SHORT STORY WRITING
AND
FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM

To—
The Subs!

SHORT STORY WRITING
AND
FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM

BY
SYDNEY A. MOSELEY
AUTHOR OF

"The Truth About a Journalist" "Television: To-day and To-morrow," "Who's Who in Broadcasting," "Money Making in Stocks and Shares," "The Truth About Borstal," "A Singular People," "With Kitchener in Cairo," "Brightest Spots in Brighter London," "About the Dardanelles," "Haunts of London." "The Fleet From Within," etc.

FOURTH EDITION

LONDON
SIR ISAAC PITMAN & SONS, LTD.
1946

Fourth Edition, 1939
Reprinted, 1946

SIR ISAAC PITMAN & SONS, LTD.
PITMAN HOUSE, PARKER STREET, KINGSWAY, LONDON, W.C.2
THE PITMAN PRESS, BATH
PITMAN HOUSE, LITTLE COLLINS STREET, MELBOURNE
UNITEERS BUILDING, RIVER VALLEY ROAD, SINGAPORE
27 BECKETTS BUILDINGS, PRESIDENT STREET, JOHANNESBURG

ASSOCIATED COMPANIES
PITMAN PUBLISHING CORPORATION
2 WEST 45TH STREET, NEW YORK
205 WEST MONROE STREET, CHICAGO
SIR ISAAC PITMAN & SONS (CANADA), LTD.
(INCORPORATING THE COMMERCIAL TEXT BOOK COMPANY)
PITMAN HOUSE, 381–383 CHURCH STREET, TORONTO

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN AT THE PITMAN PRESS, BATH
D6—(G.6035)

PREFACE TO FOURTH EDITION

THAT SHORT STORY WRITING AND FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM has been selling steadily for some thirteen years is, I venture to submit, sufficient testimony to its usefulness and popularity.

What has happened in the intervening years from 1926 to 1939?—new periodicals, new subjects, new editors and new ideas. And, of course, a multitude of new writers and new stars.

I have revised this edition of SHORT STORY WRITING AND FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM, thoroughly bringing it up to date. Thus I hope the new reader will find it equally as useful as the many thousands who have made the three earlier editions possible.

SYDNEY A. MOSELEY.

ROYAL AUTOMOBILE CLUB,
LONDON, S.W.1.
1939.

INTRODUCTION

CAN JOURNALISM BE TAUGHT?

THERE are few questions on which journalists are more divided domestically than that of the teaching of journalism.

You will be told by some that no theoretical training in the world will make a journalist of anybody who lacks a special aptitude for the work. It is further claimed that the journalistic sense, like the musical sense, "cannot be acquired," and must have been created within you.

On the other hand, there are many experienced writers who hold that, given average intelligence and education to start with, journalism is a profession, like any other, which may be studied and taught.

One could go on theorizing from both sides of the question. Far better to give the results of my own actual experience in putting the problems to the test.

Some time ago I was approached by two colleagues who asked me to become the principal of a school for teaching article and fiction writing. I demurred.

"There are many schools of journalism," I pointed out, "and in some of them at least the value of their tuition is open to question."

"All the more reason," was the argument, "why an established journalist should be the head of a really sound school."

I promised I would consult my editor friends in Fleet Street. Much to my surprise I was encouraged

on all hands to proceed with the project, and my friends were, in fact, of great personal help to me.

They told me that they were weary of receiving piles of manuscripts, many of which were hopelessly unsuitable at sight. They reminded me—for my own editorial experience had been exactly the same as theirs—of all the time tragically wasted in editorial offices, merely in order to sift promising literary wheat from quantities of utterly useless chaff.

"If," they argued, "you can instil some elementary idea of editorial requirements into the minds of these unfortunate literary aspirants, the number of pathetically useless and time-wasting manuscripts will undoubtedly be reduced. At the very least, you can teach them not to send us totally unsuitable subjects. Good ideas, badly handled, and well-written articles that do not in the least fit in with our own particular requirements."

Editors, therefore, were only too glad for me to take in hand some of these aspiring writers. They knew of my own years of work in Fleet Street, and were kind enough to say they thought I could be of real help to my students.

Well, I tried. It must have been a happy period in the editorial offices, for I certainly succeeded in shunting miles of manuscript from their offices to mine. I was soon overwhelmed with all sorts and conditions of articles and short stories—the bulk quite unsuitable for publication. There were stories written on foolscap paper, others on odd sheets; much work was quite undecipherable, and would not even be glanced through by the busy editor.

There were idealists who expected to make a livelihood writing heavenly sonnets. Scholarly-written essays which, did the space permit, might find a home once in six months in a monthly review, came from earnest writers who wanted to take up journalism as a whole-time occupation!

There is no doubt that I could have assembled hundreds of these writers and have given them all a few helpful points with actual illustrations from practically every single article or story that was submitted to me. But it would have taken me years.

Manifestly it was impossible for me to read and criticize even a tithe of the manuscripts which students expected me to examine *personally*.

I had valuable colleagues, but, as they themselves pointed out, it was my personal tuition that the students wanted.

Since it was not possible for me to do what was expected of me I decided that the experiment, so far as I was concerned, must come to an end.

During this period, moreover, I had come to realize more than ever that even the successful student had only reached the beginning of the battle.

Journalists know that; the new-comer does not. He imagines that once having mastered the general principles of writing for the press the rest is plain sailing. And it hurt me to have to tell the few whose work showed merit that there were other reasons why they had not "caught on"—space, editors' previous commitments, a desire in some quarters for well-known names, more modern plots, local

atmosphere and other reasons incomprehensible to the outsider.

What was the use of my saying "This is a good story, well written and interesting, and one which ought to stand a chance of publication," if it afterwards came back from the editor with the usual regrets?

Alas! I am not in the least proof against "hard-luck stories," and I made promises of personal assistance which took up a good deal more of my time and energy than I could possibly spare.

After all, it came down to this. A good many of the faults in the mass of manuscripts were common and recurrent. I found myself repeating hints and criticisms and advice. Thus: "Don't for heaven's sake throw up your present occupation in the hopes of making a living at writing. It is not so romantic as ruinous. *Fleet Street is crowded—it is always crowded —with experienced journalists who cannot all find berths.*"

Or "articles intended for newspapers should be short, and not exceed 1,000 or 1,200 words at the most. Nowadays, half-column articles are favoured. Say 500 to 600 words. You have written 5,000," and so on.

That kind of writer didn't know, and without help from somebody, *would never know* why his work was returned. Editors, who have to handle hundreds of oddly assorted manuscripts, can hardly be expected to give reasons for their objections.

Yet I often thought that the big publishing houses would not only be doing themselves a service but

would also be doing a kindness to their contributors, if they installed a "humanity editor" to state, in a few words, why each manuscript was being returned. What heart-breaking this little act would save. What time, what labour!

The greatest shock of all in this experiment of mine was to find that hundreds who wished to become journalists and authors, hadn't even a grounding in the English language.

Of course, that kind of applicant—whose chances of success were nil—had to be refused.

This was perhaps prejudicial to the business side of the venture, but it was less disheartening to me than the number of students who had average ability, but no sticking power; who had a good education, but lacked imagination; or who simply lost interest.

I own that I was relieved when my experiment ended, though that relief was not untinged with regret.

Many writers achieved their first success through our help, and scores of cordial letters of thanks from beginners whom we had been able to set upon the right road cheered us in our work.

