Arnold Bennett

The Elusive Craft of Writing

How to Become an Author, The Truth about an Author, Literary Taste: How to Form It & The Author's Craft

e-artnow, 2019
Contact: info@e-artnow.org

Table of Contents

How to Become an Author

Chapter I
The Literary Career

Table of Contents

Divisions of literature.

In the year 1902 there were published 1743 volumes of fiction, 504 educational works, 480 historical and biographical works, 567 volumes of theology and sermons, 463 political and economical works, and 227 books of criticism and *belles-lettres.* These were the principal divisions of the grand army of 5839 new books issued during the year, and it will be seen that fiction is handsomely entitled to the first place. And the position of fiction is even loftier than appears from the above figures; for, with the exception of a few school-books which enjoy a popularity far exceeding all other popularities, and a few theological works, no class of book can claim as high a circulation per volume as the novel. More writers are engaged in fiction than in any other branch of literature, and their remuneration is better and perhaps surer than can be obtained in other literary markets. In esteem, influence, renown, and notoriety the novelists are also paramount.

Therefore in the present volume it will be proper for me to deal chiefly with the art and craft of fiction. For practical purposes I shall simply cut the whole of literature into two parts, fictional and non-fictional; and under the latter head I shall perforce crowd together the sublime and reverend muses of poetry, history, biography, theology, economy—everything, in short, that is not prose-fiction, save only plays; having regard to the extraordinary financial and artistic condition of the British stage and the British playwright at the dawn of the twentieth century, I propose to discuss the great "How" of the drama in a separate chapter unrelated to the general scheme of the book. As for journalism, though a journalist is not usually held to rank as an author, it is a. fact that very many, if not most, authors begin by being journalists. Accordingly I shall begin with the subject of journalism.

Two Branches of Journalism: The Mechanical.

There are two branches of journalism, and it is necessary to

distinguish sharply between them. They may be called the literary branch and the mechanical branch. To take the latter first, it is mainly the concern of reporters, of all sorts, and of sub-editors. It is that part of the executive side of journalism which can be carried out with the least expenditure of original brain-power. It consists in reporting — parliament, fashionable weddings, cricket-matches, company meetings, fat-stock shows; and in work of a sub-editorial character— proof-correcting, marshalling and co-ordinating the various items of an issue, cutting or lengthening articles according to need, modifying the tone of articles to coincide with the policy of the paper, and generally seeing that the editor and his brilliant original contributors do not, in the carelessness of genius, make fools of themselves. The sub-editor and the reporter, by reason of highly-developed natural qualifications, sometimes reach a wonderful degree of capacity for their duties, and the sub-editorial chair is often occupied by an individual who obviously has not the slightest intention of remaining in it. But, as a rule, the sub-editor and the reporter are mild and minor personages. Any man of average intelligence can learn how to report verbatim, how to write correct English, how to make incorrect English correct, how to describe neatly and tersely. Sub-editors and reporters are not born; they become so because their fathers or uncles were sub-editors or reporters, or by some other accident, not because instinct irresistibly carries them into the career; they would probably have succeeded equally well in another calling. They enter an office early, by a chance influence or by heredity, and they reach a status similar to that of a solicitor's managing-clerk. Fame is not for them, though occasionally they achieve a limited renown in professional circles. Their ultimate prospects are not glorious. Nor is their fiscal reward ever likely to be immense. In the provinces you may see the sub-editor or reporter of fifty who has reared a family on three pounds a week and will never earn three pounds ten. In London the very best mechanical posts yield as much as four hundred a year, and infrequently more; but the average salary of a thorough expert would decidedly not exceed two hundred and fifty, while the work performed is laborious, exacting, responsible, and often extremely inconvenient. Consider the case of the sub-editor of an evening paper, who must breakfast at 6 a.m. winter and summer, and of the sub-editor of a morning paper, who never gets to bed before three in the morning. Relatively, a clerk in a good house is better paid than a sub-editor or a reporter.

I shall have nothing more to say about this branch of journalism.

Its duties are largely of an official kind and in the nature of routine, and are almost always studied practically in an office. A useful and trustworthy manual of them is Mr. John B. Mackie's *Modem Journalism: a Handbook of Instruction and Counsel for the Young Journalist*, published by Crosby, Lockwood & Son, price half-a-crown.

The Literary Branch.

I come now to the higher branch of journalism, that which is connected, more or less remotely, with literature. This branch merges with the lower branch in the person of the "descriptive-reporter," who may be a genius with the wages of an ambassador, like the late G. W. Steevens, or a mere hack who describes the Lord Mayor's procession and writes "stalwart emissaries of the law" when he means policemen. It includes, besides the aristocracy of descriptive reporting, reviewers, dramatic and other critics, financial experts, fashion-writers, paragraphists, miscellaneous contributors regular and irregular, assorted leader-writers, assistant editors, and editors; I believe that newspaper proprietors also like to fancy themselves journalists. Very few ornaments of the creative branch of journalism become so by deliberate intention from the beginning. The average creative journalist enters his profession by "drifting" into it; the verb "to drift" is always used in this connection; the natural and proper assumption is that he was swept away on the flood of a powerful instinct. He makes a timid start by what is called "freelancing," that is, sending an unsolicited contribution to a paper in the hope that it will be accepted and paid for. He continues to shoot out unsolicited contributions in all directions until one is at length taken; then he thinks his fortune is made. In due course he gradually establishes a connection with one or more papers; perhaps he writes a book. On a day he suddenly perceives that an editor actually respects and relies on him; he is asked to "come into the office" sometimes, to do "things," and at last he gets the offer of an appointment. Lo! he is a full-fledged journalist; yet the intermediate stages leading from his first amateurish aspiring to his achieved position have been so slight, vague, and uncertain, that he can explain them neither to himself nor to others. He has "drifted into journalism." And let me say here that he has done the right thing. It is always better to enter a newspaper office from towards the top than from towards the bottom. It is, in my opinion, an error of tactics for a youth with a marked bent towards journalism, to join a staff at an early age as a proof-reader, reporter,

or assistant sub-editor; he is apt to sink into a groove, to be obsessed by the routine instead of the romance of journalism, and to lose intellectual elasticity.

The creative branch of journalism is proportionately no better paid than the mechanical branch. The highest journalistic post in the kingdom is reputed to be worth three thousand a year, an income at which scores of lawyers, grocers, bishops, music-hall artistes, and novelists would turn up their noses. A thousand a year is a handsome salary for the editor of a first-class organ; some editors of first-class organs receive much less, few receive more. (The London County Council employs eleven officers at a salary of over a thousand a year each, and five at a thousand each.) An assistant editor is worth something less than half an editor, while an advertisement manager is worth an editor and an assistant editor added together. A leader-writer may receive from four hundred to a thousand a year. No man can earn an adequate livelihood as a book-reviewer or a dramatic or musical critic, pure and simple; but a few women by much industry contrive to flourish by fashion - writing alone. The life of a man without a regular appointment who exists as a freelance may be adventurous, but it is scarcely worth living. The rate of pay for journalistic contributions varies from seven and sixpence to two guineas per thousand words; the average is probably under a pound; not a dozen men in London get more than two guineas a thousand for unsigned irregular contributions. A journalist at once brilliant, reliable, industrious, and enterprising, may be absolutely sure of a reasonably good income, provided he keeps clear of editorships and does not identify himself too prominently with any single paper. If he commits either of these indiscretions, his welfare largely depends on the unwillingness of his proprietor to sell his paper. A change of proprietorship usually means a change of editors and of prominent contributors, and there are few more pathetic sights in Fleet Street than the Famous Journalist dismissed through no fault of his own.

