XV. PUNCTUATION

A knowledge of the principles of punctuation is essential to effective and intelligible writing, for the ease and pleasure of the reader, and even his understanding, may depend upon the choice and the placing of punctuation marks. To 'punctuate' is to mark with stops or points; the word comes from the medieval Latin *punctuare* (*punctuatus*), which in turn is derived from the Latin *punctum*, a point. The purpose of punctuation is to show the manner in which the writing is to be understood; to indicate the relations between parts of a sentence and between successive sentences. To some extent "it does for the eye what vocal stress does for the ear", but especially it marks logical relations. Some punctuation marks, such as those indicating admiration, exclamation, and interrogation, are rhetorical as well as grammatical, but most of the common ones are logical or grammatical. My discussion will be confined to grammatical punctuation in ordinary writing.

"The problem of punctuation in text matter", as George Summey * says, "is to employ words, points, and paragraph breaks in such a way as to achieve at the same time clearness, proper distribution of emphasis, and the desired kind of movement." The criticism of the punctuation of a sentence or of a group of sentences is not final until the context, within the paragraph, is read. A paragraph is a sentence or a group of sentences forming an independent unit of the composition; it represents a unit of thought. A multiplicity of paragraphs produces a choppy effect; on the other hand, paragraphs of excessive length are tiresome, because the belaboring of one unit of thought wearies the reader. The aim should be to

* George Summey, Jr., 'Modern Punctuation', p. 43; 1919.

achieve an agreeable diversity. Similarly, the short sentence is useful for emphasis and transition; the long one for qualification and suspension.

The different marks, or 'stops', represent different degrees of discontinuity. Herbert Spencer suggested that actual spaces, proportioned to the pauses required, be placed between the groups of sentences dealing with the successive ideas expressed in a single paragraph. The suggestion is attractive, but to mark the varying duration of mental pause between words, sentences, and paragraphs by means of blank spaces of graduated length would impose an excessive tax on the carefulness of compositors and proof-readers, not to mention authors, and would be impracticable.

In the 'Rules for Compositors and Readers' issued by the Oxford University Press I find the following summary:

A Period marks the end of a sentence.
A Colon is at the transition point of a sentence.
A Semicolon separates different statements.
A Comma separates clauses, phrases, and particles.
A Dash marks abruptness or irregularity.
An Exclamation [point] marks surprise.
An Interrogation [point] asks [marks] a question.
An Apostrophe marks elisions or [the] possessive case.
Quotation marks define quoted words.

The Colon

Formerly, when long sentences were in vogue, it was customary to use the colon as a stop intermediate between the period (or 'full stop') and the semicolon, but the shortening of sentences has relieved the colon of this duty. As now used, the colon suggests a sequel; it serves to introduce a specific statement, an amplification, an example, or a quotation; for instance:

I will agree to this: You pay me $1000 within a month . . . and I will give you a deed to the land.

He answered: " I cannot do that ".

The choice of a comma or a colon to introduce a quotation is determined by the importance or the length of the quotation; the colon is regarded as the more impressive introducer.

The colon is employed to indicate consequential statements, explanatory or equivalent; for example:

One thing is certain: he will not dare to return.
We know what he intends to do: resign from office.

The Semicolon

The term 'semicolon' is now a misnomer, for this mark of punctuation is not a half-colon; rather, it is what its form indicates—a compromise between the period and the comma, the two marks of which it is constructed. Sentences grammatically independent but closely connected in sense are separated by semicolons, which may be aided by conjunctions if the sentences are long.

The notes on 'Byron's World' are intensely interesting to the student of that period; and Byron, more than almost any other English poet, needs studying in the light of his social surroundings.

Henley places his adjectives with the skill of a medieval captain ordering his line of battle; they have a fighting quality; they make his verse hit you in the face.

Semicolons are used instead of commas to separate parallel phrases, so as to distinguish the superior breaks in the sense from the inferior.

Of the true nature of our existence on this planet; of the origin of our being, and of the meaning and purpose of it; of what is life and what is death; and of the nature of the rule that is exerted over us, we really know nothing.

When the conjunction in a compound sentence is omitted, a semicolon is inserted.

He is not a mining engineer; he is a mine promoter.

Here 'but' or 'however' is omitted.

A semicolon is used before a conjunctive adverb that

introduces a clause. Such conjunctive adverbs are 'however', 'therefore', 'nevertheless', 'accordingly', 'moreover', 'thus', 'then', 'so', and 'consequently'.

The room was full of smoke; therefore I came away.

The Dash

The dash is used for several purposes: for example, to indicate a break in the construction, whether intentional or not.

To cram a lad's mind with infinite names of things that he never handled, places that he never saw or will see, statements of fact that he cannot understand and that must remain merely words to him—that, in my opinion, is like loading his stomach with marbles.

Also to indicate a pause of suspense.

Germany staked her all to win the hegemony of the earth—and lost.

To insert a passage that is not grammatically essential: for parenthesis.

All of them—Spaniard, Negro, Indian, Chinaman, and European—worked together energetically.

He lost his temper—a thing he had never done before.

Dashes are used freely by the careless and the slothful, who do not take pains to make them unnecessary.

The average residue contains less than one-half of one-ten-thousandth of 1%—0.000046%.