Gratifying as these successes were, I could not but compare them with the number who must fail—fail, that is to say, in the sense of negative results. And I came to the conclusion that, for the majority of students, the hints I had been able to give could very well be embodied in an inexpensive form. No book will take the place of personal criticism of individual work, but at least I think that in these pages I may help beginners to avoid those common errors which are fatal to their chance of

success. I may also acquaint them with certain general principles and suggest methods of profitable study and experiment.

Some of the hints are so obvious to the trained journalist that he may imagine them unnecessary. Well, this book is not written for the trained journalist, and anyone who has tried to run a school of journalism will realize that even the apparently obvious needs explaining and sometimes underlining, when one is dealing with beginners.

Whatever advice I have given in these pages is the outcome of hard, practical experience.

And make no mistake about it, while most professions are hard and overcrowded with men of merit as well as with men of mediocrity, journalism is the hardest and most heart-breaking of them all.

It is well to know this. By taking heed of these hints the beginner will save himself many hard knocks in the course of his necessarily patient adventure towards literary success. To those who are journalists by nature, as well as by choice, the ups and downs of the profession are by no means lacking in exhilaration.

Beyond that I cannot go. The rest depends on flair, an ability to fight, the knack of conceiving new ideas, and—to some extent—the favour of that ever-present but ever-elusive Goddess Chance!

You who decide to enter the lists—Good Luck!

SYDNEY A. MOSELEY.

PRESS CLUB,
LONDON, E.C.4.
1926.

CONTENTS

PART 1

FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

PART 2

SHORT STORY WRITING

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VII

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER IX

SHORT STORY WRITING
AND
FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM

Part 1
FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM

CHAPTER I

TYPE all manuscript—Keep your copy "clean"—The dispatch book—Three don'ts—The newspaper touch—The vigilant sub-editor—The importance of the paragraph—Short sentences—Short words.

THERE are, first of all, some small practical details which every literary aspirant should attend to—trifling matters of stationery and typewriting.

If you mean to write for publication you must learn how to prepare your manuscripts, so that their outward appearance will not prejudice their chance of acceptance.

Logically, I suppose, the outward appearance of manuscript and the practical details of its dispatch to an editor need not concern the literary aspirant until he, or she, has learned how to write an article suitable for publication.

I have found, however, that in writing, as in many other things, people expect to run before they can walk.

That does not matter much, for to be over-keen is a good fault. But it does mean that most of my

1—(G.6035)

readers will want to win their laurels as soon as possible.

I hope they will, and that is why I include advice about the preparation and dispatch of manuscript in my first chapter.

Type All Manuscript.

All manuscript must be typed. I know that many editors would avow, with their hands on their hearts, that so long as the " stuff " is good it does not really matter whether it is typed or not. Do not believe it ! It is either the editor new to his soul-destroying task, or a polite diplomat, who tells you this. You may be very certain that in nine cases out of ten a manuscript will be regarded with definite disfavour if it is not typed.

Your manuscript must be neatly presented. The first page of each manuscript should begin with the title of your article, and your own name, or pen name, as the author underneath that title. Your name and address should be typed in small characters at the top right-hand corner of this first page.

Keep Your " Copy " Clean.

Each manuscript should have a cover, preferably of somewhat stiff paper. This should repeat the title, and author's name and address, and should contain, in addition, a statement of the number of words in the article. Make this clear, e.g. " Length 500 words," and type it in the bottom right-hand corner.

In regard to this question of length I have been

asked scores of times whether it is necessary to count every word, and whether little words of one letter should be counted separately.

Let me settle this difficulty here and now. All separate words are counted, irrespective of length, but it is not necessary in practice to make a religiously careful count of every word in a manuscript.

For a short article it is quite enough to count the number of words in, say, ten lines of your typescript. That will give you the average number of words per line, and then you need only multiply the total number of lines by this average. The total thus obtained will be quite enough for all practical purposes.

If you do your own typewriting, you will soon find that your page of typescript works out at a more or less constant number of words.

With ordinary spacing and good margins, a page of typescript usually runs from 200 to 250 words. Find out what your own particular average is and there will be no more counting difficulties.

Always leave a good margin on the left-hand side of the paper; never begin right at the top of the sheet; and never type right down to the very foot.

Never use "single spacing." (In other words, never let your typewritten lines be quite close to one another.)

Good margins and clear spacing between the lines make the manuscript look much nicer. Above all they make it easier to read, and they facilitate the work of the sub-editor.

Keep your manuscript fresh and clean. This is

most important. No pains should be spared to give the impression that it is new and is being sent out for the first time, no matter how many journeys it may have made. Re-type whenever necessary. It is a good plan to use quarto, or even smaller paper, and to fold your manuscript once only, so that ugly creases do not destroy its neat appearance.

Never roll your manuscript. Always send it flat.

Always enclose a sufficiently stamped envelope, addressed to yourself, if you want your manuscript to be returned.

Editors do their utmost to return all manuscripts they cannot use, but they are not obliged to do so, and, if no stamped addressed envelope has been enclosed, they can hardly be expected to make good the omission themselves.

The Dispatch Book.

Whether you send out only one article in a month, or several every week, a dispatch book is most useful. In it you should write the title of the article, the paper to which it is sent, and the date. If it is returned, enter that date also, and the date and paper to which you will send it next, and so on, until you can enter the date of publication. This will show you how a manuscript that may have been sent out to many papers unsuccessfully occasionally "finds a home" when you have given up all hope.

Three Don'ts.

Don't send the same article simultaneously to various newspapers. Otherwise you may commit

the unpardonable error of *selling* the same article to more than one paper. That would at once destroy any hopes of having a further article accepted.

Don't send the same article twice to the same paper. You will waste postage and annoy the editor. Your dispatch book will prevent this kind of careless error.

Don't write long letters to the editor, telling him about your domestic affairs, or that you have read his journal all your life. The article will be accepted or rejected only on its merits.

It is generally better to send no letter at all. If any explanation is essential, make it as brief as possible.

The Newspaper Touch.

The golden rule which I might lay down for those who would write for the press is to get the "newspaper touch," by which I mean a clear, concise and crisp style.

Read the leading articles of any newspaper, even those of the "highbrow" school, and you will find hardly an unnecessary word, or a word which could be effectively substituted for a simpler one.

Possibly the reason why newspaper articles are written so simply, and yet so comprehensively, is that the journalist has no time for literary embroidery. That is where the writer with more leisure to turn out an article often makes the obvious and fatal mistake. Instead of expressing himself clearly, he merely tries to be clever.

You must bear in mind that the greatest achievement of the writer is to interest, and not to puzzle,

his readers. The tendency towards grandiloquence must be checked. Even the venerable Dr. Johnson was not immune from the fault of affectation.

Macaulay, in one of his essays, says: "The expressions which came first to his (Dr. Johnson's) tongue, were simple, energetic and picturesque. When he wrote for publication he did his sentences out of English into Johnsonese.

"His *Letters from the Hebrides to Mrs. Thrale* are the original of the work of which the *Journey to the Hebrides* is the translation; and it is amusing to compare the two versions. 'When we were walking upstairs,' says he in one of his letters, 'a dirty fellow bounced out of the bed on which one of us was to lie.'

"This incident is recorded in the *Journey* as follows: 'Out of the beds, on which we were to repose, started up, at our entrance, a man as black as Cyclops from the forge.'"

I am convinced that, if you will but take heed of this rule—to write in simple, clear terms—you will have journeyed far along the road to success in writing.

The Vigilant Sub-Editor.

