability of its actors, than on the talent of its authors. It is, indeed, made to fit its actors, and not written first, and then afterwards suitable actors found to play it. These facts should always be present in the mind of the dramatic critic who desires to duly award honour to whom honour is due.

As so many of our theatrical productions are adaptations from the French, it behoves the critic to become as thoroughly acquainted as he possibly can with the recent plays of the Parisian stage. He should also familiarise himself with the legends of the play bills. "An Entirely New and Original Comedy," it is presumed, means that the production is entirely original and of English manufacture—that no part of it whatever is taken from the French. From the simple announcement "A New Play," it may be inferred that the groundwork of the production is a novel, English or French, or it may be a French play adapted and altered to suit the requirements of the English stage.

It is a standing disgrace to English dramatists that we have to go to France at all for plays. The French are truly marvellous weavers of plots. This may be attributed to the greater encouragement dramatists receive in France, where the people are more given to theatre-going than the English. French plays and novels, if they fall short of our moral standard, are, at least, more artistic, as a rule, in conception and plot than is generally the case with English productions of the same order. Frenchmen, too, in play-writing, are more given to collaboration. When English dramatists will submit to join their forces and develop a still greater capacity for painstaking work, then, and then only, shall we cease to cross the English Channel for literary material for our stage. In my opinion, all other things being equal, a play of home manufacture will always be more popular than the imported article.

It must be a self-evident fact that, if the dramatic critic knows something practically of the stage, he will be better able to understand the *technique* of acting. Theatrical matters assume a different aspect to anyone who has been behind the scenes than they do to a person who only sees the stage from the "front of the house." The young dramatic critic does not require to become an actor in order to matriculate in criticism, but a little experience as a member of an amateur dramatic club would certainly be found very useful. One thing which

he would be almost sure to learn among the amateurs would be how a good part in a good play can be spoiled by the acting.

The dramatic critic—young, middle-aged, or old—should always strive, in writing down his opinions, to weigh two things—the play and the acting—separately. The play may be good and the acting bad, or, *vice versâ*, the acting good and the play bad. The two chief objects of dramatic criticism may be said to be, to tell the public what is worth going to see or not worth going to see, and to give the best possible hints to dramatist and actors, not forgetting, of course, the actresses. The dramatic critic should be tolerant, and exercise kindness in the expression of his opinions. He must always remember that ungentlemanly remarks are not less pardonable because they appear anonymously in a public journal.

A knowledge of music, as opera bouffe is now so popular on the Stage, would undoubtedly be a useful acquisition to the dramatic critic. Of course, the tone and matter of a critic's remarks must be ruled, to a great extent, by the character of the journal for which he writes. Some readers wish to know how the actors and actresses performed their parts; others want a sketch of the plot of the new piece; while some are anxious to learn if the production is a success or not. If you are writing for a paper which addresses itself to "the Profession"—that is, to actors and actresses, theatre lessees, dramatic authors, &c.—your matter will be of a very much more technical character than if you were penning a criticism to appear in a daily newspaper.

Such dramatic critics as Mr. Moy Thomas, the late Mr. Dutton Cook, and Mr. Clement Scott are worthy examples to be followed by all young men who mean to adopt this department of journalism. Mr. Moy Thomas writes the column headed "The Theatres" which appears in Monday's issue of the *Daily News*; Mr. Cook was dramatic critic for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and afterwards for the *World* (in which journal

he usually appended his initials, "D. C.," to his contributions); and Mr. Clement Scott is editor of the *Theatre*, a monthly magazine issued in the interests of "the Profession," and is also credited with the chief dramatic criticisms appearing in the *Daily Telegraph*. A few months ago I heard that Mr. Clement Scott was "about to relinquish his duties as dramatic critic, in order to devote himself to labours of a somewhat different kind." What the "labours of a somewhat different kind" are, I do not exactly know (dramatic authorship, perchance); but certainly if Mr. Scott be as successful in them as he has been in dramatic criticism, he will have no reason whatever to complain.

The position of a dramatic critic is one, perhaps, which peculiarly lays its occupant open to temptation. The well-intentioned beginner should start as he means to go on. If he feels himself thoroughly capable of doing his work, he should think for himself, and not allow others to think for him. He should steadfastly set himself against bias from any direction; and, if he does his work conscientiously and only moderately well, he will be successful. By stating the truth always, he may excite the ill-will of one person here and there; but he will win the approval of the many, and that is certainly of greater importance to him. Let him not, necessarily, be led to form a favourable verdict concerning a play from the tumultuous applause on a "first night," as, of course, a "packed house" is not altogether unknown in the annals of the modern stage. Nor should he allow himself to be "button-holed" by anyone who may wish him to express views one way or the other contrary to his own opinions. "Chicken and champagne" may be nothing more than a theatrical figure of speech; but, at the same time, the dramatic critic is more likely to be successful if he declines invitations to suppers behind the scenes or elsewhere. It might also be advisable for all papers to follow the example of a certain journal, and pay for the admission of their dramatic critics to the theatres.

The Stage, during the last few years, has made enormous strides in the estimation of the public, which is largely due to the Press; and it rests a great deal with dramatic critics to still further popularise it in the future.

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## CHAPTER X.

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### *THE ART CRITIC.*

*"Press" Views—Young Critics and their Mistakes—Qualifications—Particular Schools of Art—Natural Taste and Ability—Foreign Pencils and Chisels—The Old Masters—What Art is—Shams in Art Work—Value of Common Sense in Art Criticism—Art Literature—Sound Judgment Necessary in Criticising Art Subjects—The Opinion of Mr. J. S. Little—Analogies in Art.*

IF the dramatic critic requires a lot of "push," very little is needed in discharging the duties of the art critic. If any position on the Press can be called "delightful," it that of the art critic. To be constantly feasting one's eyes upon pictures by clever painters, to be frequently viewing statuary and busts by eminent sculptors, and to have admittance, almost at any time, to the studios of masters both of the pencil and chisel, is certainly a pleasant mode of earning a livelihood.

While, however, there is not the "push" with the art critic that there is in the case of the dramatic critic, he must, nevertheless, be well up to time with his work. Perhaps, in the case of a minor exhibition, it does not much matter, even if his notice does appear a few days after the gallery has opened; but when dealing with a great annual exhibition, like that of the Royal Academy, he must remember that the

public look for notices in the daily papers on the very first day of the opening. Of course, the critic manages to accomplish his task in this respect by going to the Press view of the pictures, which is usually held the day before the exhibition is thrown open to the public, or, it may be, even two or three days prior to that event.

In journals we find art criticism, and so-called art criticism, just as one meets with reviewing or dramatic criticism, so-called. Every column which is written concerning an exhibition of pictures is not necessarily criticism. Possibly every young journalist considers himself fully competent to act the part of critic. What can be easier? he presumably argues with himself. Anyone can tell you whether a picture is a good one or a bad one. He goes to the galleries, and looks at the works, and then returns home, or to his office, and sits down to descant upon the merits and demerits of the works of art, with an assurance which is amusing, save to the poor artists who are most painfully concerned by his remarks. One picture, according to the youthful oracle, "wants breadth," another is "deficient as regards perspective," the third is "out of drawing," a fourth "lacks repose," and, in the fifth, "the colouring is bad."

Of course, he is equally dogmatic and lavish with regard to his praise. Water was never so cleverly painted in any work as it is in this; a background of sea and sky was never given such distance; and a knowledge of the anatomy of the horse was never exhibited in such perfection by any painter before Mr. Vandyke Brown took up his brush to devote it to animal painting. In no department of journalism is greater nonsense written than in the columns of matter which are published under the title of art criticism. It is true an uneducated person can usually tell us whether a picture is good or bad; but rarely can anyone, except the trained expert, or a person who is naturally gifted in the same direction, make it clear to us wherein lies the merit or demerit of a painting. The late Mr. Tom Taylor, who acted as art critic for the *Times*,

knew his business; and several living men, too, might be mentioned who are equally clever in this department.

It is really a very difficult thing to find a good art critic for a journal. A man, individually, may be very clever at his work; but being somewhat, or more than somewhat, crotchety, he will not do for anonymous newspaper-writing. There is an eminent painter, who is a splendid critic, but unless he signs his name to his opinions, his criticism is useless for a public journal, as, belonging to a particular school, he can see no merit in anything that is done contrary to its laws and teachings. It is, above all things, requisite that a man should learn to be in art and, indeed, in all criticism, to use an expressive phrase, "fair all round." Each school will have its merits, however many demerits it may also possess. Mr. Whistler, for instance, gives us things which are wonderfully eccentric; at the same time, we cannot deny that they are also, in some respects, exceedingly clever.

No amount of training could make a young man a capable art critic, unless he be possessed of some share of natural taste and ability for the work. Perhaps it is a branch of journalism more than any other to which a man may be said to accidentally gravitate. No youth leaving school or college ever says to himself, "I will become an art critic." Nor has it ever fallen to my lot to hear any fond parent affirming that his darling boy shall follow it as a profession. Nevertheless, it would not be impossible, granted that some natural aptitude already existed, to outline a course which it would be advisable for a young man to pursue in order to render himself capable of giving utterance to opinions concerning art which should be worthy of the attention of the public.

It has been said that a man must know other countries before he can understand his own. The same remark may be readily applied to art. The critic will more easily appreciate the productions of the native pencil and chisel if he is familiar with the works of foreign artists. In a sojourn in Italy he



would undoubtedly gather many ideas which would be of immense advantage to him in after life.

A study of the "old masters" may be viewed by the art student in much the same light as a study of the classics of literature would be regarded by the literary student. Ancient works in oils are capable of teaching the artist of to-day many a useful lesson. For water-colour painting we cannot claim a past; but, as an art, we can say that it is of English birth, and one in which we, as a nation, are pre-eminent.

What is art? Critics differ. Is it art to paint a bouquet of flowers so well that it looks like the real flowers themselves? Some persons say it is not; that it is no more than mere imitation, which any student of a provincial school of art would be capable of executing. Such work is clever enough as far as it goes; but we cannot place the portrayal of fruit, flowers, and vegetables on canvas on a level with the painting of historical and allegorical subjects, or scenes of domestic life. These departments of art usually require considerable imagination in order to excel in them. Landscape painting, again, charming as it is when well done, calls for less mental grasp than is exercised by the artist who chooses figure subjects for his studies.

A group of young water-colour artists were heard debating as to whether it was the most artistic to secure the "high lights" by scratching, or by the use of Chinese white, or by simply leaving the white paper untouched by the pencil. This matter is a trifling one, and scarcely worth quarrelling about. Providing the effect is good, one way of arriving at it is as good as the others.

Away from pictures and sculpture, the question is often asked, What is art? At a recent meeting of an architectural association, a paper was read on the subject of "Shams." Nothing was artistic that was a sham, said the reader of the paper. Wood grained to resemble oak was sham oak, *ergo* inartistic. Such an argument carries the matter too far.

We would rather possess a real oak desk than an imitation one; but if the latter were so well grained that it deceived us into thinking it real, we should imagine it had at least some claim to be considered artistic.

If we are obliged to admit that all imitations are inartistic, we shall never know where to stop in our criticism. The floral pattern of a wall paper, or of a carpet, or floral formation in articles of jewellery, are all imitations, and, therefore, would all come under this ban. The very frames, even, of artists' pictures, which are chosen with such a keen eye for effect by the artists themselves, are imitations, for nobody imagines that they are solid gold. But, if it is not too ridiculous, we might even go further still in our argument, and say that the very pictures and sculptures themselves are imitations, which they undoubtedly are, and frequently very artistic ones.

As the dramatic critic would be better furnished if he knew something practically of play-writing and acting, so the art critic will be still better qualified if he has made some practical acquaintance with art. Failing this, however, there is much to be learnt from reading all the best literature upon which he can lay his hands, and by going about with his eyes wide open. Common sense is a precious gift, more especially if possessed by an art critic: it would indeed be a blessing for art if we had a little more common sense exercised in the criticisms. It may be as well to add that the critic should make himself thoroughly acquainted with all the art-movements of the day.