Instead of the dash I would suggest a semicolon followed by "it contains only".

The interpolation of sentences within sentences, set off by dashes, thereby breaking the sense, is undesirable—for example:

Two features may be emphasized: the comparative fineness of the grains that comprise the charge—it is not usually realized that an exceedingly fine but slime-free sand can be leached successfully—and the homogeneity of the mass.

The clause interjected between the dashes breaks the sense and leaves the last clause in the air; it deals with an entirely discrete idea, and should be separated thus:

"Two features may be emphasized: the homogeneity of the mass and the fineness of the grains that comprise the charge. It is not usually realized that an exceedingly fine but slime-free sand can be leached successfully."

'Fineness' is a matter of comparison; therefore "comparative" is redundant.

Another common error is to use the dash with the comma or the colon, making two marks perform the duty for which either is competent.

Dear Sir:—

Either a colon or a dash is correct. In addressing an editor, I suggest:

The Editor:

Sir—

The Parenthesis

A phrase having no grammatical connection with the rest of the sentence calls for marks of parenthesis, often called 'curves'; if, however, the phrase is connected grammatically the curves are unnecessary.

It will be seen (Fig. 5) how the machine is constructed.

"Fig. 5 shows how the machine is constructed."

Short parentheses may be denoted by dashes, fore and aft; long explanatory interpolations are usually enclosed within curved lines, whereas explanatory additions to a quoted statement are enclosed within square brackets.

He remembered his mother—dead too now—who had protected him from his father's anger.

Those in this country who do stand for an expert specialism in education suffer, many of them (invaluable work though they have done) under the disadvantage of a merely prosaic and mechanical outlook.

The parenthesis is awkward. The statement as a whole is badly phrased; I suggest:

"In this country many of those that stand for an expert specialism in education, despite the valuable work they have

done, suffer under the disadvantage of a merely prosaic and mechanical outlook."

He made a new machine (see accompanying illustration), and by aid of it remedied the chief defect of the original device.

If a parenthesis comes at the end of a clause or sentence, it must be followed—not preceded—by the requisite punctuation, because the parenthetic clause relates to what precedes it, not to what follows.

The ore came from the lowest level, (the 14th) which gave signs of an enrichment of the vein below the fault.

The comma after "level" should follow the second curve.

Sentences or clauses in parenthesis need no terminal punctuation of their own.

It was necessary to reduce the ore from 5 inches (as it came from the McCully gyratory crushers,) to half an inch (for delivery to the 54 by 20-in. high-speed rolls.)

Delete the comma after "crushers". The period after "rolls" should be outside the curve, because it is not needed where it is, whereas it is needed to mark the end of the sentence. The period after "20-in" signifies abbreviation and is correct.

The richest gold mines in Australia at that time were at Bendigo [in Victoria] and the richest silver mines at Broken Hill [in New South Wales].

Such additions or interpolations are inserted usually by the editor, or other commentator, to add necessary information that the author has failed to give. Similarly an editorial note at the end of a letter or article is placed within brackets. Generally speaking, interpolations of any kind disfigure writing, whether placed between dashes, commas, curves, or brackets.

Quotation Marks

The marks of quotation are used to indicate the beginning and end of a passage that is quoted; they are also used to mark words that are quoted. Expressions that are common property,

such as proverbs or familiar phrases from the Bible or Shakespeare, do not require quotation marks.

A quotation should begin with a capital if it is long, but not if it is in direct serial order or is a consecutive part of the author's text. The quotation marks must be placed carefully, with proper regard for other marks of punctuation.

The editor asked a number of engineers "what is the matter with prospecting"?

Here the quotation mark after "prospecting" happens to belong to the question, and not to the statement as a whole; therefore it should be placed after the question mark, thus:

"The editor asked a number of engineers, 'What is the matter with prospecting?'."

As I use the double quotation marks for the amended example, I have to use the single inverted commas for the quotation within a quotation. This single 'quote' is employed for the titles of books and articles.

He read a paper on 'The Secondary Enrichment of Copper Ores'.
He quoted long passages from 'The Outline of History' by Wells.

The pairs of quotation marks should be used only to indicate matter quoted directly from a speaker or writer—*ipsissima verba*. The single 'quotes' are used also to indicate words that are unusual or are used in an unusual sense. Once such words have been so marked, it is not necessary to repeat the use of the single quotes when the words are repeated.

He spoke of the 'trust' as if it were an economic monster.
I infer that this mining venture is a 'wild-cat' and is intended to beguile the unwary.

The single quote is used also to mark words that are local or vulgar; as used thus it conveys apology or gives warning that the dictionary is being disregarded.

In Australia they 'fossick', whereas we prospect, for gold; so there the prospector is called a 'fossicker'.
The miners and the 'muckers' went on strike last Monday.

'Mucker' is a vulgarism for which there is no need; it means 'shoveler', so I use the single quotes as a mark of apology. In writing this explanation I have used 'shoveler', with single quotes, in order to mark it as an equivalent for the word 'mucker'. I prefer:

"The miners and so-called muckers went on strike last Monday."

If 'so-called' be used, the single quote is redundant, because 'so-called' performs the same function.

The plates of copper are hung by corrosion hooks in the acid.