Probably most of you are aware that one of the most important personages in a newspaper office is the sub-editor. In fact, in most offices there are a dozen or more sub-editors. (I include in the term "sub-editor" the various specialized editors, such as the editors of the literary and of the woman's pages.)

The sub-editor's job is to "lick into shape" the many news articles (or "stories,' which is the newspaper term) that come in daily from local correspondents all over the world. Many of these correspondents are good newsgetters, but they lack the newspaper touch.

In other words, they obtain valuable information without being able to present it in proper style. Therefore the sub-editor who "handles the story" has to dot the "i's" and cross the "t's" and sometimes to rewrite the whole article.

Now you will realize that, while the sub-editor is bound to do this in the case of news which is urgently needed for the newspaper, he is in no way prepared to be so lenient in the case of an outside contributor —the free-lance.

Unless the untrained writer happened to send in a piece of information of definite news interest, his article would not stand a ghost of a chance of being printed. It is, therefore, of first importance to you to avoid errors that exasperate the sub-editor.

The Importance of the Paragraph.

The first way to achieve this end is to learn to paragraph your article. The long rigmarole paragraph is in the worst possible style. It is even worse than the needlessly long word. After all, the greatest story ever written consisted of a single sentence and of ten words only: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

It is impossible to give a definite rule for the length of paragraphs, but it is my strong opinion

that, for the amateur at all events, and very possibly for the rest of us as well, any paragraph that contains more than 60 words should be looked at with dark suspicion. And probably it should be rewritten and divided up.

I attach a good deal of importance to this question of short paragraphs, but I should like you to convince yourselves that they are really advisable.

In the first place, an article that is broken up into short paragraphs looks brighter and more attractive.

See for yourself. Take any daily newspaper and notice how the short paragraphs help to "liven" the page. Compare an article on the news pages of a paper like this with, say, a financial report of a company meeting, which goes on through an entire column almost without a break.

Again, the short paragraph has more force (more "punch," as the Americans would say) than the long one. It expresses a clear idea or a simple fact without a cumbersome vanguard and rearguard of other ideas and facts.

And, finally, the short paragraph wins the heart of that important fellow, the sub-editor, about whom I have just been writing. It makes his work much easier for him.

It is an unhappy thought, but I am bound to add that short paragraphs are much easier to "cut" than long ones. Your manuscript may be considered suitable, but too long, and the sub-editor will have to use his blue pencil on it.

When your paragraphs are short and easy to cut down (or even cut out) the sub-editor will bless you.

When they are long, involved and cumbersome, he will do the other thing. Moreover, he may be tempted to discard the entire article.

Better an article that has been "cut" and published than one which comes back to the author intact and unused.

Short Sentences.

Just as I believe most strongly in short paragraphs, so I believe in short sentences.

There must be exceptions to every rule, and sometimes, it may be, a sentence of thirty or forty words can hardly be avoided. The beginner, however, need not trouble about exceptions. He may take it, unconditionally, that a very long sentence is a bad sentence.

Simplicity and clarity are essential in writing for the press. Make each sentence convey one clear meaning without possibility of confusion. Convey that meaning, moreover, in as few words as possible.

Short Words.

After the short paragraph and the short sentence, the short word. I assure you that, *provided it expresses your exact meaning, a short word is always better than a long one.*

Don't misunderstand me. Long words are entirely justifiable when they convey a meaning or a shade of meaning that cannot be conveyed by shorter ones.

The first and most important step towards good style is a SPARTAN SIMPLICITY OF DICTION.

Nine-tenths of the articles and stories which appear in the newspapers answer to this first qualification. It is only here and there that the special correspondent is given a free hand to paint word pictures. Moreover, he who is permitted this privilege by a severely practical editor must be a very special correspondent indeed.

Even then the chief sub-editor, jealous of his space, may be heard to murmur, "Hang the fellow! Couldn't he say what he wanted in half the length?"

Brevity, says the proverb, is the soul of wit. It is certainly the beginning of wisdom for the free-lance journalist.

CHAPTER II

THE key to the news—Pay your penny: take your choice—Details that count—Studying the medium—Special tendencies—A comparative examination—Files—"The sub-editor speaks"—General reading.

Now I want to talk about the general preparation for free-lance work.

If you mean to make money by writing for the press, you must read the newspapers.

It is of vital importance not only to read *a* newspaper, but to grow familiar with many newspapers, and to know the particular papers for which you hope to write, intimately and completely. To this end one should learn how to read a newspaper.

The editorial (or literary) page is, of course, the headquarters of the newspaper. Here one can study the political and social campaigns and the big literary offensives that emanate from the editorial board.

The Key to the News.

In the leading articles you may read of the whole purpose of the newspaper. Study these, and you will understand better how certain *news* is presented.

For instance, during the now ancient Ruhr crisis, Lord Rothermere, the then virtual proprietor of the *Daily Mail*, *Evening News*, *Daily Mirror*, and *Sunday Dispatch*, supported the French policy.

By reading the leading articles in these newspapers

you could have perceived that the proprietor held the view that France had the right to remain in the Ruhr, and that the British Government was wrong in embarrassing her ally.

Consequently, in the news pages you would have found that all items which were favourable to this policy were emphasized—say, by pointed headings or heavy type and good display—while news items which were favourable to Germany were given less space and small headlines in such a way as to minimize their importance.

In the *News Chronicle* one could observe the same system, but with the effect reversed. This newspaper was opposed to the occupation of the Ruhr, and therefore gave prominence to such news as would indicate failure on the part of France in the occupied area.

This is not unfair journalism. It simply indicates that it is possible for each newspaper, just as it is possible for the legal advocate, to give as favourable a view of its own case as possible.

I have said that one should read not only a paper, but many papers. Personally, I read at least half a dozen of the principal morning and evening papers daily.

In reading the *Daily Mail* and the *Evening News* (and on Sundays the *Sunday Dispatch*) I am conscious that I am taking in Lord Rothermere's particular views. In reading the *News Chronicle* I am aware that in the evening its views will be reinforced by the *Star*, which is, by the way, one of the best sub-edited papers in Fleet Street.

In the *Daily Express* and the *Evening Standard* I shall find what Lord Beaverbrook thinks, and I know that at the week-end I shall again read his opinions in that bright weekly newspaper, the *Sunday Express.*

Pay Your Penny: Take Your Choice.

You pay your penny and you take your choice. As a journalist, however, my choice is for all of them. To read all is to know all—all, at any rate, that is going on in the literary hives of Fleet Street.

It is unfortunate that most of you have to make a choice in reading newspapers. The best you can do in the circumstances is to read a morning paper of one political colour and an evening paper of another. That will enable you to attain a broader outlook.

It is vital to know what are the views and inclinations of any given newspaper before sending in a contribution.

I have given the instance of the Ruhr question. It would have been foolish and a waste of time to send an article to the *Daily Mail* pointing out how nobly the Germans were resisting in the Ruhr. Nor would it have been much use at that time to have sent in an appreciation of Mr. Baldwin.

Details that Count.

Quite apart from all questions of politics, it is absolutely essential to know your paper in its smallest details. Each newspaper has its "penchant." Were you to send the most cleverly written article, attempting to prove the existence of supernatural

forces to the *Daily Express*, or to any of the allied newspapers, you would not stand "the ghost" of a chance of its being accepted. Similarly, those newspapers which are rather inclined to believe in occultism would be reluctant to print an attack upon spiritualism, while an orthodox religious paper would probably welcome such an attack.

There is so much that a newspaper may print which is in accordance with its own views that it is perhaps justified in "turning down" articles which are antagonistic.