In a recently-published book, entitled "What is Art?" by Mr. Jas. Stanley Little, the author asks his readers "never to judge of men's work when they do not understand it. Be sure you are capable of understanding it before you attempt to pass judgment. This is, unfortunately, what very few do: if they know nothing themselves they talk somebody else's opinion. . . . Remember, too, that because you do not understand a work now, you may understand it hereafter;

for, in the case of our fellow creatures, we may live in the society of a man or woman for years, failing to see the meaning of their lives, until some chance occurrence reveals it to us; and so, in regard to scenes familiar, which strike us as commonplace until we are suddenly aroused to the full force of their beauty by some new light thrown upon them, by sun, rain, or mist, and ever after they are sorrowfully endeared to us by the reflected light of what has been. These analogies apply to pictures. It behoves one, then, to be very careful how one judges, even if one has honestly any judgment at all in the matter."



## CHAPTER XI.

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### *THE WAR CORRESPONDENT.*

*A Dangerous Career—Varied Qualifications: Physical, Military, and Literary—Fascinations for Adventurous Spirits—The Prince of War Correspondents—Dr. Russell's Word Pictures of the Crimean War—Archibald Forbes' Career—Literary and Intellectual Gifts—Linguist, Geographer, and Historian—Sleeping with One Eye Open—Adventurous Journalists in the Field—The Dangers and Risks of a War Correspondent.*

FROM art critic to war correspondent is a long jump. The quiet, peaceful calling of the former contrasts strongly with the adventurous, not to say dangerous, career of the latter. We could scarcely imagine two kinds of employment so widely different as observing and noting the progress of art, and watching and recording the actions of contending armies. It is a fact that the more work there is for the war correspondent, the less is there likely to be for the art critic to do, and *vice versâ*. When war makes the heart of a country throb with excitement, picture exhibitions are not so plentiful as in times of peace. Wars, and rumours of wars, not only injure trade, but retard the progress of literature, science, and art generally. However, as the time has not yet come to turn spears into pruning hooks, and swords into ploughshares, we are frequently compelled to acknowledge our indebtedness to "The War Correspondent."

The qualifications to duly fit a man for the occupation of war correspondent are of the most varied kind. They are physical as well as intellectual. All educational and literary attainments will count for nothing unless the applicant for the post of war correspondent is possessed of a physique which will enable him to stand all sorts of hardships. In faithfully discharging his duties he may have to pass entire days and nights without sleep, and, it may be, without food and water. He will also be required to remain for hours and hours together in the saddle, to undergo long marches with the army to which he is attached, and withal, in a climate to which he has not been accustomed. While undergoing all manner of hardships, it should be borne in mind, the war correspondent is not a mere fighting machine, who shoulders a musket and fires it off when he is told; but he must ever have his wits about him, and be able to think and act at one and the same time. The work demands great physical and mental gifts, and, if any success is to be achieved in the calling, the continual exercise of both.

Under the burning sun of India he may have to discharge his onerous duties, or he may have to endure the rigours of a Russian winter. It is necessary to dwell on the physical side of the qualifications essential to form an efficient war correspondent, because the physical capabilities of applicants for the office are seldom sufficiently taken into account, hence the frequent failure of men who are sent out.

The calling has an intense fascination for men of an adventurous spirit, and it is not surprising. Fame is to be won in the work of a purely individual character. The war correspondent drops the editorial "we" in his writing, and adopts the personal "I." If his letters are good his name becomes associated with them in the public estimation. During the Crimean War, the name of William Howard Russell became a household word, it was in everyone's mouth; while not one person in a thousand, perhaps, could have told you, at that period, that Mr. John Delane was Editor of the

*Times*, in which journal Dr. Russell's letters appeared. Dr. Russell is a prince of war correspondents, and in the Crimea he showed himself much more than a mere recorder of events. He wrote so as to lead to grievances being redressed and wrongs righted. Many of us are old enough to remember the outcry which was raised at the time when the pen of Dr. Russell disclosed the fact that our soldiers had to fight in paper boots, and exist on disgusting provender, while upholding the honour of the British arms. When a war correspondent can exercise such power and influence as were displayed by William Howard Russell, he certainly has a great deal of which to be proud.

Within the present decade we find a young correspondent in Mr. Archibald Forbes literally fighting his way to the front rank in his profession. Mr. Forbes has had the advantage of most of his *confrères* in the fact that he has seen service as a soldier in the army. Without some military knowledge, and that of a practical character, if possible, it is almost useless to attempt to discharge the duties of war correspondent. It is not too much to say that Mr. Forbes's letters are simply marvels in their way. He describes a battle, and as you read his vivid word picture, you feel as though you were taking part in the action. He notes the flight of a stray bullet, and you seem to see the spot on which it fell. All the more wonderful is such literary composition, when it is remembered that it is not done in the quietude of one's study, but amid the fire and smoke and alarms of war.

Mr. Archibald Forbes might be held up as a good example to aspiring young war correspondents. He did not succeed, as he himself has told us, without a struggle. He owes his present position simply to his own perseverance and ability. He had no one to help him on in journalism. He had simply to rely on Industry and Talent, the best of all friends to the aspiring young literary man—war correspondent or otherwise. Forbes started a paper and lost his money; he

wrote paragraphs for the London daily journals, and did not retrieve his fortune. His offers to act as war correspondent to more than one editor met at first with rebuffs, and the very journal, namely, the *Daily News*, on which he so signally succeeded at last, once, he tells us, munificently presented him with the sum of ninepence for a paragraph of news which he had contributed to its columns. Now, Mr. Forbes would talk about a certain number of thousands of pounds, if the conductors of any journal expressed the desire to retain his services for the seat of war.

As to the literary or intellectual attainments of a war correspondent, it may be laid down as a *sine quâ non*, that he should be a good linguist. The more languages he is familiar with, the better is he likely to be able to do his work. Without extensive linguistic attainments it is probable he would often feel himself heavily handicapped in his search after information. It is advisable, that not only should the war correspondent be able to converse in as many tongues as he possibly can, but that he should also be possessed of the ability to read and write them. To speak French like a Parisian may not be absolutely essential; at the same time, that accomplishment even may not be without its advantages. There is a little story told of an English war correspondent who saved himself from being shot as a spy through being able to speak with such a perfect Parisian accent, that it enabled him to pass himself off as a Frenchman.

That the war correspondent should be an excellent geographer, goes without saying, and it is almost equally important that he also should have a considerable acquaintance with the political history of his own and other countries. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say, that information of all kinds will never come amiss to the war correspondent in the discharge of his duties. If of pleasing manners, he will find his particular path of life all the easier to travel, for a good address is a wonderful aid towards picking up coveted items of intelligence. It is desirable, likewise, that he should

cultivate an attractive literary style, for news, even of the defeat of our arms, had better be told in easy flowing sentences than in long unwieldy paragraphs.

The increase of telegraphic facilities has considerably altered the work of the war correspondent. We do not now wait for long letters of intelligence from the seat of war, but get our news by telegraph in smaller and more frequent doses. The latter style, if it has its advantages, is also not unattended by disadvantages. So rapidly is the information given to the public after its receipt through the medium of the telegraph, that it is always possible that the enemy may be able to frustrate the intentions of our army through the very enterprise of the English Press. Therefore, it behoves war correspondents to exercise the greatest care in the selection of the matter which they transmit to their several journals. The military authorities of other countries, if not of our own, have, on several occasions during recent years, forbade the presence of war correspondents at the seat of war; but, providing men of sound judgment are employed, more good than evil is likely to result from the publicity given to sundry matters in the Press.

"How long before the French can come up?" the Duke of Wellington is reported to have asked, hearing of the pursuit that was thundering close on his rear in the most critical hours of the short sultry Spanish night. "Half an hour, at least," was the answer. "Very well, then, I will have some sleep," said the Commander-in-Chief, wrapping his cloak round him, and lying down to rest as soundly as any tired drummer boy, for the single half-hour. Such a gift for sleeping at any time should, if possible, be cultivated by the war correspondent. To him the capacity for sleeping with one eye open will always be of value.

The calling is not unattended, of course, by considerable dangers. The war correspondent always runs the risk of being shot in battle, or, in the pursuit of information for his journal, the still greater risk of being taken prisoner as a



spy, and kept in prison, if he is fortunate enough to escape being sentenced to death. He may, of course, be wounded in the discharge of his duties, if he be not killed outright. Pecuniarily speaking, he is well paid for his labours, but the rate of remuneration is not too high, considering the risk he runs in following such a career. At home, as we comfortably sit and read the war news in our journals, we should never have anything but a kindly thought for the adventurous journalists who risk their lives in collecting such intelligence. A young man who cares to qualify himself for the post of war correspondent will find that he can enter a field where there is never likely to be many competitors, simply because of the dangers that necessarily attend the calling.



## CHAPTER XII.

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### *THE SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT*

*The Beau Ideal of a "Special"—Mr. G. A. Sala—"Walking" Cyclopadia—A Tour round the World—The Technical Correspondent—Rifle Meetings—Religious Re-unions—Enterprise and Perseverance—Early Information—The "Special" an Eye-witness of Strange Scenes—Mr. J. A. O'Shea and Mr. G. A. Henty—"Our Own Correspondent" and "Our Special Correspondent"—Provincial Correspondents—"Flimsies" Sent on Lineage—Accuracy and Brevity Requisite—How Provincial Reporters Augment their Incomes.*

"THE Special Correspondent" differs considerably from the war correspondent. Military knowledge and military perception were the two essentials advanced in the last chapter in order to efficiently discharge the duties of the latter gentleman; whereas the special correspondent usually requires a large stock of general information. Mr. George Augustus Sala may be considered the *beau ideal* of a "special." His knowledge of men and things is of a most extensive and varied kind. Probably there is no other journalist like him who has so many facts and figures ever ready at the point of his pen. He has to thank his wonderful memory probably more than anything else for his remarkable success. Mr. Sala went out to the American War, but not as a war correspondent. His business was to observe and write of things generally, and the

same may be said to be the work of every "special" now and hereafter.

The special correspondent should be the possessor of general information. One day he may be describing the horrors of a railway catastrophe, next day a terrible colliery explosion, and on another day the destruction wrought by a great fire. Again, he may be despatched abroad to send home to his paper letters describing the coronation of a monarch. Nor is this all. Not being wanted for any particular duty at present, he may be told that, if he chooses, he can go for a tour through the English Lake District; or, perchance, his paper commissions him to make a journey round the world, in the same way as the *Daily News* sent Mr. Henry Lucy. A good "special," no matter what he writes, will always make his letters interesting and entertaining, as much with the description of a little country brook meandering its way through beautiful scenery and golden cornfields, as with an account of the grandeur of the Falls of Niagara.

There is, however, also the technical special correspondent. This is often a gentleman who is not constantly engaged in work for the Press, but takes it up as the opportunity presents itself. For instance, "specials" in the shape of letters are daily despatched from Wimbledon when the Volunteers are in camp; and, in order to do this class of work well, some technical knowledge of target-practice is essential. A Volunteer officer, or a private of some literary attainment, occasionally undertakes this duty and carries it out for the same journal year after year. There is a gentleman who, for a number of years, has acted as "special" in describing an annual re-union of Quakers in London; and, being a Quaker himself, he can give that specialist tone to his articles which is so desirable in this class of work. A young man who is thoroughly acquainted with any subject, and engages in Press work, is sure, some time or other, to get a chance of displaying his peculiar line of knowledge by an engagement to do some special correspondence.