On the whole, it cannot be made too clear that journalism is never a gold-mine except for newspaper proprietors, and not always for them. The journalist sells his brains in a weak market Other things being equal, he receives decidedly less than he would receive in any pursuit save those of the graphic arts, sculpture, and music. He must console himself by meditating upon the romance, the publicity, and the influential character of his profession. Whether these intangible things are a sufficient consolation to the able, conscientious man who gives his best for, say, three or four hundred a year and the prospect

of a precarious old age, is a question happily beyond the scope of my treatise.

Fiction.

I have made no mention of the natural gifts of universal curiosity, alertness, inextinguishable verve, and vivacious style which are necessary to success in creative journalism, because the aspirant will speedily discover by results whether or not he possesses them. If he fails in the earlier efforts of freelancing, he will learn thereby that he is not a born journalist, and the "drifting" process will automatically cease. For the same reason I need not enter upon an academic discussion of the qualifications proper to a novelist. In practice, nobody plunges blindly into the career of fiction. Long before the would-be novelist has reached the point at which to turn back means ignominious disaster, he will have ascertained with some exactness the exchange value of his qualifications, and will have set his course accordingly. There is the rare case of the beginner who achieves popularity by his first book. This apparently fortunate person will be courted by publishers and flattered by critics, and in the ecstasy of a facile triumph he may be tempted to abandon a sure livelihood "in order to devote himself entirely to fiction." One sees the phrase occasionally in literary gossip. The temptation should be resisted at all costs. A slowly-built reputation as a, novelist is nearly indestructible; neither time nor decay of talent nor sheer carelessness will quite kill it; your Mudie subscriber, once well won, is the most faithful adherent in the world. But the reputation that springs up like a mushroom is apt to fade like a mushroom; modern instances might easily be cited, and will occur to the student of publishers' lists. Moreover, it is unquestionable that many writers can produce one striking book and no more. Therefore the beginner in fiction should not allow himself to be dazzled by the success of a first book. The success of a seventh book is a sufficient assurance for the future, but the success of a first book should be followed by the success of two others before the author ventures, in Scott's phrase, to use fiction as a crutch and not merely as a stick.

Speaking broadly, fiction is a lucrative profession; it cannot compare with stock-broking, or brewing, or practice at the parliamentary bar, but it is tolerably lucrative. Never before, despite the abolition of the three-volume novel, did so many average painstaking novelists earn such respectable incomes as at the present

day. And the rewards of the really successful novelist seem to increase year by year. A common course is to begin with short stories for magazines and weeklies. These vary in length from two to six thousand words, and the payment, for unknown authors, varies from half a guinea to three guineas per thousand. The leading English magazines willingly pay fifteen guineas for a five-thousand-word story. But to make a living out of short stories alone is impossible in England. I believe it may be accomplished in America, where at least one magazine is prepared to pay forty dollars per thousand words irrespective of the author's reputation.

The production of sensational serials is remunerative up to a certain point The halfpenny dailies and the popular penny weeklies will pay from ten shillings to thirty shillings per thousand words; and the newspaper syndicates, who buy to sell again to a number of clients simultaneously, sometimes go as far as two pounds per thousand for an author who has little reputation but who suits them. Thus a man may make a hundred pounds by working hard for a month, with the chance of an extra fifty pounds for book-rights afterwards. A writer who makes a name as a sensational serialist does not often get beyond three pounds per thousand, though the syndicates may be more generous, rising to five or six pounds per thousand. I should doubt whether even the most popular of sensational serialists can obtain more than six pounds per thousand. In this particular market a reputation is less valuable than elsewhere. And it must also be remembered that the sale of sensational serials in book form is seldom remarkable.

The mild domestic novelist who plods steadily along, and whose work is suitable for serial issue, is in a better position than the mere sensation-monger. She—it is often a "she"—may get from three to six pounds per thousand for serial rights as her reputation waxes, and her book-rights may be anything from two hundred to a thousand pounds. I can state with certainty that it is not unusual for a novelist who has never really had an undubitable success, but who has built up a sort of furtive half-reputation, to make a thousand pounds out of a novel, first and last. Such a person can write two novels a year with ease. I have more than once been astonished at the sums received by novelists whom, both in an artistic and a commercial sense, I had regarded as nobodies. I know an instance of a particularly mild and modest novelist who was selling the book-rights of her novels outright for three hundred pounds apiece. One day it occurred to her to demand double that sum, and to her immense surprise the publisher

immediately accepted the suggestion. I should estimate that this author can comfortably write a book in three months.

The Really Successful Novelist.

The novelist who once really gets himself talked about, or, in other words, sells at least ten thousand copies of a book, and who is capable of living up to his reputation, soon finds that he is on a bed of roses. For serial rights in England and America he may get fifteen pounds per thousand, making twelve hundred pounds for an eighty-thousand-word novel. For book-rights he will be paid at the rate of about seventy-five pounds per thousand copies of the circulation; so that if his book sells ten thousand copies in England and five thousand copies in America, he receives eleven hundred and twenty-five pounds. Baron Tauchnitz will give from twenty-five to fifty pounds for the continental rights, and the colonial rights are worth something. The grand total for the book will thus be quite two thousand four hundred pounds. This novelist will probably produce three novels in two years. Magazines will pay sixty pounds apiece and upwards for his short stories, and from time to time the stories will be collected and issued in a volume which is good for a few hundred pounds. By writing a hundred and fifty thousand words a year he will make an annual income of three thousand five hundred pounds. His habit will be to write a thousand words a day three days a week, and on each working day he will earn about twenty-five pounds. All which is highly agreeable—but then the man is highly exceptional.

The case of the novelist who has a vogue of the most popular kind, that is to say, whose books reach a circulation of from fifty to a hundred thousand copies, is even more opulent, luxurious, and lofty. The sale of a hundred thousand copies of a six-shilling novel means that the author receives upwards of seven thousand five hundred pounds. The value of the serial rights of a book by such an author is extremely high in many cases, though sometimes it is nothing. There are ten authors in England who can count on receiving at least four thousand pounds for any long novel they choose to write, and there are several who have made, and may again make, twenty thousand pounds from a single book, which is at the rate of about four shillings a word. And seeing that any author who knows his craft can easily — despite statements to the contrary in illustrated interviews and other grandiose manifestations of bombast—compose three thousand words of his very best in a week, the pecuniary rewards of the first-class

"boom" should satisfy the most avaricious and exacting.

The Sagacious Mediocrity.