Studying the Medium.

Quite apart from these broad indications of newspaper policy, there are many subtler tendencies which require careful study. For instance, the *Daily Express* has the human touch, the *News Chronicle* the literary touch, the *Daily Mail* the news touch, and the *Daily Herald* the political touch. All like common-sense articles on everyday matters affecting the home, such as dietetics, exercises, and what to wear.

Each shows a penchant for occasional psychological articles, which may deal with men, women, marriage, love, some attribute or failing of women, different types of women, etc.

These papers are also partial to articles with a topical touch. The literary editors sometimes "hold up" a promising article for some little time, waiting for some news item which will make it topical. He then gives it the necessary timely opening.

One of my first contributions to the *Daily Express*

was when I was still at school. It was just a little article deploring the wearing of the tight corset!

I knew that it would be published, because I had studied the paper.

Other early contributions of mine, published again when I was a boy, appeared in the *Morning Leader* (now amalgamated with the *News Chronicle*). In each case I had most carefully and thoughtfully studied the paper before I wrote.

Special Tendencies.

This preliminary study of newspapers must be exhaustive, and should not stop short of social and political subjects. Every possible phase of discussion may be presented in widely differing ways, and no two journals are likely to follow identical lines.

Certain newspapers make a particular appeal to women. Others take a special interest in scientific subjects and the progress of invention. The *Daily Mail*, for instance, has a definite partiality for matters scientific. A new star (astronomical) will provide as great a sensation in its columns as will a new star (theatrical) in the columns of the *Daily Sketch*, or in those of other picture papers.

Later on I will give you a list of the various newspapers and periodicals, with the special subjects each prefers. For the moment, however, I want you to think for yourself. Get different newspapers each week and seek this knowledge of their varied needs. It would be a good thing to make a written record of your conclusions.

A Comparative Examination.

You might, for example, *make a comparative examination of the articles* in the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *News Chronicle*, and the *Daily Herald.* Examine each of these papers over a week or a fortnight, and tabulate your results. Divide the published articles into main subject groupings, and subdivide as you think best.

A very interesting tabulated chart can be made in this way, and it is surprising how your comprehension of the literary page market will be enlarged by even a week's careful and thoughtful study.

Before leaving this important subject of newspaper reading I must explain that, although I have referred to London papers only, I wish most definitely to include your own local paper if you do not happen to live in London.

Some of the bigger provincial papers are as well edited and as instructive as any London journal. In many cases, too, they supply an excellent market for the outside contributor's work, and I may add that many a London writer has first "got into print" in the provincial press. It is, indeed, the best training ground for the beginner.

The newspapers issued in the smaller towns are obviously of less interest to the free-lance journalist, because they offer little or no market for his work.

Finally, it must be remembered that, however admirable may be your local newspaper, the London newspapers have a nation-wide circulation, and, from that point of view, you should certainly make yourself familiar with them and their requirements.

At present I am dealing only with *newspapers*—for I hold that the beginner should regard them as the very first market to be entered, but if you propose to write for any other type of paper—the informative and the humorous weeklies, for example—the same advice holds good.

It is absolutely necessary to have a thorough knowledge of the medium for which you want to write.

Files.

It is an excellent idea for those who have the time and opportunity to visit the newspaper offices themselves. The great London papers are nearly all situated in Fleet Street or in the immediate neighbourhood. Go into these offices and study the files. Each newspaper keeps in its public offices at least two files containing back numbers. If you are a country student, and consequently cannot visit Fleet Street, there is always the office of your local newspaper, and, moreover, there are always the free libraries which provide splendid opportunities for all.

Go and study the files for yourself. The best time is in the afternoon. Particularly, if you live in London, visit the British Museum, the greatest of all our free institutions, and there you may examine the files of every newspaper, from the first number onwards.

"The Sub-editor Speaks."

It is difficult to exaggerate the educational value of intelligent file studying. Rudyard Kipling, who

was a true journalist long before he became a great author, emphasized its importance in a clever jingle, written in 1903, under the title of *The Files.*

This is how the verses begin—

"Files—
The Files—
Office Files!
Oblige me by referring to the Files.
Every question man can raise,
Every phrase of every phase
Of that question is on record in the Files—
Threshed out threadbare—Fought and finished in the Files."

General Reading.

I do not need to say anything further about newspaper reading just now, but literary aspirants have so often asked me for advice as to their *general reading* that I think a word on the subject is advisable here.

Any reading and all reading on every possible subject may be of value to the free-lance journalist. He cannot read too widely and no subject is too odd, too abstruse, too insignificant, or too little understood to merit attention.

That, you will say, is a tall order and an impossible programme. Of course; but I want to emphasize the fact that knowledge of any kind may be of value to the free-lance journalist.

For practical purposes I strongly advise the beginner to include in his reading programme—

1. Books and articles dealing with current events

and living persons, e.g. when there is trouble in the Balkans, read about the country and the places "in the news," and try to bring *new ideas* to bear on the subject.

2. Literary matter dealing with your favourite subject or your special hobby—if you are sufficiently interested, definite specialization may be worth while.

3. Any literary matter dealing with picturesque, or odd, or little known places, peoples or subjects.

These are general suggestions—no more than that—but are enough to indicate how the beginner may extend his programme of reading.

CHAPTER III

BUILD up a library—The idea book—The tenth idea—New lamps for old—Several tags to one string—Seeing what others miss—Hats and their wearers—The genesis of ideas—Hidden in the news.

PEOPLE have often asked me what I regard as the first essential in successful free-lance work. Without hesitation I have replied: "The ability to find ideas."

A first-class and original idea is always saleable.

That is worth remembering. It stands to reason that if a good idea is presented in the form of a well-written article of suitable length, its value is increased. It is equally obvious that clever writing and good style are valuable additions to any idea.

But—and this is what many beginners are apt to forget—no amount of fine writing, no care in presentation, can make a saleable article out of something which has no originality of idea behind it.

The successful free-lance journalist is one who is fertile in ideas, and who can present them to the best advantage and at the most favourable time.

In the previous chapter I recommended, among other things, a study of newspaper files.

Used intelligently, newspaper files are an inexhaustible mine of *new* ideas. They should not be used, as they sometimes are, by those completely devoid of all originality of thought and expression, who try to sell articles painfully compiled from old press cuttings.

Even these rehashed articles, spiced with a little originality, sometimes sell, but at the best the market for this kind of work is very limited, and includes no publications of real repute. Payment is pitifully small and, above all, the mere submission of this kind of work brands the writer as incapable of creative effort.

I have purposely given this warning immediately after giving the reader my strong advice to become a student of the files. I hope my meaning is clear.

From an educative point of view, and as a source of inspiration, the files are invaluable. Do not, however, rely on them as a mine from which one may dig cheap guineas. Certainly you may refer to them for facts, figures and statements, but these should be used to reinforce your own ideas or your latest information.

Build Up a Library.

You will have, on occasions, to refer back to articles on certain subjects which are always recurring. The editorial staffs in newspaper offices, in fact, would have considerable hardships without files. Their work is facilitated by a reference back to what has already been written. There is no reason why the outside contributor should not, therefore, do the same.

Every writer on social and political topics must rely, to a large extent, on the newspaper files. Fortunately for the man on the staff of a newspaper, he has no need to toil painfully through the files themselves in order to find what he wants.

Each newspaper office has a library, with books and a librarian, whose chief duty is to collect from each day's newspapers cuttings of articles and news items that may be needed for future reference. These he places in separate envelopes under a separate subject index.