The special correspondent who is regularly attached to the staff of a journal must always hold himself in readiness to be despatched anywhere at a few minutes' notice. It is said that a well-known "special," when at home in town, keeps a portmanteau ready packed, so that he may not lose a moment in getting off when he receives his orders to start—it may be only to Yorkshire, or away to far-off China. Mr. Sala has related a story, at least once, of how he has had only an hour or two's notice to pack up and hurry away.

It will, of course, pay the young "special" well to be as enterprising as he possibly can. If he executes one commission to the satisfaction of his editor, he is likely to be given other work of a similar kind. He should spare no pains in the endeavour to gather the freshest information, and seek always to make as many friends and as few enemies as is consistent with doing his duty. An indolent disposition will never do for a special correspondent; while industry, energy, and perseverance, coupled with common sense and literary ability, are sure to succeed sooner or later.

The information gathered by the special correspondent is not necessarily of no further use after he has despatched his letters to his journal. He may be able to turn to his note-book years after, and utilise his "memoranda" in another form. The "special" is often the eye-witness of strange scenes; he makes acquaintance with life in uncommon forms; he is the journalistic historian of the remarkable events of our own time. Many of his experiences will, no doubt, bear future narration, even if it be only in shape of anecdotes and illustration in the enrichment of other articles. If his pencilled notes be not voluminous, a record of his adventures may be preserved by a retentive memory. Mr. John Augustus O'Shea, a capable special correspondent of the *Standard*, wrote for *Tinsley's Magazine* a series of articles entitled "Leaves from the Life of a Special Correspondent," which has just been re-published in book form. Mr. G. A. Henty, another well-known "special," also

appears to make good use of his experiences in the admirable boys' stories which he writes in the intervals of his labours as a journalist.

"Our Own Correspondent" differs again from "Our Special Correspondent." A special correspondent will sometimes be sent out by a paper, and his letters inserted as coming from "Our Own Correspondent," but that title is usually understood to represent a correspondent who is resident in the city or town from which the letters are transmitted. A leading daily paper like the *Times* will have a resident correspondent in each of such cities as Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. Anything of a lengthy and special character sent by any one of these correspondents, if inserted in the paper, would usually be headed as coming from "Our Own Correspondent." If the editor has any doubt as to the authenticity of the matter sent, he may simply and judiciously head it as "From a Correspondent." Or such a heading as this might imply that the paper had not received it from its regularly accredited correspondent of the city whence the matter was forwarded, but that the sender was a comparative stranger; therefore the editor does not care to fully endorse statements which are probably not true, though the contribution is of sufficient interest to be inserted, and, perchance, of too great importance to miss.

"Our Own Correspondent" of a London daily journal is usually on the staff of a paper of the provincial city or town in which he is resident. He does not, perhaps, send matter every day to London, but only when he has anything that is worth forwarding, which may be no more than two or three times a week, or even less. He transmits a paragraph concerning the cattle market of his town to London, say, once a week, or it may be a paragraph concerning the iron trade, but this communication he "fimsies" and sends to all the London daily journals alike. He is just as much the accredited correspondent of one journal as he is of another, and his ordinary paragraphs concerning the cattle market or the iron trade

simply appear in the London papers in the cut-and-dried form of trade intelligence, without any intimation that they come from "Our Own Correspondent," or anyone else's correspondent.

In every country town there is generally a plodding old reporter who sends paragraphs up to the London papers, and at times, when anything unusual occurs in his locality, he finds himself appearing as "Our Own Correspondent" in half-a-dozen of the London daily journals on one and the same day. As he is usually paid for his work by "lineage"—that is, at the rate of so much per line—such an appearance does not displease him, but the reverse. Wideawake provincial reporters are able to considerably augment their incomes by transmitting items of intelligence to London journals; and if a Press worker of this description is known to be clever, and also trustworthy, he will often save London newspaper proprietors the expense of sending down special reporters to look up information concerning something out of the ordinary which has happened in the locality.

A young man in a provincial town will have a good chance of progressing in journalism if he is only careful what he sends to the London papers. Let him strive, above all things, to be accurate in his statements, and he will then find that he will gradually gain the reputation of being a reliable correspondent. He must exercise considerable patience, for no apprentice can hope to become a journeyman all at once. Every contribution he sends may not be accepted; but as he gains experience, he will find that his accepted matter will increase, and his contributions to the "W.P.B." grow fewer and fewer. He should be as concise as possible in his style, for space is valuable in a London daily journal, and the sub-editor may be tempted to pass over a contribution altogether if he has not time to cut it down. Through continually sending "copy," his name becomes known to the conductors of the papers, and when the time arrives that anything important is wanted from his district, it is probable he will find himself in receipt of commissions from more than one daily paper.

## CHAPTER XIII.

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### *DESCRIPTIVE-WRITING.*

*“Only Electro-plating” — Racy Sketches — The Boat Race, Derby Day, and Lord Mayor’s Show — The Descriptive Reporter — Energy and Originality — “Under the Hammer” — “A Sunday Morning among the Ragged” — “Obstruction at Bow Street” — A Reporter in Costume — “The Amateur Casual” — In a Debtor’s Dungeon — Breaking Street Lamps — Style and Diction.*

ABOUT ten years ago, while editing a London weekly, I found myself with plenty of spare time, and wanted “some more work to do.” I went to Mr. Byron Webber, who was then Editor of the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, and offered to do something for his journal. “What can you do?” he asked me. Modestly explaining to him that my forte was descriptive-writing, I pointed out a few sketches which I probably thought very clever productions. Mr. Webber replied, “Oh, that’s only electro-plating,” a term for descriptive-writing which is peculiarly appropriate. Descriptive-writing may be said to stand in the same relation to the thoughtful leading-article or essay as an electro-plated tea service does to a solid silver set.

But—to carry the metaphor further—to produce electro-plated goods requires as much skill as is requisite in making an article of solid silver. The workmanship may be the same

in both cases, only the material is different. An electro-plated teapot may be as chaste in design, and as fine in its workmanship, as is the solid silver article itself. In the same way, as choice phrases and sentences may be used in literary work which is of a purely descriptive character, as in constructing an essay every period of which contains an original remark.

No department of journalism gives greater scope for literary workmanship than descriptive-writing. Simile, metaphor, anecdote, wit, humour, and pathos, may all be employed in turn by the descriptive-reporter. Observations which would be quite out of place in the sober leading-article, may be made with impunity when racily sketching an event like the Lord Mayor's Show or Derby Day. The descriptive reporter's subjects are usually found for him; all he has to do, therefore, is to make his work as readable as possible.

On a London daily paper certain annual events make work for the descriptive-reporter. There is the Lord Mayor's Show, the University Boat Race, the Derby, and the opening of Parliament. I often think that nothing like so much novelty or originality is exercised in describing these annual events as might be. The descriptions, particularly of the Boat Race and the Derby, appearing in the London daily papers, present such a cut-and-dried appearance that the same articles might almost seem to be kept in type and inserted year after year. Now, could not some enterprising writer give us an account of the Boat Race from an American's point of view, or a racy sketch of the Lord Mayor's Show seen by the eyes of a Frenchman, or an account of the Derby by a lady who went to Epsom simply to enjoy the display of costumes? Such innovations would not only be appreciated by editors, but also prove a great boon to the long-suffering public.

Having had considerable experience as a descriptive-writer on the London Press, I may be pardoned if, in order to render my remarks interesting to the journalistic aspirant, I make a few slight references to my own work in this direction. I said just now that the descriptive reporter's subjects are usually



found for him; but I may here add that it is easy enough frequently to make work for himself, provided he is possessed of some originality, and is energetic and enterprising. For a London evening paper I remember once writing a sketch entitled "Under the Hammer." It was a description of a sale that took place at Waterloo of all the unclaimed luggage which had been left in railway trains and elsewhere on the London and South-Western Railway during the past twelve months. The subject made an article which the Editor was pleased to accept. About the same time, I went to a Sunday morning breakfast that was given in connection with some ragged schools, and "did" an article, which I entitled "A Sunday Morning among the Ragged," which also appeared in the same journal.

Shortly after this, while taking a stroll, I found that I could not pass up Bow-street, owing to a very large mob of people, who were assembled close to the well-known Police Court and Station. "This is literal obstruction with a vengeance," I thought. We were just then having our full share of political obstruction in the House of Commons; Mr. Robert Buchanan had only recently enlightened us in the *Contemporary Review* as to "The Newest Thing in Journalism"—which, meaning the "Society" paper, is no longer new—and the *Whitchhall Review* had just given us a column or two about "The Newest Thing in Religion," which I remember nothing of, beyond the title. Here I was wedged up in a crowd that I mentally mused was certainly "The Newest Thing in Obstruction." Yes, it was the occasion of the magisterial hearing of the well-known case concerning the detectives of Scotland Yard. The obstruction continued, as the magisterial hearing did, day after day, but I experienced enough in that one crush to jot down for the paper a column which I headed "The Newest Thing in Obstruction," and signed "One of the Mob."

My efforts, however, in descriptive-writing sink into insignificance beneath the attempts of other journalists in a similar direction. Mr. John Augustus O'Shea, of the *Standard*, some

three or four years ago, got himself up in costume, and, mounting the back of an elephant, took part in the Lord Mayor's Show. There does not appear to be anything particular to admire in this prank of Mr. O'Shea, but, at any rate, it enabled him to give us an account in the *Standard* next day of the Lord Mayor's Show as seen from the back of an elephant.

Perhaps the first and most notable instance of realistic descriptive-writing in modern journalism was when Mr. James Greenwood donned the attire of a vagrant, and gave us in the columns of the *Pall Mall Gazette* the experiences of "The Amateur Casual." Mr. Greenwood has had many imitators, but none who have approached him in popularity. A writer connected with the *Echo* recently essayed to study life as an amateur street beggar, and succeeded so well in his adventures that he was taken into custody and brought before a magistrate, charged with being a suspected person found loitering about with the presumed object of committing a felony. This enterprising descriptive-writer detailed his experiences some time after with admirable good humour and taste in the columns of the *Echo*. Still more recently, the *Pall Mall Gazette* has given us a realistic specimen of descriptive-writing in the shape of a narrative of the experiences of an amateur driver of a Hansom cab; and there recently appeared in *St. Stephen's Review* some "Notes in a Debtor's Dungeon," which, it is no secret in Fleet-street, were written and illustrated by Mr. Wallis Mackay, a gifted journalist with both pen and pencil.

Some years ago I ventured to suggest to an editor that I should get taken into custody for some petty offence, and then detail my experiences of the police cell and the charge before the magistrate. I thought I was alone in this brilliant idea, but on reading Mr. Wallis Mackay's "Notes in a Debtor's Dungeon," I find that I was not. "I well remember a friend and co-worker of mine," he says, "one who is now enjoying what he well deserves, a brilliant and prosperous career as a

novelist, suggesting to the editor of a now defunct illustrated weekly paper the brilliant idea that he should, with a gin-bottle in his possession, be found in the very act of breaking street lamps; by this means become 'police court case,' a prisoner, and emerge to flutter his experiences of the grub existence from offence to liberation with the wings of a special correspondent in the pages of the said paper. The enterprising editor threw cold water upon the idea, that the 'plan' might be discovered, and the magistrate might insist upon the proprietors of the paper paying a fine and costs. So the matter dropped, and the world lost the experiences of one who of all others living was capable of making an interesting and instructive commentary upon that almost sealed book, prison life from a prisoner's point of view." Mr. Mackay gives the initials of his "friend and co-worker," "who evolved the brilliant idea of extinguishing lamps with paving stones," so there can be no harm in stating what is known to all well-informed journalists—that "C. M." stands for Christie Murray. He is a young novelist of good performance as well as promise, as his works, "A Life's Atonement" (which first saw the light in *Chambers's Journal*), "Joseph's Coat," "Coals of Fire," &c., amply testify. Some editors habitually throw cold water upon the realistic order of descriptive-writing—it is too sensational to suit their sober tastes—but it cannot be denied that such work is greedily devoured by the public, and it is to the interest of every newspaper to please the public.