But the average mediocre novelist, too good to excite a mob to admiration, and not good enough to be taken seriously by persons of taste, can have only a polite interest in the foregoing statistics. It remains for me to assure the average mediocre novelist *in posse*, that, if he minds his task, produces regularly, perseveres in one vein, judiciously compromises between his own ideals and the desires of the public, and conscientiously puts his best workmanship into all he does, he may safely rely on a reasonable return in coin. There are scores of mediocrities who make upwards of five hundred a year from fiction by labour that cannot be called fatiguing, writers who never accomplish anything worthy of the name of art, but who fulfil a harmless and perhaps useful function in our effete civilisation. The novelist, even the mediocrity, works under felicitous conditions. He is tied to no place and no times. He probably writes for three hours a day, five days a week, nine months in the year. He can produce his tale beneath an Italian sky as easily as in the groves of Brixton or Hampstead. No man is his master, and he is dependent on nobody's goodwill and on nobody's whim. Only three things can seriously hurt him: a grave failure of health, a European war, and a prolonged strike of bookbinders. The efflux of time will serve but to solidify his reputation, if he uses it well; his income will rise for years, and will remain stable for more years, and though ultimately it must fall it will not fall as fast as once it rose. On the other hand, the novelist who will not study his readers, who presumes on their obtuseness to offer them less than his best, and who lacks stedfastness, may confidently anticipate a decreasing income, no matter what his powers.

Non-Fictional Writing.

The well-known division of authors into those who want to write because they have something to say, and those who merely want to write, is peculiarly applicable to the non-fictional field. To the former class belong the authors of the best histories, biographies, travel books, theological books, and scientific, critical, and technical treatises. The latter class is composed of a heterogeneous crowd of compilers, rearrangers, and general literary middlemen anxious to turn an honest penny. The former class seldom needs advice of an

expert nature, for the troubling consciousness of a "message" almost invariably connotes the ability to deliver that message with all needful lucidity and conviction; no one is so sure of achieving the aims of the literary craftsman as the man who has something to say and wishes to say it simply and have done with it. The latter class needs direction, for it has none of its own; and its principal desire is to make money, whereas with the former class the financial side of the work is usually secondary. Many great works of fiction have been accomplished because the authors wanted money, and wanted it badly and in large quantities, but this can be said of extremely few great non-fictional works.

The literary aspirant who merely wants to write, and who cannot write fiction, will have to be content with the prospect of a smaller income than he could derive from the imaginative gift did he possess it But nevertheless, with ingenuity, he can make money. Popular biographies—especially of princes, artists, and scoundrels, anecdotic histories of places, people, and pastimes—especially of pastimes, smeltings of the ore of antique magazines, diaries, and other records, guides to everything past, present, and 'to come, and descriptions of travel undertaken in order to be described—the field open to the activities of the ingenious hack is well-nigh boundless; in my opinion it is yet far from being fully exploited. The demand for the Anecdote glorified in cloth covers is prodigious and insatiable, and if the reward of the anecdote is not overpowering, neither is the uncreative labour of serving it up. Among the most remunerative forms of non-fictional writing is the "gossipy" book dealing lightly with a past epoch, not too remote. A well contrived chitchat on the Reign of Terror, or the Age of Johnson, or the Regency, garnished with reproductions of a few old prints, is always welcomed by the libraries. Such volumes are put forth in imposing ornamental exteriors at a fairly high price, and a twenty per cent royalty on them means a satisfactory result to the author. It is not uncommon for Mudies alone to buy two hundred copies of a half-guinea, sixteen-shilling, or guinea book of glorified anecdote. Taking the lowest price, and assuming that a thousand copies are sold, the return to the ingenious compiler is a hundred pounds. The profits are frequently more, and not often less. The popular biography and the popular monograph do not, I am afraid, pay quite so well, because publishers have a preference for buying them from the author outright at a rate which probably does not average more than one pound per thousand words. But even this is not precisely despicable when one considers that the only qualifications necessary to the

anecdotist and the compiler are a brisk, clear style and some skill in the arrangement of material.

The subject of popular non-fictional writing for money is so wide and various that it is impossible to select for discussion any career that would be fairly typical. The success of the book-concocter (I use the term without disrespect) depends on his invention and versatility, and his aptitude to foresee the changes of public taste. At best he is not likely to acquire riches; but, provided always that he has access to a great library, he may materially add to his income by intermittently concocting. He should not depend wholly on this branch of literature for a livelihood, although I admit that it might be possible, by using several pseudonyms and several publishers and an inordinate amount of research for topics, to earn as much in strenuous, tireless concoction as a second-rate novelist earns without undue exertion.

Chapter II
The Formation of Style

Table of Contents

An Art of Words.

Literature is the art of using words. This is not a platitude, but a truth of the first importance, a truth so profound that many writers never get down to it, and so subtle that many other writers who think they see it never in fact really comprehend it. The business of the author is with words. The practisers of other arts, such as music and painting, deal with ideas and emotions, but only the author has to deal with them by means of words. Words are his exclusive possession among creative artists and craftsmen. They are his raw material, his tools and instruments, his manufactured product, his Alpha and Omega. He may abound in ideas and emotions of the finest kind, but those ideas and emotions cannot be said to have an effective existence until they are expressed; they are limited to the extent of their expression; and their expression is limited to the extent of the author's skill in the use of words. I smile when I hear people say, "If I could *write,* if I could only put down what I feel—!" Such people beg the whole question. The ability *to write* is the sole thing peculiar to literature— not the ability to think nor the ability to feel, but the ability to write, to utilise words. The skill to write is far less common than the skill to think and feel. The author cannot demand of the reader that he shall penetrate beyond the meaning of the written word and perceive that which the author wished to convey, but which lack of skill prevented him from conveying. And even if the author were entitled to demand such a feat from the reader, the reader could not perform it. Nothing is less possible than that a reader should be capable of doing for the author what the author has been incapable of doing for himself. I particularly desire the literary aspirant to meditate long and seriously upon this section, for it is the most vital in the book, and the most likely to be overlooked and forgotten.

If literary aspirants genuinely felt that literature was the art of using words, bad, slipshod writing—writing that stultifies the thought and emotion which it is designed to render effective—would soon be a thing of the past. For they would begin at the beginning, as

apprentices to all other arts are compelled to do. The serious student of painting who began his apprenticeship by trying to paint a family group, would be regarded as a lunatic. But the literary aspirant who begins with a novel is precisely that sort of lunatic, and the fact that he sometimes gets himself into print does not in the least mitigate his lunacy. The student of painting would be instructed to copy drawings, to draw from the antique, to draw from the single model, to accustom himself to the medium of oils, before he made any attempt at a composition in oil-painting. In other words, he would be told to begin at the beginning. And this is what the literary aspirant must do. I am perfectly aware that literature is by tradition loose and unsystematised in comparison with other arts. I am perfectly aware that many authors have in a manner "succeeded," who obviously did not begin at the beginning and never had the sense to go back to the beginning. Nevertheless, I assert that it pays to begin at the beginning. There is not a successful inexpert author writing to-day who would not be more successful—who would not be better esteemed and in receipt of a larger income—if he had taken the trouble to become expert. Skill does count; skill is always worth its cost in time and labour.

The Self-Education of the Aspirant.

Every aspirant should pursue the following course:—

He should learn to spell. Spelling is the first thing in the craft of literature. Most people imagine that they can spell correctly; but the simple accomplishment is extremely rare. You who read this imagine that you can spell correctly. But hand a dictionary to a friend and ask him to test you in common words, and the chances are that you will be undeceived in five minutes. It is a fact that not one person in ten can be relied on to spell quite ordinary words correctly, and I do not believe that writers are superior to their fellows in the matter of orthography. The aspirant should have ten minutes' practice in spelling every day. Some vain and pig-headed aspirant, afraid of being mistaken for a schoolboy, will think that this counsel is ridiculous. It is not ridiculous, but intensely practical.