The wise contributor will follow suit, and gradually build up a library of his own. Such a library of cuttings will in time become extremely valuable.

The Idea Book.

Reinforce this gold-mine of information by keeping an idea book, as distinct from books of cuttings. Such an individual idea book will probably give you even greater satisfaction, since it is your own property, and its mining rights are exclusive.

The idea book, as distinct from a book of cuttings, is simply a collection of any odd or stray ideas that may occur to you, or may be suggested by something you happen to read.

A quotation from a poem, an extract from a speech, a witticism, a spoonerism, an odd saying, a newspaper heading, even an extract from a parliamentary report —each or any of these that strike your fancy should be jotted down at once into your idea book.

One day, as happens with nearly all writers, the fount of your inspiration may run dry. A glance at your idea book may offer the solace of a spring in the arid desert.

When you are in doubt, never hesitate to enter up any idea that passes across your mind. Delay is fatal. O. Henry, the famous American short

story writer, once said in a conversation with a friend: "One day I am going to write a story about a boy spoiled by good influences." He died before the story was written.

The Tenth Idea.

Nine-tenths of your ideas will probably never be "written up," but the tenth may supply you with a fine article. *Never run the risk of losing a good idea.*

I have had the opportunity of looking through very many idea books, and the variety of individual tastes displayed was both remarkable and instructive. One can almost judge the man from his idea book.

As I have emphasized, an idea book must not be regarded as a source for future plagiarisms. It is true that there are very few ideas which are absolutely original, but it is admirable discipline and training to think for oneself.

When you refer to your idea book it should be merely in order to start some new train of thought. You may discover a dozen different subjects for articles which have already been treated, but upon which you can throw fresh light. The old subject, considered from another angle and brightly presented, can thus often provide a saleable manuscript.

New Lamps for Old.

Aladdin's wife made a bad bargain when she exchanged an old lamp for a new one. But the first duty of a journalist is to change his old ideas for new ones. There are many ways in which this exchange can be effected.

Every subject treated in the press has been treated before by a myriad writers, and will be treated again, but the old story, if it is to "go down" with the editor, must have a "new end to it." The competent free-lance always tries to look at his subject from some fresh angle, and the resultant article, brightly and refreshingly written, escapes the deadly failing of triteness.

The other day, for instance, I cycled out to the seaside—surely the most commonplace of "adventures," described and redescribed again and again. I found "a new end" to the story, however, and wrote an article on how it felt to be left behind by the thousands of cars which flashed by me.

The subject of dangerous driving happened to be uppermost in the daily press at that time, and so I was able to turn out in addition a saleable manuscript describing my experience at the hands of the road hogs.

Several Tags to One String.

There also happened to be a light side to my little adventure. Riding along at a leisurely pace I assumed the rôle of detective. I was able to judge the kinds of cars which had preceded me by the imprints of their tyres upon the newly tarred road. Here was a nut which had shaken loose and fallen to the road while the unsuspecting motorist drove on. I hoped that I might find the bolt not very far off, and sure enough within a hundred yards I did find one.

"My dear Watson," said I to myself, "it's all perfectly simple. We shall overtake the car in due course

with an exasperated driver wondering what is wrong, and we shall be able to help him," and so it proved. This little development of my ride also supplied me with material for an article which I published.

You must understand that the articles to which I have just referred were exceedingly slight. I should not have mentioned them except to show you how very simple it is, if you are a journalist, or if you have a mind trained to observe, to " write up " almost any happening, however trivial, and turn your writing into money.

Seeing What Others Miss.

Flaubert, the great French story writer, once said to Maupassant, his equally gifted successor : " Everything which one desires to express must be looked at with sufficient attention, and during a sufficiently long time, to discover in it some aspect which no one has as yet seen or described. In everything there is still some spot unexplored, because we are accustomed only to use our eyes with the recollection of what others before us have thought on the subject which we contemplate. The smallest object contains something unknown."

Flaubert was simply telling de Maupassant what the experienced editor tells his cub reporter in other words : " My dear boy, I *know* it's an old story, *but get a new end to it.*"

Hats and Their Wearers.

Before I pass on I should like to give just one other example of the birth of an idea. I was lunch-

ing one day with the director of a famous publishing house. In the lobby of the restaurant he said to me, apropos of nothing in particular, "I wish you would wear a decent hat, instead of one which looks as if it belonged to a farmer."

Now I like wearing hats for comfort rather than for appearance, but that hat of mine had been pretty severely criticized on several previous occasions. I refused to give up an old friend, but the criticism was the germ of an idea which developed into an article on "My Hat!" a little sketch which suggested that the man was measured in the world's view very much by the standard of the hat he wore.

The Genesis of Ideas.

From the foregoing paragraphs I hope I may have shown how many ideas are obtainable merely by wideawake observation of persons and things, and how many others are suggested in conversation with friends and acquaintances.

These are ideas which are, more or less, given away to every one. They are windfalls, and anybody can have them for the trouble of picking them up.

Such ideas are very valuable, and no good journalist despises them. But I do not think they are enough for any literary man to live on.

There is another type of idea altogether, which I may describe as the synthetic idea—the idea that is deliberately and consciously built up by the enterprising writer.

I regard this kind of idea as particularly valuable for newspaper purposes, and that fact may explain

my advice—given in the last chapter—in regard to the beginner's general reading.

Later on I shall have something to say about the great importance of "news value." In regard to idea-finding it is enough to mention here that an idea which has some bearing upon, or some reference to, current news is of greater market value than any other.

Hidden in the News.

Now, just as an article—which is the finished product of the writer's idea—may advantageously refer to "something which is *news*," so real news will often contain the germ of an article not yet written.

The free-lance journalist should always read the news with a view to its less obvious suggestions of ideas.

A host of competitors will seize upon the obvious idea. The successful writer finds—or rather builds up—a new one of his own.

Probably one or two examples will best illustrate my meaning.

It happened recently that there was a series of country-house fires reported in the daily press.

The obvious ideas suggested by this news included Previous Historic Fires—Fire Brigade Organization—Masterpieces the World has Lost—and so on indefinitely, according to the particular report under consideration.

Let me make it clear that this kind of idea—and its resultant article—is not to be despised, if the article be well written with enough good and interesting facts, or statistics, or anecdotes to illustrate

it. Such articles *must* be well written however, and must have substance if they are to reach print—for they will have to compete with many other articles of just the same kind.

The idea-builder reads the news in a different way, looking for the unusual idea.

One such idea-builder happened to notice in one of the reports that a good deal of damage was caused —quite apart from the fire itself—by the fall of a large water tank. The tank had apparently rested on wooden beams at the top of the house. The beams gave way and the tank simply crashed through all obstruction to the ground floor.

Please note that the original report of the fire did not say all this. The idea builder thought it out.

Why did the tank crash through everything? Why is a water tank so heavy? How much does water weigh? What precautions should be taken to prevent this sort of accident?

I suppose, for I do not know the author of the resultant article, that these questions were asked, looked into and answered.

The result was an article which appeared, and which well deserved to appear, in a leading daily newspaper. That article was the finished form of a synthetic idea.

One more illustration of the synthetic idea. This one did not come directly from the newspapers, although it went back to them in article form.

A certain young man lunched nearly every day upon bread and cheese, washed down by a draught

of bitter ale. His beer sometimes cost him fourpence-halfpenny, sometimes fourpence, and sometimes only threepence half-penny.