One would infer that an error had been made, for what can "corrosion" have to do with "hooks"? The term refers to hooks that do not corrode, it is a trade name; therefore single quotes are required.

"The plates of copper in the acid are hung by 'corrosion' hooks."

He ordered some jackhamer drills from the Ingersoll-Rand Company.

"Jackhamer" is a variant of the technical term 'jackhammer'. The spelling is meant to be distinctive, like that of 'Uneeda' and 'Prestolite', which likewise are trade names, or commercial nicknames.

Single quotes are used for the names of publications and of ships.

He sent me a copy of the 'New York Times' just as I was sailing on the 'Mauretania'.

The relation of quotes to other marks of punctuation is a matter of which a clear understanding is needed. When an extract is quoted in its entirety, as a separate paragraph, it is customary to place the quotation marks, fore and aft, entirely outside the extract; but there is difference of opinion as to the placing of the quotation marks at the end of a clause or sentence. The style-book of the Oxford University Press says:

"Some writers wish to exclude the comma or full point when it does not form part of the original extract, and to

include it when it does form part of it [the extract]; and this is doubtless correct."

This authority proceeds to say that "there seems to be no reason for perpetuating a bad practice", namely, that of placing the comma or period "within the quotation marks at the end of an extract, whether it forms part of the original extract or not". With this I concur heartily.

These ideas are illustrated by the manner in which the foregoing paragraph is punctuated. On the other hand, it will be argued by some that typographic appearance and preponderant practice are reasons enough for doing otherwise. If, however, the practice be illogical, it is well to break from it, as I have done, both as an editor and as a writer. It is customary for a writer to conform with the style of the publication to which he contributes, and it is usual for an author to accept the style of the publisher by whom his book is published, because to do otherwise would cause much confusion, which means extra trouble and expense. The style of most publishers, however, was founded in the composing-room, not the editorial office; it is the product of the mechanical, not the literary, department. The custom was, not long ago, before the general use of the type-writing machine made it easy to obtain a clean copy of a manuscript, to leave such matters as spelling and punctuation to the compositors. The tradition lingers to the extent that most editors are willing to be relieved of the duty of punctuating the manuscript that comes to them, passing it on to the compositors and proof-readers, who are closely associated in the mechanical part of publication. According to an unreasoning convention, accepted by sundry publishers, it is correct to place the quotation marks outside the period even if the period belongs not to the quotation but to the statement as a whole, thus they write

He quoted Hancock's saying,"' the tariff is a local issue."

It would be consistent with this style of illogical punctuation to place the second curve of a parenthesis outside the period at the end of a sentence, thus:

Shelley was making marvelous speed toward the highest truth if Browning is to be believed, and that devout Catholic Francis Thompson (whose essay on Shelley is one of the best, as Browning's is one of the worst, examples of English prose style.)

Obviously the last curve should be inside the period. In other respects also the punctuation is vile. A comma is needed after "truth"; an 'or' should replace the "and"; the comma before "and" is not needed, but one should follow "Catholic".

The same followers of an illogical convention, however, will place other marks of punctuation, notably the semicolon, outside the quotation marks—correctly, as it seems to me:

Whereupon I said, "I knew it long ago"; and he replied, "How did you find out?".

Why is the semicolon outside the quotation marks, whereas in the next example, from the same context, the comma is inside?

He was a man of some distinction in the "old county," as the Cornish call it.

Here, by the way, I would use the single quote with 'old county', as nobody in particular is being quoted.

On another page of the same magazine I find:

That is not its "mighty effort"; that is not "the kernel in the nut."

Why is the semicolon outside, whereas the period is inside, the quotation mark? Because these matters are not given the consideration that they deserve.

My own suggestions concerning the use of quotation marks have been put into practice in print for many years, as also in postal correspondence. I submit them to engineers and other technical men, believing that they will find them helpful to clear writing. For further illustration I add the following examples of what I deem to be correct practice.

It is well to remember that "the tariff is a local issue".
We should not forget that "the tariff is a local issue", as Hancock said.

We remember that " the tariff is a local issue "; therefore we do not expect unanimity of opinion.

Similar reasoning applies to words within single quotes; thus:

Such illiteracies as ' preventative ', 'suppositious ', ' unpracticable ', and ' up-raise ' are common in mine reports.

The quotes are placed inside the commas because these punctuate the statement as a whole.

If a quotation appears within a quotation, the closing period may be placed logically outside the single quote but inside the double quotes; thus:

" The saying that ' a mine is a hole in the ground ' is well enough, but I demur to Mark Twain's dictum that it is ' a hole in the ground owned by a liar '."

The period at the close of a quotation that forms part of a sentence belongs to the sentence as a whole, not to the quotation alone; therefore the closing quotation marks should be placed inside the period.

Macaulay exclaimed, " The superlative is the mark of fools ".
He replied, " I shall remember this always ".

If the quotation is given separately it should be enclosed, fore and aft, within quotation marks. Huxley, criticizing Wilberforce, wrote:

" He devoted pages to the exposition of his conviction that Mr. Darwin's theory ' contradicts the revealed relation of the creation to its Creator ' and is ' inconsistent with the fulness of his glory '."