As to style, a few words to the journalistic aspirant who specially purposes striving to succeed in newspaper work as a descriptive-writer are necessary. Let him, above all things, avoid trying to imitate Dickens or Sala. It seems invariably to be the fate of the imitator to exaggerate the faults and miss the qualities of the writers copied. Weak Dickens is bad (referring to style), and diluted Sala is worse. Every writer will find that he will acquire a style of his own by constant practice, and exercising care in doing his work. A better model for imitation, if the young writer must needs

have a model, than either Dickens or Sala, would be found in the articles of Mr. Godfrey Turner, of the *Daily Telegraph*, or in the sketches which were contributed by Mr. George R. Sims, some time ago, to the *Weekly Dispatch*. The style of both these writers is good, because both lack it, in the common acceptance of the term—that is, neither manifests any striking peculiarity of diction or phraseology. Both write to the point, and say what they have to say in the simplest way. Mr. Godfrey Turner's English is remarkably pure and vigorous, while Mr. Sims' language is no less vigorous if more idiomatic.

In saying this, there is no depreciation of the style of two writers of genius like Charles Dickens and George Augustus Sala—such would be absurd—but it is to warn the literary aspirant against seeking to do that which in all probability he cannot, namely, imitate the style of a master whose style is inimitable. It may be wise to add that in mentioning Messrs. Godfrey Turner and George R. Sims, it is not to be inferred that there are no other journalists who, as writers, prove themselves excellent workmen. On the English Press there are numerous good writers, descriptive and otherwise, whose names would occupy much space. One good general rule for descriptive-writing might be laid down, and that is—Get all the information you can concerning your subject, and then proceed to write your article in the simplest and most direct manner.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

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### *SPORTING AND OTHER PROPHETS.*

*Sporting Prophets—Their "Tips"—Horse-Racing—Big Events—Influence of Sporting Intelligence on Circulation—Backers and Bookmakers—Naming Winners a Lottery—Prophets and Slang—"Pendragon" a Model Tipster—The Mysteries of the Turf, and How to Unravel Them—Popularity of Racing, Cricket, Football, Billiards, Lawn Tennis, Polo, &c.—The Weather Prophet—Prophecies of the "New York Herald"—Difficulties in the Way of Accurate Reports—The Necessity of Studying Meteorological Science.*

"SPORTING INTELLIGENCE" forms such a prominent feature in the journalism of the day, that no apology is needed for venturing a few remarks respecting "The Sporting Prophet." I should like to say, however, that I am not of a "sporting turn of mind," and this must be my excuse should I trip in any of my observations. It would be out of place here to enter into the merits and demerits of horse-racing, and other forms of sport; all we are concerned with at present is, that there is a demand for the sporting prophet in journalism, and that demand has to be supplied. No one can question that horse-racing was instituted, in the first instance, with an object

that was good, namely, to improve the breed of horses; but no one can deny that the sport is followed with very different objects now. However, were I about to launch a fresh newspaper venture, it would be necessary to fall in with the spirit of the times, and make every arrangement for a good supply of sporting intelligence, including horse-racing.

Regret it, as some persons may, it is a fact that nothing makes a newspaper sell so well as the result of a big event in the Turf Calendar, if we except, perhaps, a sensational murder case. There was a newspaper proprietor who thought he could do without his daily sporting letter, so he gave his "prophet" notice, and did without it. The circulation of the paper rapidly fell off, for hitherto the journal had been largely bought for the excellence of its sporting intelligence. Principles of morality were strongly engrained in this newspaper proprietor, but with him love of wealth was stronger; soon the well-informed sporting prophet was reinstated, and the circulation of the paper ran up as rapidly as it had previously run down.

All sporting prophets, however, unfortunately for the "backers" who pin their faith to them, are not well informed: it would be a bad day for the bookmakers if they were. It has been said that a man who had never so much as seen a racecourse or a racehorse, has occasionally been known to act as sporting prophet! That is worse than "the blind leading the blind;" it is a case of the blind leading those who can see—if not very far. An unbeliever in the Turf recently remarked that he thought the "prophet" who knows nothing of horse-racing would be just as likely to give good "tips" as the "prophet" who was familiar with racehorses and racecourses from his boyhood, as there was a good deal of lottery about naming the winner of any event. I should hardly like to endorse this statement, because it is always safer to prophecy when you know, and a "prophet" who is well-informed on racing matters is much more likely to "spot" the winner than is the scribbler whose only acquaint-

ance with a racecourse has been acquired in the purlieus of Fleet Street.

The style of the average sporting letter may be pronounced unique in journalism. No other worker on the Press sets at such mad defiance the rules of English grammar as does the sporting prophet, who is also a greater master of slang than any other writer. The slang we can, perhaps, pardon, as it is often admittedly very expressive; but I fail to see why, in these days of compulsory education, the tipster's information cannot be conveyed in passable language. "Pendragon" (Mr. Henry Sampson), of the *Referee*, may be taken as a good model by the budding "sporting prophet." He writes vigorously and well, and is never afraid to speak his mind as to the abuses of the Turf, and in all departments of sport.

The literary aspirant of the Turf, if he wishes to succeed in this particular department of journalism, should certainly obtain a practical acquaintance with the customs and proceedings of racecourses, should learn the pedigrees of race-horses, and know everything concerning their past performances. He should also be a good judge of horseflesh, so as to be able to form opinions of his own, by watching the training of horses, and estimate the probable success or failure of any horse. If obliged to trust to the "intelligence" supplied him by stable-boys or bookmakers, he is likely to find himself on the day of the race the very reverse of right in his predictions. Of course, the best horse may not win; but it is for the sporting prophet to penetrate as far as he can into the mysteries and secrets of the Turf. If he wishes to retain his position on his paper, he must be honest in all his statements, and procure the best information he can for his readers. As the result of faithful service, it is reported that Mr. Joseph Elliott, the father of the American sporting Press, has been presented, by the proprietor of the *New York Herald*, with a retiring salary of £1000 a year. Possibly this praiseworthy step may have a few imitators, both at home and abroad.

Leaving horse-racing, I may mention that in the games of cricket and football, in billiards and bagatelle, in chess and draughts, in rowing and swimming, in bicycling and tricycling, and in athletics generally, there is scope for the exercise of special knowledge in the department coming under the head of "Sport" in newspaper work. Of course, reporting of this kind is often linked with journalistic duties of another kind, or the worker could not be kept going all the year round. The late Mr. George Frederick Pardon ("Captain Crawley") made a specialty of reporting billiard matches and tournaments, though he was also extensively engaged as a writer of books on games, and in other literary duties, whilst his energetic sons devote themselves largely to cricket reporting. An old friend of mine, Mr. John Kent, is employed all the year round as a reporter at the Westminster Police Court, except the fortnight prior to the University Boat Race, when the crews take to the London water. Then he betakes himself to Putney, whence he daily transmits intelligence regarding the training to the London daily papers. Reporting of this sort, in order to be well done, requires technical knowledge.

It is a natural transition from sports to the weather, the success of the former depending so much on the state of the latter. The weather is such a staple topic of conversation with Englishmen, that it is not surprising that modern journalism has recognised the fact, and provided a department for its consideration in the columns of its papers.

The *New York Herald* was, I believe, the first paper to insert any elaborate prophecies of coming weather. The weather-prophet of that journal made himself quite a European, if not a world-wide, reputation, a few years ago, by his prognostications. This gentleman was wonderfully accurate in his earlier prophecies; but afterwards he seemed to fall away from his old "form" (to make use of a sporting term), and got himself into sad disgrace. The British public were considerably surprised at this turn of affairs, and many



journalists were also puzzled in common with the rest of the people. Why so often right previously, and so frequently wrong now? On this point I sought information from a friend who was likely to know. It appeared the original "prophet" had left the States, and gone North, and the "prophet" who had taken his place was nothing like so good at the work; hence the falling off in the quality of the prophecies.

We have in England a climate which is so variable, that anyone who could cleverly predict the state of the weather might be sure of earning a large income by his labours. Our weather-prophets ought to be good at their business, and not depend for reputation on any accidentally correct prognostication, as is said to have been the case with a certain well-known penny almanac.

Though journalism, during recent years, has paid a great deal of attention to the weather, there is still greater scope for trustworthy meteorological details in the columns of our newspapers. We do not usually look to young men for weather prognostications; but, if the subject be scientifically studied, it is not essential that greybeards alone should supply us with reliable meteorological data.

There is an old saying that it is wise never to prophecy unless you know, and I respectfully commend this piece of good advice to all aspiring young prophets, whether sporting or otherwise.

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## CHAPTER XV.

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### *THE CITY EDITOR.*

*The Money Market—On 'Change—An Unfortunate Mistake—Blowing Hot and Cold—The City Editor a Man above Suspicion—The Power Exercised—The Qualifications Necessary—The Intricacies of the Stock Market—Amateur Jobbing and Speculation—The Responsibilities of a City Editor—Temptations to be Avoided.*

THE City editor occupies a distinct position on the London daily Press. In his domain he is king—emperor. His “copy”—having reference to the money market, shares, stocks, and estimates of all kinds—is not seized by the ruthless editor or his assistant, or by the sub-editor, and subjected to revision or emendation. What the sporting-prophet writes may occasionally—though it may be very seldom—undergo at the hands of a courageous literary assistant some toning down of phraseology, and a few transpositions of the nominative; but the work of the City editor is rarely, if ever, interfered with, and it would be unwise to do so. It may be even positively dangerous, as may be gleaned from an incident which happened some time ago.

A certain London weekly paper was on the eve of going to press. Almost everything was ready, except the City editor's article. The editor—that is, the chief editor of the paper—wished to get away at once for a short holiday in the country.

and he requested his assistant to see the journal through. "Of course, if it's after midnight when you're done, Mr. ——," the editor said, addressing his assistant, "you can take a cab home and charge it to the paper." The editor then took his departure, leaving his assistant in charge of the journal. Nothing was wanting in the shape of "copy" except the City editor's article. While the assistant was sitting waiting for this, a canvasser brought in an advertisement which was only to be accepted on condition that a notice was written and inserted of the company to which it referred. Mr. ——, the assistant, saw no objection to this, and, as the advertisement was a valuable one to the paper, he quickly wrote a notice to accompany it, and gave instructions to the printer that such notice was to be inserted at the end of the City editor's article.

The City editor was a trustworthy writer, and his "copy" was never even read, much less revised, by the editor or his assistant. Presently Mr. ——, the assistant, thought to himself, "What is the use of my waiting? I need not go to the expense of a cab; I can catch the last train home, and the printer will see to the City article." So, giving the printer instructions to insert all the City editor sent, Mr. —— caught the last train to the suburb in which he resided. Next morning there was a terrific commotion in the office of that particular journal. What had been done? In the middle of the City article the City editor had written unfavourably of a company, and at the end of the City article there was the paragraph of Mr. ——, speaking in favourable terms of the same company!

This unfortunate incident might, perhaps, have happened in the experience of almost any journalist. It does, however, teach several wholesome lessons. In the first place, the assistant-editor should have remained at the office to read the City article before adding any paragraph to it, though it is questionable whether he was not exceeding his duty in making any addition to that particular feature of the paper.

The City editor usually understands his own work, and it is better to leave him to do it alone. Again, page-proofs of a journal should always be seen by the chief editor or his assistant, in order to avoid any occurrence like that described. It is true that, in the exigencies of journalism, a paragraph has frequently to be written to accompany an advertisement at the last moment before going to press; but in every case care should certainly be exercised to preclude the insertion of anything which would contradict a statement appearing in the City article or in any other portion of the journal.