He should study the etymology of words. No writer who has not a sound acquaintance with the history of words can possibly make full use of his powers. A first-class dictionary is essential. There are several in the market. The best is, of course, the *New English Dictionary.* It is still far from completion, and its price is rather high; but it is

worth its price to any writer. The *Century Dictionary* is perhaps the next best The writer should also have a small exclusively etymological dictionary. Skeat's *Concise Etymological Dictionary*, published by the Clarendon Press, 5s. 6d., is the best; but Chambers' little *Etymological Dictionary*, 3s. 6d., is not to be despised. These dictionaries should be read daily. I have been told by one of our greatest living novelists, that he constantly reads the dictionary, and that in his youth he read the dictionary through several times. I may recount the anecdote of Buckle, the historian of civilisation, who, when a certain dictionary was mentioned in terms of praise, said: "Yes, it is one of the few dictionaries I have read through with pleasure." Dictionaries should surely be interesting to him who is interested in words, and the first characteristic of the born writer is that he is interested in words.

But no dictionary can pretend to be exhaustive in its treatment of any word; it cannot, for instance, follow a word into its combinations with other words; and it must necessarily leave much to the deductive powers of the student. Therefore the aspirant must pursue his inquiries into words beyond the covers of dictionaries. He must study words in English literature itself. And in order to learn the method of such study, he should read a book like the late Archbishop Trench's *On the Study of Words*, published by Messrs. Kegan Paul, and now approaching its thirtieth edition. In the light of recent etymological research, Trench is admittedly inaccurate, but the spirit and the method in and by which he approaches and grasps his subject are admirable. His enthusiasm is as infectious as a cold which runs through a household. A later, more elaborate, and more accurate book is *Words and their Ways in English Speech*, by two American professors, J. B. Greenhough and G. L. Kittredge, published by Messrs. Macmillan: a simply delightful volume, which it is the duty of every literary aspirant to read, and to read again. The intimacy with words which must infallibly result from such study as I here indicate, will have its immediate result in an improvement'—an increased vigour, picturesqueness, subtlety, and adroitness — of the aspirant's style. And let the worldly-minded remember that these qualities of vigour, picturesqueness, subtlety, and adroitness, ultimately stand for pounds per thousand.

The aspirant should study English grammar, a subject seldom treated with any glimmering of sense in high-schools, but one which a board school teacher may be trusted to teach satisfactorily. It is obviously a truism that the man who does not understand the grammatical principles which underlie the construction of English

sentences, cannot rely on his ability to construct a sentence correctly. Yet how few writers, especially women - writers, are capable of "parsing" and "analysing" the sentences which they so cheerfully put together! The two manuals which I recom. mend in this connection are Dr. Richard Morris's *Primer of English Grammar* and Mr. John Wetherell's *Exercises on Morris's English Grammar* (both published by Messrs. Macmillan at a shilling each). They can be thoroughly mastered in quite a short time, with or without the assistance of a teacher. Again I must warn the aspirant not to scorn these beginnings of the great art of literature. It is always to the profit of a craftsman to "know his business," and the writer who cannot with ease and assurance "parse" and "analyse," emphatically does not know his business.

Writing.

The aspirant should study English composition. This advice may seem unnecessary, but many writers never study composition. They write — and trust in Heaven to save them from doing anything absolutely fatuous. They have no notion of the canons of composition. They commit literary sins against good form so atrocious that social sins of the same heinousness would banish them from the dinner-tables of decently - bred people. These writers abound, and their existence is a blot on English letters. No one can write correctly without deliberately and laboriously learning how to write correctly. On the other hand, every one can learn to write correctly who takes sufficient trouble. Correct writing is a mechanical accomplishment; it could be acquired by a stockbroker. The best book on the subject is Professor John Nichol's *English Composition*, published by Messrs. Macmillan at a shilling. The companion volume, *Questions and Exercises on English Composition*, same publishers and price, should also be obtained. Professor Nichol deals with punctuation, but many students will be glad to have *Stops; or, How to Punctuate,* by Mr. Paul Allardyce, published by Mr. Fisher Unwin. In these quite small books the aspirant may gather all the technical information necessary to good composition, from the use of a comma to the placing of a participial phrase in a complex sentence, from the avoidance of solecisms to the proper management of similes and metaphors.

So guided, the aspirant should regularly practise writing. He must write for the sake of writing. He should write from five hundred to a thousand words a day, according to his leisure and facility. As an

athlete trains, as an acrobat painfully tumbles in private, so must the literary aspirant write. I do not much care what he writes about, at the commencement, if only he writes enough; but the better his subjects the more useful and the more interesting will be his practice. He may try to report conversations (an excellent device), or to describe episodes, scenes, and persons. Or he may compose essays, articles, or short stories, "not necessarily with a view to publication, but as a guarantee of good faith." The one paramount rule is that he must always write his best; he must never leave a sentence until he is convinced that he cannot improve it. Any lack of conscientious endeavour after the best will vitiate the most regular and persistent practice. Everything written should be read aloud, if possible to another person—not immediately, but after an interval of several days. The test of reading aloud is a severe one — perhaps the most severe test to which literature can be put— and it will certainly disclose errors, weaknesses, and crudities that might otherwise have escaped attention; it is particularly valuable as an aid to the decision of questions of punctuation, for where the voice of the reader pauses, there ought the comma to be.

Concurrently with his writing, the aspirant must read and study good models. I need not give a list of good models, since every one is acquainted with the names of the masterpieces of English literature. The important thing is that the aspirant should study most those masterpieces which most strongly appeal to him. If Thackeray, or Stevenson, or Sir Thomas Browne, or Charles Lamb specially attract him, let him, in the early stages, imitate Thackeray, Stevenson, Browne, or Lamb. Let him deliberately imitate them; the act will help him in the end to arrive at his own originality. He may even go so far as to paraphrase, from memory, the favourite passages of his favourite authors; the subsequent comparison of the paraphrase with the exemplar will be an education for him.

Two Difficulties.

There are two principal difficulties which beset the path of the beginner in composition. The first difficulty is the smallness of his vocabulary. He cannot express his meaning with exactitude, because at the moment of writing he cannot think of the precise word needed; he may be acquainted with the word, but it refuses to occur to him. Reading, including the perusal of dictionaries, will gradually conquer this difficulty. A more instant palliative of it is that wonderful

collection of synonyms, Roget's *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases, Classified and Arranged so as to Facilitate the Expression of Ideas and Assist in Literary Composition*, published by Messrs. Longman at half a guinea. Every writer should possess this volume, which by its ingenious index will enable him to recover any lost word, and by presenting him with a complete series of words relating to any given idea will help him to a final nicety of expression. I sang the virtues of Roget with some enthusiasm in my book *Journalism for Women,* and a leader-writer in the *Daily News* censured my song. An indiscreet use of Roget may, I admit, lead to verbosity and other affectations; but all indiscretions lead to mischief. My opinion that Roget's *Thesaurus* is the most useful of all mechanical aids to good writing remains unchanged. I have seen the tattered tome on the desks of some of the most distinguished authors in England, and, for myself, nothing would induce me to part with my Roget except the publication of a revised and enlarged edition of him.