In short, the marks of punctuation should be placed according to the sense, despite the introduction of quotation signs, which, manifestly, do *not* mark pauses in the diction, but are merely signs that the words so designated are those of another.

If the *ipsissima verba* are not given in a quotation it is misleading to use quotation marks. In quoting, however, it is not necessary to follow the punctuation except in controversial

matter. Changes of spelling and hyphenation are permissible, because uniformity of typographic style is necessary in the pages of a book or of any other publication.

The Comma

The comma is used or misused more often than any other mark of punctuation. It performs various functions:

(*a*) To separate the members of a series of co-ordinate words or phrases—that is, members of equal value:

Surface waters include those of swamps, brooks, rivers, and lakes.

(*b*) To separate the clauses in a compound sentence or to separate parallel clauses:

The panic-stricken garrison evacuated the fort, and the enemy entered it without a blow.

He said that the mine was comparatively young, that it was rich, that the ore was docile, and that the enterprise was full of promise.

(*c*) To indicate an ellipsis:

This is good; that, better.

Here the comma replaces 'is', but it would be preferable to say "that is better".

The claim on the hill was purchased for $5,000; the one in the valley, for $10,000.

Here the comma replaces "was purchased"; the pause after "valley" gives time to recall the previous verb without actually repeating it.

(*d*) To follow a clause out of its natural order—for example, a noun clause preceding the predicate:

That the mine is rich, I concede.

But no comma is required if the noun clause follows the predicate:

I concede that the mine is rich.

(*e*) To introduce a clause that is supplementary or explanatory, and therefore not essential to the sense:

The mine, which had been worked by the natives, was in disrepair.

But no comma should precede a restrictive clause:

The mine that he had examined proved to be worthless.

(*f*) To separate a dependent clause that precedes a principal clause:

Whatever may be the outcome of the Conference, it will awaken the world to the cost of preparedness for war.

(*g*) To indicate opposition:

Such operations are merely financial trickery, not mining.

(*h*) To set apart an introductory phrase in a sentence where without the comma there might be confusion:

To start with, it is obvious that . . .
In truth, he never even saw the mine.

(*i*) Participial phrases are set off by a comma, even if not introductory:

Smiling, he passed the cigars.
This being granted, let us proceed to examine the evidence.
This man, always willing to help, agreed to give us the benefit of his knowledge of the flotation process.

(*j*) To set apart words and phrases that logically should be thus isolated:

But, Sir, I beg to disclaim . . .
Smith, come here and give me a hand.
Get out, you lazy lubber.

(*k*) To set off a clause introduced by a conjunction, if the clause has its own subject nominative:

The ore is low-grade, but it is free-milling.

Here the second clause, introduced by "but", has a subject

nominative, "it". If the second clause has no subject nominative, a comma is not necessary:

The ore is low-grade but free-milling.

The omission of commas, as of other necessary punctuation, mars the sense:

To begin with all drawings should be made of standard size.

He does not mean "to begin with all drawings"; a comma is needed after "with", to separate the introductory phrase; otherwise "with" runs into "all". See rule (*h*).

He was a dealer in carbide and acetylene gas and latterly extended his activities to the supplying of all sorts of apparatus.

At first sight it would appear as if he were a dealer in "latterly extended" as well as in "carbide and acetylene gas". The sentence is compounded of two distinct clauses, which should be separated by placing a comma after "gas". See rule (*b*).

This was followed by a peremptory demand the justice of which was questionable.

In reading, one would pause after "demand", and a comma should mark the pause. Moreover, the clause following "demand" is supplementary and non-restrictive, therefore it should be introduced by a comma.

The reference to the elocutionary test suggests the advice that is frequently given to read aloud what you have written, because the varying pauses suggest the requisite marks of punctuation. However, writing that is meant primarily to be read aloud or to be spoken to an audience calls for a punctuation different from that which is required in the writing meant to meet the eye; in short, there are two kinds of punctuation, the grammatical and the elocutionary. Punctuation that indicates the manner in which a passage is to be spoken, and marks such frequent pauses as are needed for an effective oral delivery, may obscure the grammatical relations of clauses and sentences.

Wilson * gives the following example, which he quotes from a book on elocution:

Men of superior genius; while they see the rest of mankind, painfully struggling, to comprehend obvious truths; glance, themselves, through the most remote consequences; like lightning, through a path, that cannot be traced; they see the beauties of nature, with light and warmth, and paint them forcibly, without effort; as the morning sun, does the scenes he rises upon; and, in several instances, communicate to objects, a morning freshness, and unaccountable lustre, that is not seen in the creations of nature. The poet, the statuary, the painter, have produced images, that left nature behind.

For the sole purpose of indicating the sense of the passage, it would be punctuated grammatically as follows:

"Men of superior genius, while they see the rest of mankind painfully struggling to comprehend obvious truths, glance themselves through the most remote consequences, like lightning through a path that cannot be traced. They see the beauties of nature with light and warmth, and paint them forcibly without effort, as the morning sun does the scenes he rises upon; and, in several instances, communicate to objects a morning freshness and unaccountable lustre that is not seen in the creations of nature. The poet, the statuary, the painter have produced images that left nature far behind."