The City editor, like Cæsar's wife, should be above suspicion. The right man should be procured to fill the position, and trusted implicitly. If confidence cannot be placed in him, he had better not be employed at all. The temptation to go astray is very great, but the man who cannot withstand every form of temptation, pecuniary and otherwise, is not fitted to control the monetary intelligence of any influential journal.

The power exercised by the City editor is, in the syllables of Dominic Sampson, "Pro-di-gi-ous!" As he possesses a giant's strength, we may pray him not to use it like a giant. He may make a company or mar the prospects of a venture; he may write up shares or write them down. Possessing such power and influence, it is, of course, essential that a man of straightforward and honourable character should be secured to fill the post of City editor. His salary is liberal, perhaps not on account so much of literary services rendered as on the score of honesty, a quality which has its market value in the commercial world.

Politics, trade, agriculture, and even the weather must all be studied by the young journalist who aspires to become a City editor, for they all more or less directly or indirectly affect the Money Market. He must be able to draw such conclusions as the following:—

"Some of the heaviest of the English railway dividends will be due immediately, the North-Eastern being distributed on

Saturday next, and the London and North-Western on the Monday following; but any effect they may produce on the market must be largely counteracted by the release of the three millions which the India Council will disburse for their maturing debentures."

"The excellent harvest prospects have led many operators to form hopeful conclusions as to the immediate future of trade; and, the leading stocks being scarce, there is little difficulty in bringing about a rise in price."

"One cause of the remarkable upward rebound in Eries was a statement that financial arrangements of a satisfactory kind had been concluded, and the amounts due to the New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio Company, under the lease, punctually paid."

The aspirant must also make himself a thorough master of the intricacies of British Funds, Foreign Government Bonds, railways, telegraphs, banks, and all manner of public companies. As a City editor he will also be called upon to chronicle failures, defaulters, partnerships, appointments of official liquidators, and various items of intelligence which concern City men.

The City editor has his office in the City, and rarely presents himself at the office of his journal in Fleet-street or the Strand. His "copy" is forwarded by messenger, and, in the case of an evening paper, much of it, of course, by telegraph; for a special wire is laid between the City editor's office and the office of the journal he represents.

The City editor usually leads a life quite apart from all other departments of journalism. He is wrapped up in stocks and shares and Consols and Three per Cents., and in everything appears to see something which will influence the Money Market or be influenced by it. An energetic man will occasionally act as City editor to more than one journal, and against this no particular objection can be urged. Monetary matters, unlike politics, assume much the same aspect to different men; therefore it can scarcely be with any amount

of justice contended that a City editor of one journal should not occupy the same position on another. Prejudice can scarcely enter into the question as it would in the case of politics. Indeed, I would rather myself engage the services of a man as City editor who has other City work on hand, because he would be more replete with information. Devoting so much time to monetary matters, it is, naturally, worth his while to collect all the intelligence he can about the Stock Exchange and its proceedings.

The City editor occasionally has opportunities of making money by speculation, but the beginner should eschew this tempting means of adding to his income. Writing money-articles and amateur stock-jobbing may appear to go well together, but, as a matter of fact, in the interests of journalism, they do not. To speculate in some shares in a company of which the young journalist thinks he knows everything is, no doubt, very tempting; nevertheless, he should avoid this fascination. He should do his newspaper work, and try to do it to the best of his ability, and leave the business of stock-jobbing to the jobber. If he is dissatisfied with his earnings in journalism, then he should become a stockbroker, and cease his connection with the Press. There are many temptations to stray from the right path in any department of journalism, but with the City editor who is addicted to speculating in stock and shares, these temptations are still greater.

The position of City editor is of a most responsible kind, and the more the responsibility is felt by anyone occupying such a post, the greater is the success likely to be achieved in the work.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

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### *THE FREE LANCE.*

*A Literary Soldier of Fortune—Authorship and Journalism—A Flourishing “Free Lance”—Indomitable Energy Requisite—Rejected “Copy”—The Extent of the “Free Lancing Order”—“The Grave of Genius”—The “Free Lance” an Author—His Usefulness and Versatility—The Benefit of Knowledge of Practical Newspaper Work—Hints on “Free Lancing”—Where to Apply for Work—How to Do It—The Aim and Tone of Articles.*

It may be necessary to state that the “Free Lance” is a gentleman of the Press who writes for various papers, or any papers he can, and is not regularly attached to any journal. He is a sort of literary soldier of fortune, and, for a guinea or so, his pen may be hired on behalf of almost any cause, or to write on almost any subject. This statement is by no means disrespectful to the “Free Lance,” for, as already explained, the journalist may be regarded in much the same light as the barrister: the latter is “fee’d” to do the best he can with his brief, and the “Free Lance” is paid to write to suit the interests of the journal employing him. Between authorship and journalism, there is the widest distinction, though Mr. Sala has somewhere expressed himself that he does not see any difference between the two. Authorship is an individual effort in writing which is intended to

be of a more or less permanent character; journalism is a chronicle of news with comments thereon, the interest of which passes away with the next issue of the paper. It is not essential that authorship should appear in volume form. A political leading-article is journalism; a social article in the same paper, which would not get out of date within a reasonable time, and would bear reprinting on a future day, in my opinion, is authorship.

A flourishing "Free Lance" is one to be envied by the literary beginner. He is not at the beck and call of a single employer; he puts his eggs, so to speak, in a number of baskets; he can retire to rest every night without the dread of awakening the next morning to find himself, through the caprice of a newspaper proprietor, thrown out of employment. An editorship or a sub-editorship is the thing mostly coveted by the journalistic aspirant; but a "Free Lance" "who knows the ropes" of journalism is in a much more independent position. The income of the editor or the sub-editor may be limited by the amount of his salary; the earnings of the "Free Lance" cannot be fixed, and depend for their largeness or smallness on the extent of his energy and ability.

One quality the "Free Lance" must possess, if he is to succeed, even in a comparative degree, and that is indomitable energy. He must not let rejected "copy" damp his spirits, but rather regard it as an incentive to further effort. No "Free Lance" gets all his articles accepted without taking some trouble, and when a MS. is sent back to the author it is not necessarily a sign that the "copy" is lacking in cleverness, but more likely that it is unsuitable to the journal to which it has been submitted.

Some journalists manage to combine an editorship or a sub-editorship, or other journalistic appointment of a regular kind, with a great deal of work of the "Free Lancing" order. These men, however, are a fortunate few. As a rule, an editorship or a sub-editorship takes up a man's time, and



leaves little or no leisure for anything else, if the duties are thoroughly and efficiently performed. There is such a thing, also, as seeking to do too much, being too greedy, in literary work, and breaking down under the strain. It is a sad spectacle to see a man whom greed has captured working night and day, sacrificing domestic happiness, health, and, perchance, life itself, to the task of turning out columns of "copy." It is a still sadder spectacle to see genius broken on the ever-revolving wheel of daily journalism when that genius would undoubtedly, could it command the time, produce some literature which would live.

Mr. Joseph Hatton has referred, in an American monthly magazine, to the Newspaper Press as "the grave of genius." Although not much of a believer in "mute, inglorious Miltons," yet I am prepared to admit that in numerous instances it is easy to perceive that we obtain perfection in journalism at the expense of authorship. Possibly, we may be rapidly advancing towards that state which Lamartine has predicted: that, before the present century shall have run out, authorship will be entirely absorbed by journalism, which will be the only literature we shall know.

The "Free Lance" usually shows more of the author in his work than does the salaried man on a newspaper. The "Free Lance" does not always take a current topic for a subject, choosing, rather, matters of a permanent interest on which to write. He steers clear, generally, of current news in selecting a subject, because he knows that before his article can perhaps get a chance of appearing the matter may have grown stale; therefore all his labour would be thrown away. The salaried man can find a subject among the news of the day, because he knows what he writes is sure to appear; the "Free Lance" can seldom be quite certain that his work will be used.

Unquestionably, most of the best writing on the Press is done by the "Free Lance." His articles must be good, or they will be rejected. If there were no "Free Lances,"

it would puzzle one to know how many journals would get "copy" to fill their columns. It might appear that they would be driven to engage salaried staffs of writers; but this many of them could not afford to do. Besides, there is the other side to the question, so far as the public is concerned. It is an undoubted fact that nearly every writer produces better work as a "Free Lance" than he does when taken on the salaried staff. The brains of the "Free Lances" are ever active to catch a new idea with which to rivet the attention of an editor, and, through him, interest the great reading public. There is, of course, certain newspaper writing which could never be done by the "Free Lance." We could not, for instance, depend on him for our leading-articles. He has so many irons usually in the fire that his movements and appointments are rendered somewhat uncertain; therefore, the only thing left for a newspaper proprietor to do, in order to get his leading-articles, is to engage salaried writers to do them. Besides, it is essential that leader-writers should be regularly employed on a journal in order to fully understand its tone.

"Free Lancing" is frequently a stepping-stone to a regular engagement as leader-writer, or as editor, or as sub-editor, or in other literary capacity, though many a "Free Lance" would decline the offer of a regular engagement, preferring to retain his independence of action and his eggs in a number of baskets. As "Free Lancing" is a good stepping-stone towards a regular engagement, so is a regular engagement often the best stepping-stone to successful "Free Lancing." It would be unwise to recommend literary aspirants to begin on the Press as "Free Lances" if they can avoid it. The best advice is, Get a regular engagement first; then afterwards you will have a better chance of succeeding as a "literary soldier of fortune." The greater knowledge the worker possesses of the inside of a newspaper office, the greater is his success likely to be when writing for the newspapers from the outside. There are things to be learnt inside a news-

paper office which can never be picked up unless experience has been gained as a salaried journalist on a paper.

There may be a number of readers who do not at present see their way to obtain a regular engagement on a paper; hence a few hints as to "Free Lancing," should they feel disposed to try their hands at the work, may be found useful. A young gentleman wrote to me some time ago, asking my "advice as to the best method of becoming a newspaper correspondent, or a writer on popular subjects for magazines, &c. I do not know what papers or magazines would be likely to accept articles from one who is almost a novice. I have written several articles for a paper (local), but I wish to get into the London papers."

Several correspondents have asked me similar questions. To them all I would say, Leave the monthly magazines alone. If you get a contribution into one of them, it by no means follows that your fortune is made. Do not overlook the fact that a monthly magazine appears only twelve times a year, and if you secured the insertion of an article in each issue, your income could not, by a long way, be truthfully described as "princely." I never yet met an experienced *littérateur* who thought much of monthly magazines as a medium for earning money. The monthly may do for your choice morsel, when you have one to dispose of, and you wish it to be ticketed with your name; but as a means of earning the wherewithal to pay your rent and taxes, butchers' bills, and settle the accounts of your shoemaker and baker, commend me to the weekly and the daily papers.

It is useless to send jokes to *Punch* or leading-articles to the *Times*. The two busy B.'s—Messrs. Buckle and Burnand—will appreciate this advice. Those journals receive more matter from experienced writers than they can use. For the efforts of the "'prentice han'" less-known papers should be selected. When you have served your time to the writing trade—which, be not deceived, every one must do for a longer or shorter period—and have become a journeyman scribe,

then you can try the "big papers." Every literary aspirant possesses a fair acquaintance with some one particular subject: let him write the best article he can on that subject, and then select the journal his article will best suit, and post his MS. off to the editor. It is better, however, before sitting down to write, to first select the journal, and then strive to make the tone of the article agree with the tone of the journal, which you can ascertain by careful reading. The great thing to aim at is to make the article as interesting as you can to the reader, both by the matter you put into it and by your manner (or style) of writing.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

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### *PERIODICALS AND PERIODICAL LITERATURE.*

*The Art of Making Money—Stories and Sketches—Editors and Contributors—Old Tales Retold—Good Jokes and their Authors—An Interesting Incident—The Popularity of Novelettes—The Regulation Column—A Specimen Circular—The “Pink Novelette” Fever—Writing for the Magazines—“Declined with Thanks”—Editorial Arrangements in Advance—Rejected Addresses—Amusing Mistakes—The Necessity of Perseverance.*

As journalism, and not as authorship, I regard most of the penny periodicals that are issued weekly. They contain, as a general rule, stories and sketches that are not worth reprinting after they have served their original purpose—namely, to fill the publications for which they were written. Indeed, the authors of these writings rarely aim at anything beyond getting payment for their work from the periodical in which it appears, and is there permitted to rest. Any ambition above making money is unknown to scores of “Free Lances,” both male and female, who labour for the periodical press.