The second and more serious difficulty is the instinctive tendency of the young author to compose in phrases instead of in single words. In accounting for the tediousness of second-rate authors, Schopenhauer said that owing to their lack of clearly defined thought, their writing was "an indefinite, obscure interweaving of words, current phrases, worn-out terms of speech, and fashionable expressions." And he added: "It is only *intelligent* writers who place individual words together with a full consciousness of their use, and select them with deliberation." This sentence is the utterance of practical wisdom. The first sign of unintelligent writing, the first cause of tediousness, is the presence of ready-made, trite phrases. From an entirely respectable book, by an author of repute, which has just passed through my hands, I cull at random a handful of these phrases: Joined the majority [for "died"], strong-minded female, needless to say, *terra firma*, fondly imagined, absolutely non-plussed, deaf old party, respect due to the cloth, beat a hasty retreat, called into requisition, graciously volunteered, *par excellence.* Now it is obvious that this author was content largely to use secondhand, worn-out material for the expression of his ideas; that even if his ideas were originally distinct, they must have lost much of their distinctness in being thus forced into an old mould.

Avoid the use of ready-made phrases. When they present themselves, as they will do, reject them. Define your thought clearly, and you will discover that its expression demands a new phrase, invented word by word specially for it Your business is to invent that

phrase, simply and naturally. Besides leading to dulness and banality, the use of trite proverbial phrases leads also to exaggeration and misstatement When Boswell told Johnson of the earthquake shock at Leek, Johnson remarked: "Sir, it will be much exaggerated in public talk: for, in the first place, the common people do not accurately adapt their thoughts to the objects; nor, secondly, do they accurately adapt their words to their thoughts: they do not mean to lie; but, taking no pains to be exact, they give you very false accounts. A great part of their language is proverbial. If anything rocks at all, they say *it rocks like a cradle*; and in this way they go on." And in this way the careless, unintelligent author goes on, too.

When a sentence has been written, every word in it should be interrogated *separately,* and made to justify the position which it occupies.

Style.

Having disposed of the lower aspects, the more mechanical details, of composition, I am free to approach the great and deeply misunderstood question of "style."

Most persons, including many literary beginners, have an entirely wrong notion of the significance of the phrase, "literary style." They imagine that it necessarily includes the idea of pomp, statelinesss, magnificence, lyricism, richness, elaboration; that it is something beyond, and in addition to, accurate, lucid description. Here I will print a specimen of English:—

> "He who has once stood beside the grave, to look back upon the companionship which has been for ever closed, feeling how impotent *there* are the wild love and the keen sorrow, to give one instant's pleasure to the pulseless heart, or atone in the lowest measure to the departed spirit for the hour of unkindness, will scarcely for the future incur that debt to the heart, which can only be discharged to the dust. But the lesson which men receive as individuals, they do not learn as nations. Again and again they have seen their noblest descend into the grave, and have thought it enough to garland the tombstone when they had not crowned the brow, and to pay the honour to the ashes which they had denied to the spirit. Let it not displease them that they are bidden, amidst the

tumult and the dazzle of their busy life, to listen for the few voices, and watch for the few lamps, which God has tuned and lighted to charm and to guide them, that they may not learn their sweetness by their silence, nor their light by their decay."

This passage has the qualities which for most people constitute a good literary style. Let me now give another specimen of English:—

"The following occurrence ought not to be passed over in silence, in a place where so few notable ones are to be met with. Last Wednesday night, while we were at supper, between the hours of eight and nine, I heard an unusual noise in the back parlour, as if one of the hares was entangled, and endeavouring to disengage herself. I was just going to rise from the table when it ceased. In about five minutes a voice on the outside of the parlour door inquired if one of my hares had got away. I immediately rushed into the next room, and found that my poor favourite Puss had made her escape. She had gnawed in sunder the strings of the lattice-work, with which I thought I had sufficiently secured the window, and which I preferred to any other sort of blind, because it admitted plenty of air. From thence I hastened to the kitchen, where I saw the redoubtable Thomas Freeman, who told me, that having seen her, just after she had dropped into the street, he attempted to cover her with his hat, but she screamed out and leaped directly over his head. I then desired him to pursue as fast as possible, and added Richard Coleman to the chase, as being nimbler, and carrying less weight than Thomas; not expecting to see her again, but desirous to learn, if possible, what became of her. In something less than an hour Richard returned, almost breathless, with the following account: That soon after he began to run he left Tom behind him, and came in sight of a most numerous hunt of men, women, children, and dogs; that he did his best to keep back the dogs, and presently outstripped the crowd, so that the race was at last disputed between himself and Puss—she ran right through the town, and down the lane that leads to Dropshort. A little before she came to the house he got the

> start and turned her; she pushed for the town again, and soon after she entered it sought shelter in Mr. Wagstaff's tanyard, adjoining to old Mr. Drake's. Sturge's harvest men were at supper, and saw her from the opposite side of the way. There she encountered the tan-pits full of water; and while she was struggling out of one pit and plunging into another, and almost drowned, one of the men drew her out by the ears and secured her. She was then well washed in a bucket, to get the lime out of her coat, and brought home in a sack at ten o'clock. This frolic cost us four shillings. . . ."

The untrained taste will probably discover no distinction of style in this relation of a hare's escape. Nevertheless, the peroration of Ruskin's famous Introduction to *Modem Painters* is not more distinguished in its own way than Cowper's letter to the Rev. John Newton is distinguished in its own way. Each is fine literature. The aspirant, if he cannot feel the rightness of this judgment, must try to feel it until he succeeds in doing so.

Richness, elaboration, lyricism, and so forth, may be present in a particular good style, but they are not essential elements of good style in general. When a writer expresses his individuality and his mood with accuracy, lucidity, and sincerity, and with an absence of ugliness, then he achieves good style. Style—it cannot be too clearly understood—is not a certain splendid something which the writer adds to his meaning. It is *in* the meaning; it is that part of the meaning which specially reflects his individuality and his mood. When Stevenson wished to visualise calm sea-water on a clear night, he wrote the beautiful simple phrase, "star-reflecting harbours." When Kipling essayed the same feat he wrote the striking, aggressive, explosive phrase, "planet-powdered floors." Each expressed himself while expressing the idea. The whole difference between the individualities of Stevenson and Kipling can be discerned in the difference between those two phrases. Style is the result of self-expression, of the writer being himself. If a writer is individually distinguished, then, after he has learnt his craft, his style will be distinguished. If he is individually commonplace, then his style will be commonplace.

Being One's Self.

I have said that style is the result of the writer -being himself. But

every man is himself instinctively; he has not to take thought in order to be himself. Therefore the young writer should dismiss from his mind that abstract entity which he calls style. He should forget all about style. His sole aim should be to write down, accurately and lucidly and honestly, what he means, always trying to avoid positively ugliness, but not consciously aiming after positive beauty. Let him lose himself completely in the effort to express his meaning in the fewest and clearest words. Good style —beauty, charm, gaiety, splendour, stateliness —will come of itself, unasked and unperceived, so far as the natural distinction of his individuality permits. Good style is not a bird that can be brought down with a shot-gun.

Let me add that to be one's natural self is the most difficult thing in literature. To be one's natural self in a drawing-room full of observant eyes is scarcely the gift of the simple debutant, but rather of the experienced diner-out So in literature: it is not the expert but the unpractised beginner who is guilty of artificiality. The chief end of the literary apprenticeship is to combine naturalness and sincerity with grace and force Hence the aspirant must familiarise himself with the fundamental idea, at first perhaps strange and alarming, that the process which lies before him is not one of acquiring, but of stripping off.