In my discussion of punctuation, I have restricted myself to grammatical punctuation, that is, to the punctuation needed in technical writing. However, I have thought it proper to make this digression for the purpose of passing reference to another phase of the subject, partly to indicate that it has not been ignored.

The drop in the price of silver has put an end to profits from the mine in Mexico, a fire had stopped production for several months before the silver market collapsed, when repairs had been made a drought had caused a shortage of electric power, and, of course, a further decrease of profitable activity.

* 'A Treatise on Punctuation', by John Wilson. This is an old text-book, especially honored in the composing-room and at the proof-reader's desk.

This excerpt from a report is badly punctuated. After both "Mexico" and "collapsed" a semicolon is needed to mark the grammatical independence of the preceding sentences; the commas do not suffice. I suggest:

"The drop in the price of silver had put an end to any profit from the mine in Mexico; moreover, a fire had stopped production for several months before the collapse of the silver market, and, after repairs had been made, a drought had caused a shortage of electric power."

Every Diesel engine must be set up and adjusted before it leaves the factory. This is entirely done away with in the Steinbecker engine, as its governing mechanism requires no adjustment, for with good workmanship and proper installation best results are assured with positive fuel regulation without previous testing. While running no readjustments of any kind are necessary as in the case of the Diesel.

This is a sample of the kind of writing usual in periodicals dealing with mechanical engineering. In that branch of the profession it is customary to use words as if they were crowbars, not chisels. In the above quotation, the introductory sentence is not open to criticism; it is a clear statement. "Done away with" is a miserable phrase. "With" is over-worked. A comma is needed after the participial phrase "while running", and another is needed between "necessary" and "as". I should re-write as follows:

"Every Diesel engine must be set up and adjusted before it leaves the factory. This precaution is not needed for the Steinbecker engine, which has a governing mechanism that requires no adjustment, so that, given good workmanship, proper installation, and positive regulation of fuel, it is possible to obtain the best results without any preliminary testing. This engine requires no readjustment whatever while running, and in this respect also it differs favorably from the Diesel."

The placing of commas between co-ordinate words may make a confusing break in the structure of a sentence, thus:

Instead of the customary box a clean, tightly covered sheet-iron can is used.

Here the comma breaks a sentence at a point where there is no joint; that comes between "box" and "a", where one clause ends and the other begins. The effect, to the eye, of the comma is bewildering. I suggest:

"Instead of the customary wooden box, a clean and tightly covered sheet-iron can is used."

Or, better:

"A clean and tightly covered sheet-iron box is used instead of the customary wooden box."

Here is another example:

In spite of the low rate of disintegration of some of the radio elements old, unaltered minerals have reached equilibrium.

Again, the placing of a comma, quite properly, between two co-ordinate adjectives, produces a confusing effect. "Old" and "unaltered" are co-ordinate in their application to minerals; one cannot object to the comma on grammatical grounds; but it divides the sentence wrongly, because the first clause ends with "elements" and the second begins with "old". Therefore I suggest:

"In spite of the low rate of disintegration of some of the radio elements, old and unaltered minerals have reached equilibrium."

When mention is made of three or more members of a series, it is desirable to use a comma before the 'and' that links the last two. See rule (*a*).

Tom, Dick and Harry arrived last night.

The omission of the comma after "Dick" suggests that Tom is being addressed and that he is being informed about the arrival of the other two; or one might infer that Tom arrived alone, whereas Dick and Harry arrived in company. To take an example from technical writing:

This card system divides itself into several parts, namely, correspondence, technical information, catalogues and miscellaneous.

Apparently the card system has three divisions, one of which is "catalogues and miscellaneous". If, however, a comma precedes "and", the sentence will mean, as the writer intended, that there are four divisions, one of which is "catalogues" and another "miscellaneous".

To obviate excessive expense for power, stoping and hoisting must be done in the day-time.

Here "stoping" and "hoisting" are joined purposely in opposition to "power", as could *not* be inferred if the writer were in the habit of writing, for example, "Mining, milling and refining are the three main operations", omitting the comma after "milling". The omission of a comma after "stoping" is significant to those accustomed to write, "Mining, milling, and refining are the three main operations", using the comma before "and" to join the three members of a tripartite group.

This big problem of muscle, capital and brains, must receive the attention of thinking people.

It is a trio, not a duo. A comma is needed after "capital"; on the other hand, the comma after "brains" should be deleted.

Obvious as it would seem that to man ships, officers and men are necessary, it has been the habit of successive Congresses to ignore the fact.

This is borrowed from Summey,* who says:

"'Ships, officers and men' is not a series". If we make it a rule to mark the three members of a series by separating each of them by commas, the meaning in such a context would be clear, as the above quotation was to me.

When commas are used to separate the members of a series, it is well to arrange the phrasing so that another comma does not precede or follow immediately, as in the following example:

Under the whip of war, with little but patriotic pride as an incentive, genius, initiative, resourcefulness, and other kindred latent qualities, were

* 'Modern Punctuation', p. 22.

developed over-night, which being especially organized rendered irresistible the combined forces of the Allies.

The comma after "incentive" belongs there, though it may appear at first to join "incentive" to the series "genius, initiative, resourcefulness, and other kindred latent qualities". The comma after "qualities" should be omitted. The form of the sentence makes "over-night" the antecedent of "which". I suggest:

"Under the whip of war, with patriotic pride as the main incentive, the genius, initiative, resourcefulness, and other kindred latent qualities of men were so developed and stimulated as to render irresistible the united efforts of the Allies."