A literary beginner who can invent a story, perhaps, has a better chance of making his way with periodicals than with newspapers, and this for several reasons. First, salaried writers are seldom or never retained on the periodical press; secondly, style (a quality which the young writer invariably

lacks) is not such a consideration in a story as in a newspaper article; and, thirdly, meritorious work is the sole passport to the periodicals, whilst personal characteristics may go for or against the literary aspirant seeking employment on a newspaper.

It is a common thing to hear the literary beginner lamenting that he is not known to editors. He may, however, reap consolation in that respect by reflecting on the fact that our most popular writers were once in the same position. Of course, it would be wrong for me to tell the literary aspirant that there are no advantages in being known to editors—that is, known in a favourable way. Some writers are known only too well, and those who know them best avoid them and their work. The chief reason why an editor likes to make the personal acquaintance of his contributors is that he will then be able to better judge of the *bonâ fide* nature of the contributions they send to him. No mortal editor can have read all the stories or articles which have been published during the last half century, and old stories and articles have been copied out on more than one occasion, and palmed off on editors as original. It is not so long ago that Mr. Charles Dickens had offered to him an article which had appeared in *Household Words* during the editorship of his illustrious father.

Good jokes are, doubtless, rejected by the editor of *Punch*, because they come from unknown persons, and therefore Mr. Burnand, not being an Irving Bishop or a Stuart Cumberland, cannot be sure that they are original. The sender of the joke, however, may be honest enough, he having sent something which he has slightly modified from the utterance of a "witty" friend, but which utterance, it may transpire, was taken from the pages of *Punch*. Or the "witty" one may have heard the joke from another reputed "funny man," and then repeated it as his own. This shows how desirable it is for an editor to know something of the personal character of his contributors, apart altogether from their ability.

From Charles Dickens down to the modern penny novelist, the contribution dropped into the editor's box has led to a successful career, if not to fortune. A flourishing young *littérateur*, who earns a good income solely in connection with penny periodicals, recently informed me how he began. On leaving college, he attempted acting, becoming a member of a provincial travelling company. He found, however, that there was scarcely bread and cheese to be procured at such work—and hard work it was, for he had to play a different part nearly every night—so he threw it up, thinking he could make more money by writing stories. Knocking about the provinces had given him a few ideas, and he wrote a short story—containing not more than about 2000 words—and dropped it into the editor's box of a penny weekly periodical of light literature, published in the Strand.

In the course of a few days, my young friend received a letter from the editor, asking him to call at the office. He did so, when the editor informed him that he had accepted his short story, and presented him with a cheque for 30s., but added that he did not want such short stories—he could borrow or get (*alias* steal) from the American papers any number of such productions. What he did want, however, was novelettes containing about 32,000 words. "Thank you," said the young literary beginner, "I will try my hand at one, and send it in to you."

My young friend laughingly admitted to me that, at that period of his life, he had never so much as read one of the now-so-well-known penny novelettes with covers of pink hue. He, however, set to work, and wrote a story of about 32,000 words in the course of five or six days, and sent it to the editor. It was accepted, and he has kept steadily plodding along at similar work for over five years. He may never, as a "penny novelist," achieve fame, but, at any rate, he earns about ten times the income he did as an actor, and finds the employment of a congenial character. Presently, he good-humouredly adds, he may do something big in the shape of a

three-volume novel, which will make his name known to the public; then he can quit the fairly remunerative occupation of writing penny novelettes.

Nothing, perhaps, tickles the literary beginner so much as the fact that he must write his stories to a given length—that is, he must put a certain number of thousands of words into them. Fancy, love passages being written to make so many lines or fill so many columns! But there is really nothing remarkable about such an arrangement. Even the Poet Laureate cannot please himself as to the length of his sonnets, which must contain fourteen lines each and so many syllables (I am not a verse-writer, therefore do not know) to each line. Leading-articles, too, in the daily papers, are written a regulation length—a column and a “stick,” otherwise fourteen or fifteen lines over the column. Novelettes cannot be a different length one week from another, therefore it is essential that the stories should all contain *about* the same number of words: it is better if they contain a few more than are wanted than a few less, as it is, of course, always easier to cut out three or four lines than to fill in.

The following is the copy of a circular which was some time ago issued by one of the best-known penny weekly periodicals, to a number of story-writers who were likely to respond with contributions:—

“The Editor of the —— begs to inform —— that he requires original romantic love-stories of the *present day*, full of intensely interesting incident, and written in a simple but attractive style. The length should be seven printed pages of the ——, about 20,000 words (specially required); twelve such pages, about 32,000 words; or serials of from eight to ten numbers, each number to contain about 8000 words. A decision will be given on any stories submitted for approval within a fortnight from the time of receiving them; if accepted, they will be paid for according to arrangement; if declined, they will be returned on receipt of stamps to cover



postage, it being understood that no responsibility is incurred for delay or accidental loss."

About the time when the pink wrapper penny novelette fever first broke out, a story-writer received the following letter (of course, omitting names) from an editor:—

"Dear Sir,—The length of the novelette contemplated will be twenty-eight and a half columns—ninety-six lines to the column, and twelve words to the line—the length, in fact, of those published in ——. The tales should be characterised by vigour of style, fulness of sensational incident, and conversational sprightliness. The tone must not be open to the imputation of pruriency, without any of the goody-goodyism that is *not* attractive to the mass, especially of the readers we anticipate. The element of love must be a leading one, and, when possible, the *primum' mobile*. Time, present; locality, England. Our price is from £6 to £10, according to quality."

There are literary aspirants who will turn up their noses at the bare idea of writing penny novelettes, and who will sit down and manufacture elaborate MSS., which they will post to the *Cornhill*, *Macmillan's*, and *Belgravia*, where they will mostly, for obvious reasons, be "declined with thanks." Beginners should understand that the leading magazines are kept more than supplied with contributions by writers who have won a position in the literary world. The doors are not always kept locked and bolted against really clever literary novices, but the experiences of authors usually show that you must win your spurs before you will be allowed to gallop—or even to canter—at all freely through the pages of the monthly magazines. *Chambers's Journal* claims to be open to everyone alike who can write suitable and meritorious matter. Such a periodical as *Chambers's Journal* receives shoals of MSS., and as it does not take very much type to fill it, as a matter of course it follows that only a portion, even of the good contributions, can be accepted, and those which are accepted must wait their turn before they can appear.

Some monthly magazines (*Good Words* is one of them) have

their contents arranged for a year in advance, so anyone who is fortunate enough to have contributions accepted by them cannot realise the pleasure of seeing them in type for twelve months at least. Conversing recently with the editor of a popular monthly of light literature, he told me of a novel which he had accepted, and which *might* appear in his magazine in 1886, though it was probable it might not see the light till 1887!

I do not believe that any paper or periodical—not even excepting *Punch* and the *Times*—is closed to undoubtedly clever and, at the same time, suitable contributions. It stands to reason that editors, if only in their own interests, are anxious to get hold of the best work they can. Of course, an editor now and again is obtuse-minded, and fails to see merit in a writer till someone else has discovered it, and then all the world recognises it. Mr. W. S. Gilbert first took his “Bab Ballads” to *Punch*, where they were rejected; *Fun*, however, saw the exquisite humour of the work, and Mr. Gilbert’s name as an amusing verse-writer was made. The *Morning Advertiser* would have nothing to do with Mr. Archibald Forbes, but Mr. Robinson, the manager of the *Daily News*, instantly recognised the ability of the now well-known special correspondent, and the reading public soon endorsed his opinion.

Instances of this sort might be multiplied, but they would all tend to show that, after all, editors are liable sometimes to err in their judgment the same as ordinary mortals. Most of the weekly periodicals insert a proportion of chatty articles as well as stories, and thus afford an opportunity for the operations of the literary aspirant who does not do anything in the shape of fiction.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MARKETABLE MANUSCRIPTS.

*Unsuitable Effusions—Avoid Poems for the "Times" and Stories for Trade Journals—"A Three-act Comedy" and its History—The Novice and High Game—Vaulting Ambition—Imitation and its Reward—The Amateur Cabman and Sensational Effect—Studying a Periodical—Writing Biographical Sketches—Character Sketches and Sensational Plots—A Letter of Introduction and What Came of It—A Good Rule—Don't Burn MSS.—The Journalistic Jury and their Verdict.*

GENERALLY speaking, unsuitability is more often the reason, than lack of merit, of the MSS. of the literary beginner being "Declined with thanks." There is no denying that many juvenile effusions are simply atrocious, and could not be accepted even by the editor of an amateur magazine—an individual, by the way, with whom the literary aspirant should have no dealings whatever. I know from considerable experience as a publisher's reader, and having sat for a number of years in an editor's chair, that innumerable MSS. which are not without merit have to be returned to the authors, simply because they are unsuitable to that particular paper or periodical; whereas, if sent to the right publication, they would, in many instances, have been accepted.

"But how am I to know which is the right publication?" the literary beginner will, perchance, exclaim. It is a pity

the answer cannot be, "Easy enough." It may be easy for an experienced journalist to tell exactly what will suit a particular paper or periodical, and be able to see, just by glancing his eye over the pages of the paper, whether there is any opening for "copy;" but the beginner has a great deal to learn before he can hope to feel that he is the possessor of similar knowledge. However, a few hints will be useful to the novice.

As an initial piece of advice, do not send "poems" to the *Times*, nor favour trade journals with "serial stories equal in length to three volume novels." Some readers will smile, and perhaps unjustly accuse me of indulging in a little joke. Could anyone be so foolish as to send a poem for insertion in the *Times*, or a serial story to the editor of a trade paper? The idea of joking is farthest from my thoughts. Mr. Buckle, the Editor of the *Times*, would inform you that, during his as yet short reign in Printing House-square, he has received numerous sets of verses on topics of the day, not to mention occasional "poems" on such subjects as the mythology of ancient Greece, the dying gladiator's prayer, and a plea for the abolition of bull-fighting in Spain.

As to MS. novels being sent to trade journals, I can speak from experience. While editing a trade paper, a serial story was sent to me, with a note intimating that it—that is, the novel—might be "found suitable to your columns." At another time, whilst acting in the same capacity, I was favoured with "a three-act comedy, which Mr. John Hollingshead," remarked the author, "said was a very good first attempt." Whether the comedy was intended for insertion in the journal or not it was unnecessary to inquire, but, at any rate, the request was made to read it, and write the author an opinion concerning it. But my time would not permit me to do it, otherwise I might have prevented the spoiling of a great deal of good clean paper with similar lucubrations. It should be mentioned that the fiction did not in the least degree bear on the trade dealt with by the paper, nor did the

"comedy" come addressed to me by name, to be read as a special favour to the author. Many persons never seem to think that editors, as a rule, are a busy race of men, whose time is fully occupied in getting through their work, without turning aside to look at MSS. which could be of no use to them, even were they most carefully perused.

The younger the literary aspirant, the higher the game at which he usually flies in authorship or journalism. It is hardly worth while throwing cold water on anyone's ambition, but it certainly seems the wiser course to attempt small things before setting out on a huge undertaking. It is folly for a young man to sit down to write a three volume novel before he knows whether he can write a short story which will be accepted. The same remark of course equally applies in the case of an ambitious young woman. It is utter stupidity for a youth to attempt to contribute leading-articles to papers before he has found that he can write paragraphs which do not need considerable editorial revision before they can appear in type.