There are many treatises on style. I shall recommend none of them, for the same reason that I would not recommend a book of "household medicine" to a hypochondriac. Let the aspirant read good stuff, learn the rules, and try to say merely what he means.

Chapter III
Journalism

Table of Contents

The Journalistic Attitude.

The beginner who aspires to be an outside contributor, or—in the slang of the profession —a freelance, must first of all comprehend the journalistic attitude. The freelance, the sender-in of unsolicited contributions, offers his wares in a market to which he has not been invited, a market which in theory does not want him. He must therefore, if he hopes to do any business, devote all his efforts to finding out what the real needs of the market are. Now journalism, as practised to-day, is quite a modem invention. In the history of no art, perhaps, has there been a change so sudden and so fundamental as that which separates the journalism of twenty-five years ago from the journalism of the present time. Modern daily journalism was invented by Mr. W. T. Stead, on the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and further developed by Mr. T. P. O'Connor on the *Star.* After a short interval it was carried a step further by Mr. Alfred Harmsworth on the *Daily Mail* These three men have been or are the great revolutionary forces in daily journalism. Their influence has affected all that branch of journalism, whether daily, weekly, or monthly, which deals with current events and leads or expresses public opinion. The other branch, that which has no "views" on anything, and merely seeks to entertain, owes its form to Sir George Newnes, who hit on the idea of *Tit-Bits.* Every characteristic of modern journalism can be traced back to one of the four papers I have mentioned. The *Daily Mail* was an ingenious and entirely logical combination of the other three, and its success has been the justification of the logic which evolved it.

The difference between the old and the new journalism is twofold, and lies partly in the journal's attitude to its readers, and partly in its attitude to the world. The old journalism said to itself, in effect, when it wrote its copy: "This is what our readers ought to like. This is good for them. This is genuinely important. This ought to interest This cannot be omitted. This is our expert opinion on a vital affair—" And so on. The new journalism says to itself: "*Will* our readers like this, *will* they be interested in it? Let us not forget that our readers are

ignorant, ill-informed, impatient under intellectual strain, and not anxiously concerned about many really vital matters. Let us remember that they live chiefly for themselves and for the moment; that in fact they are human. Let us look the situation in the face and decide whether our readers—*not as they ought to be, but as they actually are*—will read and be interested in this thing. If they won't, however excellent it may be, it is of no use to us." Again, the old journalism considered that many aspects of life were beneath its notice. The old journalism ignored nearly everything except politics, law, trade, and the arts. The new journalism ignores nothing, considers nothing beneath its notice. Everything that is human is good enough for the new jour nalism, and the more human it is, the more warmly does the new journalism welcome it.

The general effect of the new journalism is mixed. By sheer skill it has invested with interest a number of topics that once were hopelessly dull, and has thus brilliantly compelled the average man to acquire useful information and to form views on subjects which formerly he ignored. In short, it has educated the average man. On the other hand, its growing tendency to pander unduly to the prejudices and the intellectual laziness of the average man is thoroughly bad.

The business of the journalistic aspirant, however, is not to criticise tendencies but to follow them. And the freelance must do a little more than follow them; he must overtake them and pass them. The watchwords of modern journalism are Freshness, Brightness, and Human Interest. The efforts of the freelance, therefore, since they have to attract notice in a crowd, must be very fresh, very bright, very full of human interest.

The whole philosophy of the freelance can be summarised under three heads or maxims:—

(1) Not the sort of thing that I want to write, but the sort of thing that the public wants to read!

(2) Every department of life, no matter how apparently commonplace, has its interesting side. As a freelance it is my business to see that side and to utilise it.

(3) Every good new thing is saleable, but the proper market must be found for it

The Sorts of Journals.

Let us imagine the journalistic aspirant standing in front of the bookstall at Charing Cross Station. He sees before him a very large

representative selection of all branches of the English press, so large, indeed, and so various as to be extremely confusing and rather terrifying. The aspirant says to himself: "Most of these papers are prepared to buy contributions from outsiders. Probably most of the numbers actually on this stall contain unsolicited articles that were offered by freelances. I too wish to be a freelance, and to send in articles that will be accepted and paid for. How am I to begin?"

He must begin by classifying and studying the papers at a reading-room, and deciding which paper, or which kind of paper, he will first attack. His immediate aim in life is now to get an article into a paper. He must therefore sink all his own preferences, vanities, scruples, and prejudices, all his little notions about what the art of journalism ought to be, and deliberately practise the art of journalism as it is. He must be entirely worldly, entirely possessed by the idea of getting money in exchange for an article— not for the sake of the money, but because money is the sole proof of success in the enterprise. After he has made money he will have plenty of time in which to endeavour to improve the tone of journalism and preach his own particular fancies. As works of reference in this department, he should have either Sell's *Dictionary of the World's Press* (7s. 6d), or, more compact and compendious, Willing's *Press Guide* (is.). These two volumes give all addresses, dates of publication, &c. *The Literary Year-Book* (published by Mr. George Allen, 3s. 6d.) gives some useful particulars as to the requirements and methods of certain monthly magazines, obtained direct from the editors.

The class of paper first to be mentioned is the popular penny weekly, of which the chief examples are *Tit-Bits, Pearson's Weekly*, and *Answers.* Others might be named, such as *Harmsworth's Penny Magazine,* but this triad are far in advance of all rivals; their leading position has often been assailed, but never seriously menaced. They constitute a suitable field for the early efforts of the aspirant, who should examine their pages with care. Broadly speaking, the popular weekly proceeds upon the principle that, although one half the world does not know how the other half lives, it would like to know. The popular weekly prints articles of which the titles begin with "How"—"How milk is adulterated," "How streets are washed," "How a public company is floated." Or it throws the light of its lantern on out-of-the-way occupations — "An Hour with a Horse - Dentist," "The Apprenticeship of a Steeple-jack." Or it collects together curious facts of a sort— "Crimes of Crossing-Sweepers," "Dogs who have brought Disaster," "Mill-girls who have become Marchionesses." Again, it prints mildly

humorous sketches of social life, especially quarrels and reconciliations of married and betrothed persons. The aspirant may discover other features of the popular weekly for himself. He must not, if he happen to have a refined literary taste, despise the popular weekly. In nine cases out of ten, he may take it for granted that if he cannot please this class of paper he can please no other class. The popular weekly does not demand a high literary standard. And it pays very well—a guinea a column of five to seven hundred words, and sometimes two guineas.

It is most important that the aspirant should note the maximum length of the articles printed in every paper. The popular weekly, for instance, does not as a rule want anything over a thousand words in length. The first consideration with every editor is the length of the article submitted. If it is too long or too short, it may be the finest article in the world, but it will be refused. The aspirant should always count the number of words in his articles.

A secondary class of popular penny weeklies is now formed by *M. A. P.* and *T.P.'s Weekly*, both of which appeal to a slightly higher order of intelligence than the *Tit-Bits* class. *M. A. P.* desires personal paragraphs. And here I must quote from Mr. J. M. Barrie's novel of journalistic life, *When a Maris Single*, which every aspirant should read. A clever journalist in that book remarks to a beginner: "An editor tosses aside your column and a half about evolution, but is glad to have a paragraph saying that you saw Herbert Spencer the day before yesterday gazing solemnly for ten minutes in a milliner's window." *T.P.'s Weekly* has a literary cast Both - these papers offer opportunities to the enterprising tyro.