Commas are used too freely, especially after adjectives, the result being a choppy style.

He pointed to a typical, Elizabethan mansion, which had belonged to his grandfather.

This cross-cut disclosed a mass of soft, oxidized ore, the existence of which had not been suspected.

The adjectives "typical" and "Elizabethan" in the first quotation, likewise "soft" and "oxidized" in the second, are not co-ordinate; they are not of equal rank. "Typical" is superimposed on the unit formed by the second adjective ("Elizabethan") and the noun ("mansion"). It is the "Elizabethan mansion" that is "typical", not "Elizabethan" alone. So also "soft" applies to the unit "oxidized ore". The comma should be omitted after "typical" and after "soft". The same reasoning holds good in such phrases as:

American electrical machinery
Heavy mineral oil
Solid cast-iron rollers
Friendly commercial relations

In these phases no commas are needed, because the words after the first adjective in each phrase constitute a unit. On the other hand, if the adjectives are co-ordinate, each playing an equal part, then they should be separated by a comma:

Long, slender, tapering cones
Deep, narrow, dark defiles
Stupid, malicious, unprovoked diatribe

A few more examples may prove useful:

The parsons are here with their quaint, hieratic language, nearer to essential truth than our economists.

The writer means that the "hieratic language" is quaint; the two adjectives are not co-ordinate. The omission of the needless comma renders more obvious the break indicated by the necessary comma, after "language".

The immigrant is in origin a peasant, inarticulate, and underneath by habit and tradition.

The comma after "inarticulate" is objectionable. The writer means that "the immigrant is in origin a peasant, inarticulate and underneath by habit and tradition". He is inarticulate "by habit and tradition" no less than he is "underneath" from the same causes.

The standard raise is a regular six-post, two-compartment combination of chute and manway.

The adjective "regular" applies to the entire phrase that follows; therefore the comma after "six-post" is not required; it breaks the continuity of thought.

The placing of commas before and after such adverbs as 'apparently', 'occasionally', 'therefore', 'then', 'evidently', and 'fortunately' is stilted and awkward, because it turns such words into a parenthesis—in most instances needlessly; for example:

He, therefore, decided to return.
They were unfriendly and, apparently, were unwilling to assist.
These circumstances, evidently, were more influential than he had supposed.
The rise in copper was a detail that, fortunately, he had anticipated.

The Period

The period is the most frequently used punctuation mark except the comma, and it outweighs every other point. It is emphatic but not suspensive.

Abbreviations are indicated by the period:

Pro. tem. 6 in. 8 ft. gal. B.A. U.S.A. Calif. Penn.

Also contractions:

i. e. (*id est* = that is)
e. g. (*exempli gratia* = for the sake of example)
etc. (*et cetera* = and the rest)
viz. (*videlicet* = to wit)

A series of periods, usually three, indicates the omission of words:

They propose that the building shall belong . . . to the communes in which they stand.

These are secondary uses of the period, its chief function being to mark the completion of a sentence; therefore in many respects it is the most important of all the marks of punctuation; indeed, some writers depend upon it almost entirely to regulate their flow of language, dispensing with the colon and semicolon, and even using the comma sparingly. Victor Hugo and some of his imitators treat so many of their sentences as paragraphs that their style becomes spasmodic and tiresome. Our American newspaper writing tends to this extreme. As a step toward simplification such a style is commendable, but it is easily overdone. To the reader such 'snappy' writing seems at first to be clear and vigorous; then the fresh starts become monotonous in their iterative impact on the brain; before the end, if the article be fairly long, the manner becomes so unpleasant that the reader's annoyance overwhelms all other impressions. British press-writers, after the fashion of Macaulay and Edwin Arnold, are inclined to the other extreme; they indulge in well-rounded sentences varied by interjectory phrases and

subordinate clauses, thereby producing a literary style that in the hands of the less expert readily becomes rambling or involved. Obviously it is desirable to avoid both extremes. REMEMBER THE READER. Observance of this basic principle will guide the writer to a proper mean in the use of the period, as of other marks of punctuation, so that the reader will be saved the mental effort on the one hand of jumping a series of hurdles, as it were, and on the other hand of losing his way in a maze. Here are two examples of the jerky style:

Allies must have common sentiments, a common policy, common interests. Russia's disposition is aggressive. Her policy is the closed door. Her interests lie in monopoly. With our country it is precisely the opposite. Japan may conquer, but she will not aggress. Russia may be defeated, but she will not abandon her aggression. With such a country an alliance is beyond the conception even of a dream.

The foregoing is taken from the London 'Times' as quoted in 'The King's English'. Here is one from a Kansas newspaper:

Writing a column is a fine job. It is composed in about equal parts of labor, work, and worry. A column hound toils and slaves to get out his column and then worries his head off for fear he'll go stale and lose his job. All that is expected of a column hound is that he be amusing or clever in twenty-five or thirty different ways every day. A vaudeville performer can go out with one act and get it booked for forty weeks solid. The next year he can go over the same circuit with the same act. The people forget what he said last year and laugh their heads off at his stuff. So long as he busts somebody over the head with something or sticks his fingers in somebody's eye the audience will howl with laughter. It doesn't make any difference how many times the audience has seen him do it. Busting somebody over the head is laughter's principal accessory.