He discovered that in many public houses "a bitter" meant "a glass of beer" and that "a glass" did not mean a "half-pint."

That discovery led him to build up not one, but a whole series of ideas. It was made just about the time when food values and food frauds were topics of general discussion in the press.

The young man's first article was one on measures that are not measures at all (I think he called it "extreme measures").

Then he studied the law on this subject—at least to the extent of visiting the British Museum and doing some intelligent reading. That gave him another article on the rights of customers.

There were several more articles from his pen, all carefully constructed, all built up from nothing but his own *deliberately sought ideas.*

Instances of this kind could be multiplied indefinitely. I do not think, however, that further illustrations are necessary.

I will conclude this chapter with this reiterated advice—

When you read the news, or when life and experience present you with "stories" of your own, look for those ideas which are not immediately obvious and build them into something new and original.

CHAPTER IV

ROUSE curiosity—Three great themes—Articles on women—Women and sport—Money—Health and food—Informative articles—Specialized information—Are you a specialist?—Those dreadful people.

BECAUSE the choice of subject is so immensely important, I find it necessary to supplement my general remarks upon idea-finding with a more particular consideration of this problem.

In the previous chapter I mentioned how a commonplace cycle ride suggested to me a subject for three articles, which I afterwards wrote. While it is possible that the cycle ride would have suggested nothing to you, it is also possible that some equally trivial happening might give you inspiration, whereas it would be passed unnoticed by myself.

Before going farther, I should like to give you one particular instance of very simple subject-finding.

On my desk I have before me a dictionary. Now, millions of people handle this precious book without realizing that there is a " story " in it. The average man or woman is very shy of the dictionary.

We shall suppose that we are writing an article about our shyness for the dictionary. A good title is necessary. *The Book of Blushes* would be perhaps rather too " cheap." *The Book We Hide* would be more intriguing.

In justification of the first title, I could give an actual illustration from my own experience. A friend of mine was searching through his pockets for

his diary to which he wished to refer for my benefit. In mistake he pulled out a small pocket dictionary. I never saw greater embarrassment in a man of letters.

Why he should have felt so ashamed to be caught with a dictionary in his pocket I cannot imagine.

The two greatest books in the world are the Bible and the dictionary, and if the theological student is proud to carry with him the former, why should the literary student be shy of carrying with him the latter ?

Among the books of reference that one finds on the average man's desk the dictionary is conspicuously missing. It does not necessarily follow that the book is not within reach. Quite possibly it is hidden away in the nearest drawer.

Rouse Curiosity.

What is the reason for this reluctance to acknowledge the use of the second greatest book in the world ? The fear, no doubt, of being regarded as a " swallower of the dictionary," always the object of the schoolboy's derision.

Perhaps in reading this, some of you may say: " This is certainly true, but I had not noticed it before."

If you can make your reader say this to himself about every article you write, you are well on the way to becoming a successful contributor.

Once you have by practice gained the power to see the small things in life from a new angle, it is easy enough to utilize a thousand and one

trivial happenings as material for short newspaper "stories."

A word dropped in the course of conversation, a little incident in the railway carriage, an association of ideas—say, the placard of a morning paper that recalls some more or less directly connected episode of your own, or of a friend's life—an exchange of biting repartee between two chauffeurs, any one of these things may provide the seed that will germinate to produce the published article.

For instance, a former secretary, who was entirely new to the literary market when she first came into my employ, found a ready opening in the daily newspapers. It may be of interest to quote part of a letter which she sent to me at a later date—

"In the case of nearly every article I write, the law of association applies. For instance, with one article I thought of two points, women and listening. Now what can be said that is new about these?

"The general idea that a woman is a good listener would be of no interest, even if it were true. I thought of several of my women friends who made a pretence of listening to others speak, but betrayed their lack of interest by a monosyllabic 'yes' or 'no,' which they interspersed as a contribution on their side.

"The fact was that they were not listening. I thereupon hit upon the idea of showing the little tricks that women resort to in the vain endeavour to pretend to an interest in other people's conversation, and I showed how the really interested listener's face expressed what she was feeling. I called the

article *Her Listening Face*, and it was printed, though under a different title, in a morning newspaper."

Three Great Themes.

It is worth while to make an analysis of newspaper subjects.

The majority of ideas of extraneous origin may be classified as touching upon one of three great themes: Sex, Money, and Health. Directly or indirectly, the free-lance cannot hope to escape them.

A comparison between the sexes on practically every subject under the sun can be exploited. The old query: "Does a woman age sooner than a man?" has been followed by a million and one similar sex queries.

Articles on Women.

There is always something new happening to the sexes. For instance, of late years, women have begun to take an interest in boxing matches. Hence the subjects: Are women fond of boxing? Do they idealize boxers? Should they attend boxing matches? Is woman's sensitiveness becoming blunted? Has woman the brutal instinct?

One could give endless variations on the same theme. Latterly, too, many more women have achieved success as novelists than there were in the Victorian days. They no longer have to resort to a masculine *nom de plume* in order to obtain a hearing. Then the question suggests itself: What sort

of books do they write ? Do they understand human nature ? Are their menfolk heroes or otherwise ? Are women novelists generous to each other ? In reviewing each other's books are they unbiased ?

Some of these ideas have been used. Some have not. Others could easily be thought out.

Women and Sport.

Another modern tendency is the popularity of sport among women. Women are playing football and cricket to-day, where in the old days they contented themselves with croquet and a little tennis. What is the effect of these more violent exercises upon a woman's physique ? Does sport for women make for safe motherhood ? Is the constitution of women such that the use of muscles which should be rested has a deterrent effect upon her future offspring ? Does golf, another sport which has come into great popular feminine favour, tend to bring out the mannishness in women ? And so on.

In five minutes I could suggest dozens of articles of the same type, and be it noticed that I have referred only to women. I have not touched upon men, or upon men and women, or upon boys and girls, or of women and children, but you will readily appreciate for yourself the vast range of topics and ideas that can be grouped under the general heading of Sex.

Money.

The next theme is *money*. The value of money and its significance has been impressed more upon

this generation than it has ever been before. The fanciful flights of modern currencies have never been so spectacular in history. They have formed the themes of ponderous political articles, of discourses on economy, of financial treatises, and of a thousand and one little articles on the social aspect.

Will money go out of fashion altogether? Shall we go back to the old truck system when articles used to be exchanged for services rendered, instead of money? The oldest of themes, that money is the root of all evil, suggests a hundred different subjects. Does money make for unhappiness? Which country has the most money; is it the most peaceful, the happiest?

I need hardly say that the money theme is not restricted to currency. It includes the vastly important questions of prices, of incomes and expenditures, of allowances, of taxes and revenue, of imports and exports, and so on almost indefinitely.

Health and Food.

A topic that is always popular is the effect of certain food on the health. Years ago Mr. Eustace Miles must have made a fortune in the innumerable articles he contributed on this subject to the newspapers and periodicals. Latterly I have noticed this has not been done so much. Why, I do not know, unless it be that there is not another Eustace Miles available.

I throw out the suggestion that study in this direction might be remunerative.

With the coming into fashion of new diseases, it

is generally possible to associate these with certain foods or certain habits.

This might suggest an article on the Fallacies in Food Values. Go over the generally accepted ideas of the value of food, bring them up to date by the aid of a doctor friend, or, if he is not available, get some of the innumerable standard works on food and make a comparison.

To come down to modern days again. Does dancing, interspersed with food, promote indigestion? If it does, then the modern woman who likes to disport her beauty in the ballroom, what time she dances between the courses, will suffer a rude awakening when one day she looks into her mirror!