I come next to the daily papers. Of the penny morning papers the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Daily News* are the most hospitable to the freelance. The three principal halfpenny papers, the *Daily Mail,* the *Daily Express,* and the *Morning Leader*, welcome outside contributions. Morning papers want short, very topical and timely articles or interviews, with or without illustrations. The halfpenny papers have also a "magazine page," which is really a *Tit-Bits* day by day. The aspirant should try to get into this magazine page.

But the recognised lawful prey of the ambitious outside contributor is the penny evening paper, and especially the *Pall Mall Gazette, Westminster Gazette,* and *St. James's Gazette.* These three papers appeal to a literary public, and they demand from the freelance, whom they encourage, a high standard of style. Social sketches, interviews, and topical articles, will find a home in the "gazettes" when they are

good enough. The other two penny evening papers, the *Globe* and the *Evening Standard,* each print every day an article, in the form of an essay not necessarily topical, which is frequently accepted from an outside source. This article is the first on the first page of the *Evening Standard,* and the last on the first page of the *Globe.* In both cases it is imperative that the article should conform to the requirement of length. The halfpenny evening papers will not be of much use to the freelance.

Next in order of importance to the freelance come the high-class sixpenny illustrated weeklies, the *Illustrated London News, Graphic*, *Sketch*, *Sphere*, *Tatler,* and *Black and White.* Of these the first and fourth are the most literary, and the second is the least benignant towards the freelance. All pay well, and one or two handsomely. And all are prepared to accept topical or personal articles, preferably illustrated by striking photographs.

The ladies' papers form an important class. The sixpenny organs are *The Queen, The Ladys Pictorial, The Gentlewoman,* and *The Lady's Field.* The first and last are best suited to the outside contributor; they pay well. The threepenny organs, *Hearth and Home* and *The Lady*, do not spontaneously encourage the freelance, but the latter buys occasional articles. The penny women's papers —*Home Notes, Home Chat, Woman,* &c.— appealing without exception to a popular public, do not offer much scope to the outsider.

The politico-literary weeklies should engage the attention of the serious ambitious beginner with a taste for letters, which, be it remembered, is not quite the same thing as a taste for journalism. The *Pilot, Spectator*, *Saturday Review,* and *Speaker* are open to receive topical and miscellaneous articles in essay form, with a literary or political turn. But they do not buy their views or their reviews from the outsider. The *Outlook* takes very short articles of a light texture. One or two of these organs do not err on the side of generosity in remuneration.

I cannot deal with the hundreds of weeklies which appeal to special publics, such as the *Athenceum* (literary), the *British Weekly* (religious), the *Investors Review* (financial), the *British Architect* (professional), the *Draper's Record* (trade). The majority of them depend little on the outsider, but it is probable that very few of them would refuse to listen to an outsider who approached with an original idea specially suited to them. Some of them are very wealthy organs.

The monthly publications are divisible into three classes: general magazines appealing to a popular public; general magazines appealing

to a cultured public; and reviews. The first class, of which the principal specimens are *Pearson's, Strand, Windsor, Lady's, Woman at Home, Lady's Realm* (6d.), *Royal* (4d.), *London* ($^1/_2$d.), has the readiest welcome for novelty, and pays the best. Its articles are essentially *Tit-Bits* articles glorified in fine raiment; they must be illustrated. The second class comprises both illustrated—*Pall Mall Magazine* — and unillustrated—*Blackwood's, Cornhill, Longman's,* and *Macmillans.* The unillustrated demand the higher literary standard. I shall discuss these magazines from the point of view of their requirements in fiction in a subsequent chapter. The "reviews" which pay for outside contributions are the *Fortnightly, Nineteenth Century, Contemporary, National,* and *New Liberal.* The aspirant need not trouble to woo these excessively *difficile* old ladies until he has had considerable experience. A book dealing fully with magazine work is *How to Write for the Magazines*, published by Mr. Grant Richards, at 3s. 6d.

The foregoing conspectus of the British Press is, of course, far from complete, but it indicates the main outlines of the subject, and the aspirant must fill in minor details from his own observation and study. He must learn to differentiate the characteristics of one organ from the characteristics of another, and must thoroughly familiarise himself with the contents of every paper. He should on no account put any of the more popular papers aside as being beyond his enterprise. The less he limits the variety of his efforts, the more successful are his efforts likely to be.

First Efforts of the Freelance.

I have now shown how the third of my three maxims for the guidance of the freelance is to be carried into practice. I will go back to the other two. In choosing subjects to write about, the freelance must always bear in mind my first maxim. He may leave to great editors the task of educating the public; his own business is to minister to their desires. He must not be ashamed to be popular, and he must not be ashamed to write the kind of stuff that he would not dream of reading were it written by some one else. His first efforts cannot be too humble. The point is that he wants to get into print, and he will the most quickly and easily achieve his desire by appealing to a large audience. He must put away all sentimentality about the art of literature and the moral mission of journalism. It is of no use beginning to air one's views until one has collected an audience. A

young man of talent, capable of distinguished work, may hammer at the doors of the *Spectator* and the *Fortnightly Review* for years with dissertations upon literature, morals, or world-politics; ultimately, when he has attained sufficient skill and shown sufficient pertinacity, he will be admitted within these august portals. I say that it would have been better for him, not only financially but in experience and in other ways, had he been content to make a start by amusing or instructing the populace. I would repeat and repeat again: Begin humbly.

It is well to begin with the paragraph. The piquant paragraph of two or three hundred words is enormously in demand. There is scarcely any paper with a general circulation that does not gladly buy paragraphs—paragraphs about anything and everything. Paragraphs are not a gold-mine, and only a freelance of miraculous ingenuity could make a living out of them; but they require much less constructive skill than even the shortest article, and just as completely as an article they afford the aspirant the satisfaction of seeing himself in print, and of pluming himself upon having established relations with a paper. The remuneration for paragraphs runs from half-a-crown to three and sixpence. Some papers pay by the inch, and some have a fixed price per paragraph irrespective of length.

My second maxim should help the aspirant in excogitating topics for his brilliant and facile pen. He must learn to see life interestingly. And he must fall into the habit of regarding the whole of human existence as material for "copy." The idea of "copy" must be always with him. When he jumps on an omnibus, ideas for articles should crowd thick upon him: "How an Omnibus is Built," for *Pearson's Magazine*; "The Ailments of Omnibus Horses: a Chat with a Vet. of the London General," for the *Westminster Gazette*; "An Omnibus Horse's views about Policemen," for a comic paper; "Ways of the Omnibus Thief," for *Tit-Bits*; "London Stables: an Inquiry," for the *Daily News;* "Stopping and Starting," a sketch, for the *Queen* or the Saturday women's page of the *Daily Chronicle.* When he spends a sleepless night owing to the entire failure of all his efforts for a month past, he should by instinct consider the feasibility of a scare-article for the *Daily Mail* about the increasing use of narcotics by urban populations. When his uncle is killed in a great railway accident, he should be moved to write an illustrated article on the differences between ancient and modern railway accidents for the *Strand Magazine.* And when he is starving because he has been foolish enough to throw up a safe but modest clerkship before securing a position in Fleet Street, he should throw

off a bright essay for the *Young Man* on "How to Live on a Shilling a Day." If he animates his existence by this spirit he is certain to succeed.

Matters of Practical Detail.

In writing a paragraph or article, always have in mind a particular paper, and aim at pleasing that paper. Do not make the produce first, and then try to select a market for it; but select the market, and make the produce definitely to suit the market.