The younger the literary aspirant, I say, the higher the game at which he will fly. The imitators of Dickens and Mr. George Augustus Sala are countless, and now also we find a number of young men who unmistakably take Mr. G. R. Sims for their model. There is not much chance of success for the slavish imitator (though we all may have a favourite writer whose style we greatly admire); and if aspiring young journalists, instead of pouring forth weak ballads after "Dagonet"—a long way—or watery "Mustard and Cress," would try to do something really useful, there would be hope for them. Let them cease to desire to be locked up, so as to be able to describe a night in a police cell and the charge before the magistrate, or burn to detail their experiences as amateur hansom cab drivers. This sort of thing comes very useful as a subject, when one has the misfortune to glean the materials by actual experience. The "amateur casual," the "amateur cabman," the "amateur madman," and similar

business, has been overdone by the papers of late years, and seems to have quite turned the heads of many aspiring young journalists. Papers are dying for want of really useful and thoughtful articles—for the British public, it should not be forgotten, is a really serious and sober people—and cannot be kept alive by descriptive sketches of the sensational and frothy order, which can be had, of a kind, by the score, simply for the asking, from almost any newspaper man who can pen a sentence.

Let literary beginners take these remarks seriously to heart, and act upon them, if they wish to enter upon journalism in order to gain their livelihood. Trade journals want carefully and appreciatively written descriptions of new processes in manufactures; we want to learn all about the latest clever inventions, and an account of the performance of the type writer is certainly more acceptable to an editor than a sonnet addressed to the Moon. "Boot-making by Machinery" is a preferable subject for the literary beginner to select than a pæan to the Sun. He had better be the author of a useful little handbook on "Smoky Chimneys: Their Prevention and Cure," or even of an article on "The Alimentary Canal of the Cockroach" (with seven illustrations), than of a trashy three-volume novel (which would be of no use to anyone save the butterman), or of a pretentious five-act tragedy in blank verse.

Avoid controversial subjects, unless you are sure of the ground upon which you would tread. The best way to get an idea of what any paper or periodical would be likely to accept, is to carefully read and study that particular paper or periodical—not one number of it, but several numbers. Avoid controversy in an article of a purely descriptive character; or in a biographical or historical sketch, in which facts are given without venturing an opinion. For instance, you may write a very readable biographical sketch of Mr. Gladstone if you keep to the facts of his career; but if you begin to criticise his actions, either favourably

or unfavourably, you will assuredly displease one political party, while at the same time you would please the other. Papers and periodicals that are intended for what is called "family reading" usually eschew politics, and are neither Liberal, nor Conservative, nor Radical. Of course, if you were writing a sketch of Mr. Gladstone for a Liberal paper, you would make him out to be a man without either flaw or blemish—a perfect political paragon, in short; but if your article were intended for a Conservative paper, it would be advisable to seek inspiration from back numbers of the *Pall Mall Gazette* of ten years or so ago.

There is another reason—though I am almost afraid to mention it—why it is as well the literary beginner should avoid as much as he possibly can venturing opinions in his articles. A young writer's views are naturally somewhat crude, and while his mental rawness will not show itself, perhaps, in a simple narrative of facts, it is likely to exhibit itself most prominently when he begins phrases with some such words as "I think," or "I am of opinion," or "My idea is," &c.

My readers will understand that I am addressing these remarks to the literary aspirant who holds no engagement on a paper, but is purposing to send in contributions to any paper or periodical which he thinks will be likely to accept his MSS. When a young man has secured a regular engagement, his editor will fully instruct him what and how he is to write.

We will now turn from newspapers to the periodical Press, where the same care should be exercised as to sending in suitable contributions. You should know that what will suit the *Family Herald* will not do for the *London Journal*, and *vice versâ*. One journal requires simply love-making, and slight character sketches, while another demands a sensational plot, to which everything else in the story must be subjugated. If you send your sensational story to the love-making periodical you will have it "Declined with thanks;" if you send your love-making MS. to the paper which is great

at plots it will return to you. Don't burn your works. Send them off again, changing the destination in each case, and the chances are, providing you know how to tell a fairly good story, both will be accepted.

I occasionally write stories myself. Some years ago, when doing my first work of this kind, I called one day to see the editor of a popular penny weekly periodical. I had a letter of introduction to him—the only time a letter of introduction to an editor was of any use to me. "So you want to write for us," he said, as he offered me a chair, not at the office of the periodical, but at his private chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields. "Yes," I replied. "Well, now I'll tell you what we want," the editor went on. "We *don't* want any deep analysis of character, *à la* George Eliot. Miss Braddon is more in our line, or Wilkie Collins. As to dialogue, we require it to be of the ordinary, everyday, conversational order. You are passing along the street with a friend, and a character attracts your attention. You say, 'Look at his eye,' or 'Look at his nose,' as the case may be. 'Hasn't he got a peculiar one?' Now *that's* what we want." I nodded my head, and said "Just so," trying to look as solemn as possible, though the interview was novel to me at the time, and tickled me immensely. But I contrived to make him think I was amused at some boys who were tying an old tin pot to a cat's tail immediately beneath his windows.

A good rule to observe in writing for penny periodicals is to imagine as you write that you are telling your story to a group of milliner-girls, or girls occupying about a similar position in life. This will prevent you being too metaphysical.

As regards every kind of literary work, it is necessary to impress on those who aspire to enter upon journalism as a calling, or of making progress in it if they have already entered upon it, that, whatever you do, never write without you are paid; take plenty of time to do your work, and do not be disheartened by having a MS. "Declined with thanks:"



you can send it to another editor. When twelve editors—a journalistic jury—refuse your work, it is time enough to think about burning it—not before; and not always then. For it may be useful to you at a later date in your career, when, perhaps, you have made a name, and the public will read anything that emanates from your pen.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### REMUNERATION.

*What Pays—Incapables in the Journalistic Army—Zeal without Brains—The Literary Ladder, and Those who Climb It—Men of the Right Stuff—The Mistakes of Parents—The Charm of Literary Work—Journalistic Virtues—Salaries of Reporters, Sub-Editors, and Editors—The “Column rate” for Contributions—“Penny-a-Liners”—Magazine Articles—The Pay for Novelettes—Good Style Necessary in all Literary Work.*

CHARLES DICKENS has somewhere said, that if authorship had not paid him, he would have turned commercial traveller. It is greatly in the interests of literature that men (and women) should be ambitious of literary fame. Still, even writers, being merely mortals, desire to live comfortably and clothe their children decently, and educate them so as to give them the best possible opportunity of a good start in life.

We may assume that every sensible literary man or woman who depends solely on the pen for a livelihood will feel much as Charles Dickens expressed himself as feeling. It would be unwise for anyone to pursue journalism or authorship if, after a good trial, he found it did not pay, just as it would be unwise for him to follow any other employment that did not compensate him for his labour. Numerous incapable persons—that is, incapable in a literary sense—foolishly enrol themselves in the army of writers, with the result, very often, of years

of misery (and life-long misery frequently) to themselves and all those who may be dependent upon them. The chief reason of this lamentable feature of the literary world is that so many mistake *cacoëthes scribendi*, as manifested in themselves, as an indication that they are able to produce, and go on producing, articles and books which the reading world will be pleased to peruse. A few sheets of paper, a bottle of ink, and a pen may be all the materials a writer requires; but this fact should not be overlooked—and it often is—that brains are necessary to regulate the order the words should take on paper.

Providing that he will only work, no man who can write at all need have occasion to complain that he is not in receipt of a fair, if not a good, income from his pen, even if he is not so successful as to make a fortune—a pleasing fate which is more likely to befall the brilliant dramatist or novelist than the journalist, however brilliant he may be. We do, it is true, meet with men who do not seem to earn much money by their literary labours; so, too, do we meet with impecunious barristers, doctors, painters, and actors. There is, however, always a reason for non-success in any calling, and if we care to trace this reason, we shall generally find that it is either the “cursed drink fiend,” or lack of industry, or, perchance, the two combined.

The aspirant, as a rule, is likely to find the literary ladder difficult to climb. His early years at writing are almost sure to be years of struggle. But he must take heart. Young men at the Bar, young surgeons beginning practice, young actors and young painters, all have their early years of struggle, and must fight their way with a will if they wish to succeed in their chosen profession or calling. If you have the right stuff in you, you are sure to win your way sooner or later, notwithstanding the opinions of your relatives or friends, who, perchance, knowing nothing about literary work, advise you to emigrate, or to turn to some other occupation, just as if the act of emigrating or turning to some

other occupation would destroy your desire to succeed as a writer.

The author or journalist nearly always has repaired the mistake of his worthy relatives or friends, who pitchforked him, when very young, into some profession or calling for which he was totally unfitted. I, for instance (if you will excuse the little personal reference), who have no cause to complain of literary work as a medium of earning money, was marked out by my fond parents to be an architect, simply because I had taken a prize or two for drawing at a local school of art. Into an architect's office I was put, after having had a few slight adventures at sea and elsewhere. Had it been my lot to remain in that uncongenial atmosphere, and in a profession for which I had neither taste nor capacity, the probability is that to-day my income would not have been more than about £2 or so a week, the average salary of an architectural draughtsman.

Now, the great charm about the literary world is that invariably all the people in it like their work—at least like literary work, if not exactly the particular kind which they may be at present doing. No one is put to write articles or novels against his will. Fancy what sort of articles or novels we should have if the work were done against the grain, as work too often is in many other professions.

Journalism and authorship frequently prove precarious occupations, because their followers will not observe the virtues of method, punctuality, order, and industry, which are required and given in most other employments. A writer should have his work hours just as a lawyer has his office hours, or a surgeon his hours of consultation. Such officers of the literary army as Scott, Dickens, and Anthony Trollope did not disdain to have regular fixed hours for work, which were in the morning—the best time for work of any kind, save acting, star-gazing, and burglary. If literary aspirants would regard journalism or authorship in a more business-like light than they usually do, they would find themselves

producing more marketable MSS., and, as a direct result, in receipt of larger earnings.

In the chapter on "Reporting," there are some remarks respecting the salary of the provincial reporter, which capacity is better than any as a beginning for the aspiring young journalist, for reasons that were then given. Two guineas or 50s. may be named as the weekly remuneration of a fairly efficient reporter in a small country town. For this sum, he is also often expected to write a column of "local notes" a week, occasional descriptive sketches, and now and again a leader. Of course, on the daily papers of the provinces (at least, on the dailies of large towns like Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leeds, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Dundee, &c.), reporters are paid much higher salaries—as high salaries, indeed, in some cases, as reporters on London daily papers receive—four, five, and six guineas a week being nearer the figure.

All provincial journalists who are worth anything at all can supplement their regular incomes by contributions to the London Press, providing they have the time. Reporters can send up news, and the editors and sub-editors of ability are probably in many cases able to contribute original work of some kind or other to the periodicals, or, it may be, turn out an occasional book-job for a local or a London publisher.

The salaries of sub-editors and editors in the provinces vary a great deal. Many country newspapers make shift without such gentlemen as sub-editor and editor. A good county weekly will pay an editor a salary of about £300 a year, and a sub-editor, say, £150. For the provincial daily Press you can more than double these amounts. Mr. Charles Pebody, the Editor of the *Yorkshire Post*, it is stated, receives £1000 a year; but his predecessor in the same editorial chair was given £1500 per annum. The salary of the Editor of the *Manchester Guardian* is, I dare say, equal to the editorial honorarium paid on any London daily paper, except the *Times*. I have not manifested sufficient inquisitiveness to

inquire what young Mr. Buckle (he is only thirty), the Editor of the *Times*, receives, but Mr. Chenery, his predecessor, was reported to have £5000 a year, with free chambers in Serjeants' Inn. Such was also the honorarium of Mr. Delane during his reign in Printing House-square. Mr. Arthur Arnold edited the *Echo* for £1000 a year during Messrs. Cassell, Petter, and Galpin's proprietorship of the journal; and, shortly after this, in Baron Grant's reign, Mr. G. Barnett Smith drew £600 a year as sub-editor of the same paper. The *Echo* formerly paid a guinea and a half per article to outside contributors to its columns, though now, I believe, its literary remuneration in this respect rarely exceeds a guinea. Miss Frances Power Cobbe, perhaps the brightest and cleverest of lady journalists, was given six guineas a week for visiting the *Echo* office three mornings a week and writing an article and a note (that is, a leaderette) for the paper on each one of the three mornings.