A column hound must have a new act every day. If he busts anybody over the head or jabs his finger in anybody's eye he gets the paper into trouble. Most anything is funny on the stage. Very few things are funny in print. Cold print reveals a man at about life-size. If you don't believe it go out and listen to a speech by your favorite rabble-rouser and then try to read it in cold print. One trouble with a column hound is that when the stuff doesn't flow freely he becomes desperate and tries to force it. The saddest thing . . .

I forbear from quoting further; by this time my reader will imagine that he has been busted over the head or that some-

body has stuck a finger in his eye. On the other hand, consider a paragraph such as the following, quoted from Milton:

I must say, therefore, that after I had from my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father (whom God recompense!) been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences, as my age would suffer, by sundry masters and teachers, both at home and at the schools, it was found that whether aught was imposed by them that had the overlooking, or betaken to of mine own choice in English, or other tongue, prosing or versing, but chiefly this latter, the style by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live.

This paragraph is constructed correctly, but it is much too complicated for pleasant reading or ready understanding. The writing of Woodrow Wilson errs similarly; for example, in the 'Delineator' of November 1909, he wrote:

In the professional schools of an ideal university nothing of this practical spirit would be abated, for such schools are, one and all, intensely and immediately practical in their objects and must have practice always in mind if they would be truly serviceable; but there would always lie back of their work, by close association with the studies of the university in pure science and in all the great subjects which underlie law and theology, the impulse and the informing spirit of disinterested inquiry, of study which has no utilitarian object, but seeks only the truth. The spirit of graduate study, and of under-graduate, too, would be carried over into all professional work, and engineers, doctors, ministers, lawyers, would all alike be made, first of all citizens of the modern intellectual and social world—first of all, university men, with a broad outlook on the various knowledge of the world, and then expert in a great practical profession, which they would understand all the better because they had first been grounded in science and in the other great bodies of knowledge which are the foundations of all practice. That is the service the university owes the professional schools associated with it. The parts should be vitally united from end to end.

It is supposed that more punctuation is required in scientific writing than is customary in ordinary writing, but this idea seems hardly in accord with the fact that the lawyer in his technical writing aims to use punctuation marks as little as possible, because he knows that they may cause misunder-

standing if placed wrongly. That is why, it may be assumed, Acts of Parliament contain no marks of punctuation. The statutes of Congress, however, are punctuated, and on their punctuation more than one lawsuit has been based, despite the custom of the courts to disregard punctuation wherever the sense is clear. For example, one judicial opinion * states that "although it has been held that punctuation may be disregarded, it may be resorted to as an aid in construction when it tends to throw light on the meaning". Another † says: "Punctuation is a most fallible standard by which to interpret a writing. It may be resorted to when other means fail; but the Court will first take the instrument by the four corners in order to ascertain its true meaning. If that is apparent on judicially inspecting it, the punctuation will not be suffered to change it".

To which one may remark that the omission of the necessary punctuation marks is just as likely to cause misunderstanding as the use of too many of them. However, the experience of the law suggests that a statement if made in logical form will convey its meaning correctly with the aid of the minimum of punctuation; the argument seems to be that the use of punctuation, except the placing of periods at the end of sentences, signifies an effort to correct defects in our writing. If we used fewer stops, we might write more clearly. A faulty sentence should not be corrected by a remedial punctuation; it should be re-written. A great number of stops is a sure sign of bad phrasing:

> Shakespeare, it is true, had, as I have said, as respects England, the privilege which only first-comers enjoy.

This is quoted from Lowell by the Messrs. Fowler in 'The King's English' as "a good example of the warning value of commas". In the example cited they are needed, and thereby

* Commonwealth v. Kelley, 177 Mass. 222.

† Ewing v. Burnet, 11 Peters 41; U. S. Supreme Court, 1837.

they suggest the defectiveness of the construction, which is "like an obstacle race".

The miners, it was anticipated, would refuse, unless the rate of pay was raised, to return to their work, which, it will be remembered, they had left without any warning to the company, early in January.

This is an example of a choppy style, marked by numerous short phrases that require commas, most of which could be spared if the phrasing were better. I suggest:

"It was anticipated that the miners would refuse to return to work unless their rate of pay was raised, for it will be remembered that early in January they had left without any warning to the company."

The great exponent of statements that are long but orderly, complex but clear, is Ruskin. I quote his poetic description of the micaceous rock that forms the crest of the Matterhorn.

They are, on the contrary, an unaltered monument, seemingly sculptured long ago, the huge walls retaining yet the forms into which they were first engraven, and standing like an Egyptian temple,—delicate-fronted, softly colored, the suns of uncounted ages rising and falling upon it continually, but still casting the same line of shadows from east to west, still, century after century, touching the same purple stains on the lotus pillars; while the desert sand ebbs and flows about their feet, as those autumn leaves of rock lie heaped and weak about the base of the Cervin.