Paragraphs and short articles need not be typewritten. Articles over two thousand words should, if possible, be typewritten. Without making a fetish of typewriting, one may say that it is never a disadvantage, and usually an advantage, to the journalist. And seeing that the best of all typewriting machines may be bought for half the cost of the best machines of ten years ago, the aspirant might well make an effort to possess a machine of his own. One shilling per thousand words is a fair price to pay for typewriting; in most cases to pay less is to countenance sweating.

When a contribution fills more than one sheet, fasten the sheets together at the top left-hand comer only with a paper fastener. Do not stitch or pin the sheets. It is well to protect the white sheets by putting a sheet of stout brown paper top and bottom. When these get ragged and soiled by postal journeys to numerous editorial offices, they can be changed. Never send out a soiled or torn manuscript; its condition always prejudices an editor against it.

Write on the first page of your manuscript the title of the article, your name and address, and the length of the article in words. Write your name and address also on the back of the manuscript

Many papers print in every issue a few brief instructions to contributors. Read these before despatching your article, and make sure that you have complied with them.

Do not save in special instances, send any letter with your manuscript

Merely enclose a stamped, addressed envelope for its return in case of rejection. Note that some papers which state that they will not return rejected manuscripts, often do return them when a stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed. Always use envelopes, and not book-post wrappers, in order to minimise the wear and tear of your manuscript. If you wish to economise in postage (a serious item to the beginner), leave the envelope open and send it by book-post.

Chapter IX
Verse

Table of Contents

There is a word, a "name of fear," which rouses terror in the heart of the vast educated majority of the English-speaking race. The most valiant will fly at the mere utterance of that word. The most broad-minded will put their backs up against it. The most rash will not dare to affront it. I myself have seen it empty buildings that had been full; and I know that it will scatter a crowd more quickly than a hose-pipe, hornets, or the rumour of plague. Even to murmur it is to incur solitude, probably disdain, and possibly starvation, as historical examples show. That word is "poetry."

The profound objection of the average man to poetry can scarcely be exaggerated. And when I say the average man, I do not mean the "average sensual man"—any man who gets on to the top of the omnibus; I mean the average lettered man, the average man who does care a little for books and enjoys reading, and knows the classics by name and the popular writers by having read them. I am convinced that not one man in ten who reads, reads poetry—at any rate, knowingly. I am convinced, further, that not one man in ten who goes so far as knowingly to *buy* poetry ever reads it. You will find everywhere men who read very widely in prose, but who will say quite callously, "No, I never read poetry." If the sales of modern poetry, distinctly labelled as such, were to cease entirely to-morrow not a publisher would fail; scarcely a publisher would be affected; and not a poet would die—for I do not believe that a single modern English poet is living to-day on the current proceeds of his verse. For a country which possesses the greatest poetical literature in the world this condition of affairs is at least odd. What makes it odder is that, occasionally, very occasionally, the average lettered man will have a fit of idolatry for a fine poet, buying his books in tens of thousands, and bestowing upon him immense riches. As with Tennyson. And what makes it odder still is that, after all, the average lettered man does not truly dislike poetry; he only dislikes it when it takes a certain form. He will read poetry and enjoy it, provided he is not aware that it is poetry. Poetry can exist authentically either in prose or in verse. Give him poetry concealed in prose and there is a chance that, taken off his

ends, "They shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." This chapter will doubtless be more or less familiar to you. It cannot fail (whatever your particular *ism*) to impress you, to generate in your mind sensations which you recognise to be of a lofty and unusual order, and which you will admit to be pleasurable. You will probably agree that the result of reading this chapter (even if your particular *ism* is opposed to its authority) is finer than the result of reading a short story in a magazine or even an essay by Charles Lamb. Now the pleasurable sensations induced by the fortieth chapter of Isaiah are among the sensations usually induced by high-class poetry. The writer of it was a very great poet, and what he wrote is a very great poem. Fifth: After having read it, go back to Hazlitt, and see if you can find anything in Hazlitt's lecture which throws light on the psychology of your own emotions upon reading Isaiah.

Sixth: The next step is into unmistakable verse. It is to read one of Wordsworth's short narrative poems, *The Brothers*. There are editions of Wordsworth at a shilling, but I should advise the "Golden Treasury" Wordsworth (2s. 6d. net), because it contains the famous essay by Matthew Arnold, who made the selection. I want you to read this poem aloud. You will probably have to hide yourself somewhere in order to do so, for, of course, you would not, as yet, care to be overheard spouting poetry. Be good enough to forget that *The Brothers* is poetry. *The Brothers* is a short story, with a plain, clear plot. Read it as such. Read it simply for the story. It is very important at this critical stage that you should not embarrass your mind with preoccupations as to the *form* in which Wordsworth has told his story. Wordsworth's object was to tell a story as well as he could: just that. In reading aloud do not pay any more attention to the metre than you feel naturally inclined to pay. After a few lines the metre will present itself to you. Do not worry as to what kind of metre it is. When you have finished the perusal, examine your sensations....

Your sensations after reading this poem, and perhaps one or two other narrative poems of Wordsworth, such as *Michael*, will be different from the sensations produced in you by reading an ordinary, or even a very extraordinary, short story in prose. They may not be so sharp, so clear and piquant, but they will probably be, in their mysteriousness and their vagueness, more impressive. I do not say that they will be diverting. I do not go so far as to say that they will strike you as pleasing sensations. (Be it remembered that I am addressing myself to an imaginary tyro in poetry.) I would qualify them as being "disturbing." Well, to disturb the spirit is one of the

Chapter X
Broad Counsels

Table of Contents

I have now set down what appear to me to be the necessary considerations, recommendations, exhortations, and dehortations in aid of this delicate and arduous enterprise of forming the literary taste. I have dealt with the theory of literature, with the psychology of the author, and—quite as important—with the psychology of the reader. I have tried to explain the author to the reader and the reader to himself. To go into further detail would be to exceed my original intention, with no hope of ever bringing the constantly-enlarging scheme to a logical conclusion. My aim is not to provide a map, but a compass—two very different instruments. In the way of general advice it remains for me only to put before you three counsels which apply more broadly than any I have yet offered to the business of reading.

You have within yourself a touchstone by which finally you can, and you must, test every book that your brain is capable of comprehending. Does the book seem to you to be sincere and true? If it does, then you need not worry about your immediate feelings, or the possible future consequences of the book. You will ultimately like the book, and you will be justified in liking it. Honesty, in literature as in life, is the quality that counts first and counts last. But beware of your immediate feelings. Truth is not always pleasant. The first glimpse of truth is, indeed, usually so disconcerting as to be positively unpleasant, and our impulse is to tell it to go away, for we will have no truck with it. If a book arouses your genuine contempt, you may dismiss it from your mind. Take heed, however, lest you confuse contempt with anger. If a book really moves you to anger, the chances are that it is a good book. Most good books have begun by causing anger which disguised itself as contempt. Demanding honesty from your authors, you must see that you render it yourself. And to be honest with oneself is not so simple as it appears. One's sensations and one's sentiments must be examined with detachment. When you have violently flung down a book, listen whether you can hear a faint voice saying within you: "It's true, though!" And if you catch the whisper, better yield to it as quickly as you can. For sooner or later the voice will win. Similarly, when you are hugging a book, keep your ear