The editorship of the *Times* is the big plum of journalism; the editors of the other London dailies receive salaries which are nearer the sum of £2000 or £3000 than £5000 a year each. I believe the present editor of the *Morning Advertiser* receives £1500, and the Editor of the *Daily Chronicle* less than £1000.

A guinea is the lowest sum that is paid for an article of the orthodox column in length, on the London daily Press. At any rate, I have never had less, and have frequently received more. The *Globe* pays a guinea; the *Daily Chronicle* rewards its outside or occasional contributors of original matter at the rate of £1 per column: Mr. Edward Lloyd will have nothing to do with the obsolete coin, a guinea. The *Morning Post* paid a friend of mine who, three or four years ago, wrote some leading-articles for its columns, at the rate of two guineas an article; and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, some years ago, when it was a Conservative paper, gave the same friend twenty guineas for a series of four articles on a special subject with which he is well acquainted.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* formerly had the reputation of rewarding its literary workers most liberally; what its rate of remuneration is now I do not know. The *Times* pays five guineas an article, and will give more rather than risk losing a good contribution. The rate on the *St. James's Gazette* is three guineas an article, and on the *City Press* one guinea (and occasionally a guinea and a half) an article. Of course, a well-known journalist like Mr. Sala can always command his own terms on any paper or magazine—terms which would be much higher than any I have named. I have only given the prices that are paid to the rank-and-file, and not to the officers of journalism.

I have been paid for "Gossip" for the *Citizen* at the rate of two guineas a column, and threepence a line for "Gossip" for *Truth*, which, in either case, is by no means bad pay. Yet it is quite within the bounds of possibility that some would-be clever individual will some time or other dub me a "penny-a-liner." Yet I never did any "lining" (which is manifold paragraphing or reporting) during my whole connection with the Press, and "lining" is nearly always now paid at the higher rate of three-halfpence a line.

People talk contemptuously of "penny-a-liners" without really knowing what they are talking about. I know a "liner" (so-called because he is remunerated at the rate of so much a line) who has purchased several villa residences out of his earnings—no, not through a building society, but paid the money down for the property; who has sent his daughter to school in France; and who, every year, goes for an extensive tour on the Continent (and not with a tourist's ticket). He would decline a sub-editorship or an editorship, if either were offered to him, because he likes the freedom and independence which his present employment gives him. This gentleman says there is only one man he envies, and that is the successful novelist, who can go and do his work in the pine forests of America if he chooses.

The *Spectator* will give five guineas for a good article, and

the *Saturday Review* three or four guineas. Journals, however, like those are beyond the capacity of the average literary beginner, who will do better at first by confining his attention to more modest publications. *Chambers's Journal*, *Household Words*, and kindred periodicals are always open to contributors of ability, and their several rates of remuneration will not, I think, be found disappointing.

With regard to penny novelettes, it was mentioned in the chapter on "Periodicals and Periodical Literature" that the rates of remuneration for these works of fiction were "£6 to £10, according to quality." It may, however, be stated that I have known £15 paid for a clever novelette, and this, too, to an author without any name as a fictionist. A friend has expressed his surprise to me that I should recommend anyone to write penny novelettes, the composition of which, he says, must be productive of a bad literary style. I am always ready to listen to advice, but I do not see why the writing of penny novelettes should be productive of a bad literary style. Many such works are done in an atrocious style, but aspiring writers may do something towards reforming this by writing their fiction, whether penny novelettes or three-volume novels, in a style worthy of a careful workman. There is no reason whatever why a penny novelette should not be as much a work of art in its way as a three-volume novel. However, writing penny novelettes pays well those who can write good stories; and, after all, what do the great majority of the army of writers labour for—money or fame? Money, which they get; fame only falling to a supremely clever author here and there. Of course, it is always in the choice of a literary aspirant to attempt a bigger thing than a penny novelette if he thinks he can do it and succeed.

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## CHAPTER XX.

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### CONCLUSION.

*The Press as a Power in the World—The Benefits Conferred on the Public by its Influence—Absurd Notions about Critics—Daily Papers and their Production—How the Work is Done—Journalistic Enterprise—A Daily Illustrated Newspaper—Capacity for Literary Work—A Common-place Book—Newspaper Cuttings—Legible Handwriting—Careful Work—General Hints.*

THIS chapter brings my little work to a close. A great deal more concerning the Press might be said; but it has been my aim to keep the amount of matter within reasonable limits, so that the book could be put before literary aspirants in a handy size and at a moderate price.

An entire chapter might easily have been devoted to describing the really wonderful organisation of the Press. How a daily newspaper is produced, from the first process to the last, would have formed a subject which could not have failed to interest. The Press is wonderful, and it is powerful, let its detractors say what they choose to the contrary. The Press,

too, is fair, as a rule, in its criticisms, though an exceptional instance may crop up now and again which shakes one's belief in the impartiality of the journalist. Many a great reform, many a public boon and privilege, for which we are in the habit of thanking other workers, has actually been effected or won by newspaper writers. What amount of interest would the general public take in Parliamentary proceedings were it not for the reports and comments thereon appearing in the newspapers? Some Members of Parliament affect to speak contemptuously of all newspapers, yet at least one of this fraternity has purchased a newspaper to advocate his candidature, and secure his return to Parliament.

Powerful as the Press is, no good man need fear its censure deserving it not. Nothing is more absurd and silly than the supposition that dramatic critics meet together, "after a play is over," and agree to "slate" or praise the piece. Why, very often the critics of different papers do not know one another; and, besides, if they did, they have too much independence of character—being usually literary men of ability—to submit to run together like a flock of sheep. The Press is frequently unanimous in its praise; so, too, is it frequently unanimous in its censure, because the subject criticised is, respectively, good or bad without a doubt. The very unanimity of the Press is a proof of the soundness of its criticism, instead of being any indication of the reverse. If the English Press errs at all, it is on the side of gentleness. It is ever more ready to praise than to condemn, and its lash is only applied to the moral and social reprobate.

A copy of a newspaper is bought for a halfpenny or a penny, therefore people do not see anything wonderful about it. That such a production *can* be purchased for a halfpenny or a penny is just the subject for wonder.

Only think how many brains have toiled before the paper is laid upon our breakfast-table. The leader-writers have done their work, and the editor and his assistant have seen that they did it well; the dramatic critic has analysed the last

new play; the reviewer of light literature has dealt with the last clever novel published, and half-a-dozen poor works of fiction besides; the reporters at the various law and police courts have faithfully written out all the cases of interest and sent them in to the office of the paper; the reporters on the staff have attended to the City and other meetings, reported lectures, addresses, and so forth; the Parliamentary corps has duly recorded the debates in Parliament; reporters in numerous districts of the provinces have sent in items of news; the London "liners" have not forgotten the inquests, fires, street accidents, &c.; and the sub-editor of the paper and his assistants have had to wrestle with—condensing, altering, or correcting, or, perchance, destroying, as the case may be—all the enormous quantity of "copy" which has come to hand. Add to this the work of the war correspondents, the duties of the resident correspondents at the various foreign capitals, and the sketchy article of the "Special Commissioner," and some idea may be gained of the mental labour which it is essential should be performed before the mere mechanical production of a newspaper can be proceeded with.

The newspaper as issued, however, only represents a percentage of the literary work which is performed in connection with a newspaper office. Any journal might any day fill an issue thrice the size, were it to insert all the "copy" which comes to hand during the twenty-four hours. The public in the halfpenny or penny sheet really get the pick or cream of the news, and the comments thereon. Many a head has ached in the preparation of "copy," which is doomed to find its way into the waste-paper basket, not always because it lacks interest or is worthless, but more often for the simple reason that space cannot be found for it.

Journalistic enterprise would find a more appropriate place in the history of the Newspaper Press than in the pages of a book addressed to literary aspirants. At the same time, I cannot forbear expressing, in a word, my admiration of the

bold undertakings upon which newspaper proprietors have entered in order to supply the public with news of occurrences in the most distant parts of the globe. There is no doubt the forthcoming adventure in journalism will be a daily illustrated newspaper. It has long been talked about, but never attempted, unless a little illustrated sheet which appeared on five consecutive evenings in October, 1881, can be called an attempt in this direction. No one, however, should think of starting a daily illustrated newspaper unless he is prepared with an enormous sum of money—say, £50,000 at least—and determined to carry it on till it is a success. There is only one way of making a paper pay, and that is to make it so interesting that the public will buy it, and feel it necessary in their daily life.

Turning now to the more immediate interests of journalistic aspirants, let me impress upon them the desirability of making sure that they are possessed of a capacity for literary work before they essay to gain a livelihood on the Press. Journalism is a lucrative profession for the able man, but the reverse for a person who has neither taste nor ability for the work. I have not pretended to make a young man a journalist; my aim has rather been to throw out a few hints to literary aspirants of promise. A great deal of the mechanism of journalism can be taught, but you cannot give brains (which are certainly a desirable acquisition, even in journalism) to anyone. Granted that a man is possessed of fleetness of foot, he may be trained for a professional pedestrian; and granted that a young man is possessed of literary ability, he may be trained for a professional journalist. My remarks have not, I hope, tended to convey the impression that a silk purse *could* be made—to use a homely metaphor—out of a sow's ear.

Just as a journal must be made interesting or useful if it is to succeed, so must a young journalist make his work interesting or useful if he is to succeed. Everything will depend upon the literary aspirant himself as to whether he

will become a George Augustus Sala, a G. R. Sims, or a James Greenwood.

Rose Munroe, in a complimentary letter in *The Bazaar*, advised the young journalist to start a commonplace book. She has found it of great use to herself in her literary labours. Mr. Sala also strongly recommends the keeping of a commonplace book. There can be no doubt the careful keeping of such a book would prove of great service to the journalist, though, personally, I have not been very industrious in that respect. I possess a scrap-book, into which I have from time to time gummed newspaper cuttings, and I have frequently found it of use to me. Every journalist, like the dramatist or novelist, has his own method of work, and I think it is best for the young beginner to proceed as his fancy dictates.

One thing, however, every literary aspirant must make up his mind he will have to do, if he would be successful, even in a comparative degree—that is, to work. **WORK! WORK! WORK!** must be his daily watchword and motto.

Young journalists are in the habit of conversing with one another as to how long it takes them to write a column. Speed is certainly an important qualification to a newspaper man, but you had better be slow, and do your work well, than be quick, and do it badly.

Let your handwriting be as clear and plain as possible. Write, too, with black ink on white paper, on slips of a moderate size. If your handwriting is plain, printers' errors—a great source of annoyance to a writer—will be less likely to occur. In a very silly article, recently, the literary aspirant was advised *not* to make his handwriting too plain, as clear handwriting did not look professional; that scraps of paper of any sort might be used on which to write "copy," as it was professional! Give no heed to such nonsense.

Plenty of space should be left in margins and between lines for your own and editorial corrections, so that any alterations which it may be desirable to make will not necessitate the recopying of an entire page.

Write your name and address at the top of the first page of your "copy," and, of course, write only on one side of the paper.

One word more in conclusion: Work, and if you possess any ability at all, you are sure, sooner or later, to reap the reward of your labours.



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