There are endless ideas which could be worked into saleable articles, all based upon the health theme.

For instance, the subject of those two dreadful maladies, cancer and consumption, although they have been written about again and again will continue to supply copy for the free-lance until the days of that millennium in which both scourges shall have disappeared.

Here, again, a new angle is needed. A friend of mine, who knew nothing about either subject, wrote columns on the fact that the discoverer of a new serum was on the point of starvation.

I must mention in parenthesis that while any subject relating to health or ill-health is nearly always saleable, because it interests such a large section of the community, it is better in a general way to choose happier subjects. You will usually find that articles about any particular illness are written "By a

Physician," or "By a Specialist," since, with this type of article, the public demands the necessary touch of authenticity. Nevertheless, as I have shown by the example of my friend, there are any number of incidental ideas deriving directly from the health theme.

You may remember that the hero of Barrie's *When a Man's Single* was a young and struggling journalist. In his early days he, too, was constantly on the look-out for new ideas, and I remember that he turned out a "story" describing the wholly imaginary terrors of the knobbed walking-stick, a deadly instrument, likely, in his fertile imagination, to set up cancer of the hand.

It probably would not be wise to draw wholly on one's imagination for ideas of this kind, but a little reflection will lead you to all kinds of "query articles." By a query article, I mean one which is based upon the propounding of some rather novel question, such, for example, as "Do high heels produce spinal trouble?"

Informative Articles.

Although the majority of informative articles could, strictly speaking, be classified under one of the main theme headings, yet they should really be considered as being rather in a class of their own. Such articles are in particular request for the popular twopenny weeklies. Figures and facts for this kind of story should always be brought up to date. That the paper used in one edition of a popular novel would stretch from London to John o' Groats

is an instance of the kind of calculation which has been rather overdone, and which is almost always inaccurate.

On the other hand, there are thousands of interesting points which can be gleaned from any encyclopaedia and which, properly handled, can be made to interest the general public. One important point in regard to *Tit-Bits*, *Answers*, *Pearson's Weekly*, and that class of popular weekly, is to remember in sending topical articles that they go to press a fortnight and sometimes three weeks in advance of the date of publication.

Specialized Information.

The informative article is always greatly strengthened if you have special knowledge of the subject which you are treating. If, for example, you happen to have a printer among your friends, you might get from him a good deal of highly technical, but very interesting, information. You could not pass that information on to the public in a strictly technical manner, but you could use your friend's knowledge as the foundation for a bright, informative article, full of facts newly presented, and therefore interesting.

Are You a Specialist?

Nearly everyone has specialized knowledge of one kind or another. You should know more about your own special occupation than does the man in the street. Therefore you can probably write an interesting article keeping strictly to your own "line of

country." So many people are apt to think that no one else can be interested in work which they themselves, owing to long habit, find commonplace and possibly dull.

Get the maximum out of your environment. Don't waste specialized experience, whether in the office or in the home. Remember that little " stories " of the home are in very great demand.

" Domestic " stories will probably come more easily to women writers, but they have also been treated with great success by men of ready sympathy and trained observance.

Those Dreadful People.

For example, when your wife tells you that you must be home early because she is having those dreadful Robinson's in to dinner and bridge, that might suggest quite a number of small articles. You know that she detests the Robinson's; you know equally well that the very mention of their name drives you to think of an imaginary prior engagement, and both of you also know that the Robinson's reciprocate your dislike. Yet you realize that that same evening, after dinner, four people animated by a mutual antipathy will pass a deplorably dull evening, playing insufferably bad bridge. Why ?

There is an immense amount of material here. The whole psychology of man and woman is illustrated in the bridge-party-you-cannot-escape ! The tyranny of bridge, the ties of convention, the restrictions of Suburbia, the married man's obligations, and

the married woman's almost automatic efforts at maintaining her place in a social circle with which she may be profoundly bored, are all possible aspects of this single incident. Moreover, each one of these separate aspects may be handled in quite a variety of ways. Of late, little dialogue articles between husband and wife, spiced with observation and humour, have been finding very ready acceptance.

At your office, a heated altercation between two jealous heads of different departments might suggest an eminently suitable article on "Man—The Baby!" or you might prefer to treat the incident as a peg on which to hang a psychological study illustrating the dwarfing influence upon character of big administrative systems.

If you are a schoolmaster or a schoolmistress, the boys and girls under your care should supply you with an inexhaustible fund of material for free-lance work. Every occupation in this work-a-day world is capable of supplying the free-lance with saleable ideas, always provided he or she has vision. Now vision is essentially a quality that can be cultivated. Cultivate it!

It might be worth while to write a book which dealt with nothing but this very important question of idea-finding. I cannot give to it the space it really deserves because there are other matters of importance with which I must also deal in these pages.

Before closing this chapter, however, I do most earnestly advise the beginner to make idea-finding a part of his or her daily life.

I have already advised you to keep an idea book. Let me add that you should use this book to the utmost. As you gain experience, so you will be able, more readily and more certainly, to reject those ideas which cannot be worked up into saleable manuscript.

At first, however, you should remember that, although 90 per cent of the ideas you jot down may be worthless, the other 10 per cent may be of immense value. And you lose nothing by putting your idea on paper, whereas an idea you have allowed to escape may never be recaptured.

Don't be satisfied with looking only for your own ideas. Read the free-lance articles of other writers which are published in the daily papers, and try to guess how these writers built up their ideas.

The time will come when you will never be at a loss for some idea which is worth developing into an article and, above all, when you will never be at a loss for some idea which is associated, directly or indirectly, with the news.

CHAPTER V

News value—Danger of mere statements—Treatment of ideas—Don't use the first person—Don't be discursive—Title and "make-up"—A step farther—Opening paragraphs—How news is presented—Arrest attention—Sustaining the interest.

Because I am myself a professional journalist, some readers may be inclined to think that I have emphasized the importance of *idea-finding* too strongly. Should they ever look to free-lance work as a livelihood, however, I think they will change their minds.

They will also come to agree with me that next in importance to the finding of good ideas is the appreciation of *news value.*

In everything you write as a free-lance, stress the news value.

I am fully aware that articles have been, are being, and will continue to be published which have no direct value of any kind. If you could do it well enough, you might, for example, write (*and sell*) articles on the peculiar intelligence of your pet Pekinese, or the truly marvellous character interpretations of your favourite author.

Let me make it clear that I do not regard news value as *essential.*

At the same time let me make it equally clear that, given good style and presentation, the article which has some news value or topical interest stands a vastly better chance of acceptance than the article

which has neither the one nor the other and is of purely general interest.

News Value.

If it were possible to summon all the editors in London to a conference, and I were to ask them the essential point for which they looked in all contributions, they would all shout in unison, "NEWS!"

In every Fleet Street office the cry is the same: "WE WANT NEWS," and be it remembered that this applies not only to daily journalism, but to every description of writing.

Just as the slogan of the news editor is "NEWS" and "MORE NEWS," the motto on the portals of the literary editor's sanctum is "GIVE ME FACTS." Mr. Belloc wrote delightful essays, both *On Something* and *On Nothing*, but it takes a great free-lance to sell articles which have no *facts* as their foundation and *news* as their superstructure.

I think most readers will understand what I mean by "news value." It is obviously impossible for the majority of free-lance writers to turn out real, red-hot, genuine, unduplicated *news*.