Is not this a strange type, in the very heart and height of the mysterious Alps—these wrinkled hills in their snowy, cold, grey-haired old age, at first so silent, then, as we keep quiet at their feet, muttering and whispering to us garrulously, in broken and dreaming fits, as it were, about their childhood—is it not a strange type of the things which "out of weakness are made strong?" If one of those little flakes of mica-sand, hurried in tremulous spangling along the bottom of the ancient river, too light to sink, too faint to float, almost too small for sight, could have had a mind given to it as it was at last borne down with its kindred dust into the abysses of the stream, and laid, (would it not have thought?) for a hopeless eternity, in the dark ooze, the most despised, forgotten, and feeble of all earth's atoms; incapable of any use or change; not fit, down there in the diluvial darkness, so much as to help an earth-wasp to build its nest, or feed the first fibre of a lichen;—what would it have thought, had it been told that one day, knitted into a strength as of imperishable iron, rustless by the air, infusible by the flame, out of the substance of it, with its fellows,

the axe of God should hew that Alpine tower; that against *it*—poor, helpless mica flake!—the wild north winds should rage in vain; beneath *it*—low-fallen mica flake!—the snowy hills should lie bowed like flocks of sheep, and the kingdoms of the earth fade away in unregarded blue; and around it—weak, wave-drifted mica flake!—the great war of the firmament should burst in thunder, and yet stir it not; and the fiery arrows and angry meteors of the night fall blunted back from it into the air; and all the stars in the clear heaven should light, one by one as they rose, new cressets upon the points of snow that fringed its abiding-place on the imperishable spire?

In this exquisite passage* the many beautiful ideas are interwoven without breaking the main thread of thought; the words and the punctuation combine to create a masterpiece; nevertheless I dare to suggest sundry minor changes in the punctuation.

The comma after "Egyptian temple" is not needed, because the dash suffices. The question mark after "made strong" should follow the quotation mark. After "lichen" the semicolon is not needed, as the dash marks the sudden transition from description to question. The use of the dash with the exclamation mark after "helpless mica flake" is an example of one of the rare places where two points seem justifiable. A second "should" would be proper after "kingdoms of the earth"; and another after "meteors of the night". Probably Ruskin felt that he had used "should" so many times that it might be taken for granted, and thereby avoid an excess of repetition.

The question arises to what extent Ruskin's punctuation of his own text was followed by the man that set it in type or by the proof-reader that revised the galleys. It is more than probable that another edition of 'Modern Painters' would show differences in the punctuation of this splendid passage. The fact must be faced that punctuation, like spelling, is a matter that editors have been in the habit of leaving to the typesetter and the proof-reader, the latter being recruited not uncommonly from the composing-room. One result, among others, is that some usages are merely conventional; they

* 'Modern Painters', Vol. IV, p. 257; 1873.

are not based on logical reasoning—for instance, the placing of the period inside quotation marks when these marks refer only to a word or to a minor part of the sentence, thus:

Again and again he harped on that word "reciprocity."

There is no logic in placing the 'quotes' outside the period, which marks the close of the sentence as a unit.

Another illogical custom, to be noted in magazines with high literary pretensions, is to use the comma and the dash concurrently in places where one of these marks of punctuation suffices.

When it was obvious to me that even the American flag would not save me,—that, on the contrary, it would attract attention to us,—I accepted the proposal with thanks.

This is quoted from the 'Atlantic Monthly'.

Some of my suggestions, particularly in regard to the placing of quotation marks, are opposed to the prevalent custom, but that need not prevent technical writers from adopting these suggestions in their correspondence and reports. They will find, when they write for a magazine or a newspaper, that their style of punctuation will be made to conform with that of the publication to which they send their letter or article; and if they write a book they will find themselves called upon to conform with the style of their publisher. Manifestly a newspaper or magazine must print its matter in uniform style as regards spelling and punctuation, and, in most instances, the writer will be the more docile for the reason that he has no decided ideas of his own concerning these minor matters. Nevertheless punctuation is not a minor matter to one who desires to acquire the art of writing clearly and convincingly, so I have not failed to give space to it in this book. In course of time the editor will assert his control in this matter, and to exert that control intelligently he will take a keener interest in punctuation. When this consummation is achieved we may expect some measure of real improvement.

Such passages as I have quoted, whether for warning or

example, show that punctuation distributes the weight of thought among the different parts of the literary structure; it affects the emphasis of the subordinate elements; above everything, it regulates the movement that marks the progress of the thought. As Summey says: "An experienced writer means a point as definitely as he means a word".

When the second edition of this book was reviewed by an assistant editor of the 'Engineering and Mining Journal', of which I was editor so long ago as 1903, he said that my suggestions for punctuation were "amateur". This was both ungenerous and impertinent. Twenty years of sincere professional work as an editor should have spared me such an epithet, unless 'amateur' be used in the sense of a love for performing the duties of the editorial office. To my reviewer, and to others, I reply simply that quotation marks indicate only that the words so treated are those of another, either writer or speaker; to end a sentence with a quotation mark is as illogical as it would be to use italics for the same purpose; words are printed in italic (Italian) type either to emphasize them or to mark them as belonging to a foreign language. The quoted words are another's, the italicized words are emphatic; neither usage has anything to do with punctuation. In short, quotation marks have no more to do with punctuation than the flowers that bloom in the spring.