If you happen to be experimenting with literary work in, say, Peckham, you would stand no chance of being first with the news of an unemployed riot in Manchester, or a revolution in Mexico.

Quite apart from local circumstances, the free-lance writer cannot hope to compete successfully with the professional news getter—the reporter and the special correspondent.

But you can hope to make your articles topical, to keep your writing in tune with what IS NEWS.

More often than not your choice of subject need not interfere. A little adroit manipulation will serve to present that subject from its news angle.

Danger of Mere Statements.

Be sure that your "facts" are not mere statements. If the daughter of the porter, whose wife is charwoman in the office down the street, says there have been certain dramatic happenings in that office, she is making a statement, but she is not necessarily relating a fact. The journalist becomes very conscious of human fallibility when he is sent out to investigate statements and find what *facts* they contain.

You are quite at liberty to take upon yourself the responsibility of making a statement, but if you do so, make that statement boldly. Always avoid the timorous use of "I think" or "I believe."

Don't think. *Know.*

Another point: In making use of any given facts, be sure that, to the majority of your readers, they are likely to be new facts, or at least that you are presenting new aspects of old facts. Always bring your facts right up to date, and always examine them from a new angle.

Treatment of Ideas.

The successful "treatment" of any idea is largely a matter of technique. Although wide and intelligent reading is invaluable to the free-lance,

and a sure guide to the final acquisition of technique, I should like, at this stage, to give you a little practical advice, both positive and negative, in regard to your treatment of ideas.

First of all: *Do not be egotistical.*

The new writer, especially, should be wary of this tendency. Neither the editor nor the reader wishes to know particularly what *you—John Smith*—think as an individual. As a matter of fact, the public is entirely uninterested in your personality or your opinions. For this reason *always treat your subject impersonally.*

Don't Use the First Person.

Obviously, if your article is to be impersonal, you *must* avoid the first person singular. If your article bristles with capital I's, it stands no chance. The tendency to use this first person singular form has condemned countless manuscripts to rejection at the very outset.

Naturally there are exceptions to every rule. A writer of assured reputation, writing authoritatively about a subject upon which he is an acknowledged expert, will probably give weight to his article by writing it in the first person.

Moreover, certain topics lend themselves to the first person method. If, for example, you were to write a literary page article, discussing the schoolgirl's opinion of her sisters who have just "come out," the first person singular might be used very effectively. Each writer's own intelligence, however, must be his best guide in this matter.

As a general rule, it is always better to avoid the first person singular.

Don't be Discursive.

In your treatment of any subject whatever, stick to your point right through. Don't wander.

A discursive article suggests that the writer is either uncertain of his subject or is deliberately "padding." This wearies the reader and kills the interest in the article itself. It is better by far to reduce your article to one half, or even a quarter, of its original length and stick to your point, than to turn out a lengthy manuscript full of irrelevancies and qualifications. Such an article is like listening to a washer-woman describing her emotions after a visit to the cinema.

American newspaper men use a special term—"snappy"—to describe what they consider a bright and telling article. In a "snappy story" the facts are marshalled with the least possible delay, and presented to the reader without a single wasted word. Furthermore, a "snappy story" ends on a logical climax, with a definite note of finality.

Title and "Make-up."

Having given you this negative advice, I want to follow it with something positive. You know what to avoid. Now learn what to cultivate.

It is very important that you should choose a good and telling title. Quite frequently a title will suggest itself before you have written your article. Indeed, a title may suggest an article. In actual practice

the title you choose will possibly not be used by the particular editor who accepts your article, but, provided your original title is a good one, the reason for its omission will be purely technical.

Newspaper and magazine type is made of metal and not of india-rubber. Consequently, there are only a certain number of letters that can be put into a line. Technically, each different size of type is said "to run so many ems to the line," the width of the letter "m" being taken as the standard.

Furthermore, if you study the pages of any newspaper, you will see that there is a careful symmetry—what is technically called "make-up"—in the arrangements of type and headings. The greater this symmetry, the better the balance of the various headings in each column, the more attractive is the general appearance of the page.

All this is technical journalism. The appearance of the page shows whether the paper has a good "make-up" editor or not. The make-up editor does nothing but arrange material supplied to him from the various editorial departments, and display it in the paper in the most attractive way.

Supposing you have written a little article which you have entitled "Commonsense Knocks Out the Communist," or "Communist Knocks Out the Capitalist," as you will. These are not bad titles, and are just sufficiently intriguing to make the reader at least glance through the first paragraph.

Let us further assume that your article has been accepted by a London daily newspaper. It has been passed by the sub-editor and is to be used on the

literary page. Possibly, exigencies of space will compel the "make-up" man to use this article at the head of, say, column five, and the title will have to balance the title for another article on, say, column three. The type chosen for the heading may contain only fifteen ems to the line and, for this reason only, your chosen title cannot be used. It simply won't fit.

This need not discourage you. The newspaper is quite capable of finding a good title that will fit. When you see your article in print, you may find that it has been called "Reds Found Unready," or "Reds Rout Capital," as the case may be.

The great thing I want to impress upon you is that, whether your original title is used or is not used in print, it is of great intrinsic importance. You need a "snappy" title to impress your *first* reader—the man who is going to buy your manuscript. After all, he is the reader who, to you, counts more than all the half million or so subscribers to the paper itself.

A Step Farther.

The really experienced free-lance goes a step farther. When he is writing definitely for one particular paper, he can judge fairly well where his article is likely to be used, and he will consequently give his story a title which will fit without alteration. This is a little thing, but close attention to details and the constant effort to save the editor trouble is always worth while.

If you were an editor, and had before you two

articles, equally good, one of which you could send to the printer without alteration, whereas the other required either a new title or just a little retouching, it is obvious that you will choose the former. Always bear this in mind.

It is *not necessary* to write titles to fit, because, even when the greatest care has been exercised it is quite possible that the "make-up" man may have to use a substitute. It *is* necessary to try to write the best and brightest title you can think of, so that you will, at least, capture the attention of your reader.

It is exceedingly difficult to say just what makes a good title. My strong advice to every beginner is that he or she should study the titles used in papers like the national daily newspapers, paying particular attention to those used on the editorial, or literary page.

Perhaps, also, a study of one or two American papers taken at random may be useful. I think much can be learned from American title and headline writing, but I hesitate to advise the beginner to read American papers; for, while there is much to admire in them, there is also much that should be avoided by the free-lance contributor to English newspapers.

In the matter of titles, however, one cannot deny that the American journalist is well trained. He always gives his story or articles a title likely to compel interest, or amusement, or attention of some sort.

And that is the great secret of successful title

writing. Get the point of your "story" into a pithy phrase and there's your title.

I would add that a *label title* is usually *not* advisable. By a "label title" I mean one which simply gives your article a name. The following are typical labels: "The Labour Question"; "Motoring in Surrey"; "Dostoievski, an Appreciation"; "The Care of Children," and so on.

Unless your choice of subject forbids, *get action into your titles. Use verbs, and active verbs rather than passive ones.*

Keep your titles very short. Generally speaking, a title should not exceed four words.

Avoid sub-titles. If they are needed by the newspaper they will be supplied by the sub-editor.

In those cases where an action-title is obviously unsuitable, endeavour to find a colourful or striking phrase that will suit.

No matter what your title may be, it is a good one that catches the reader's eye and rouses his interest.

Opening Paragraphs.

Following upon your choice of title comes the question of your opening paragraph. To get a good opening is even more important than to find a good title.

Tell your story in the first paragraph.

For ordinary free-lance work, the exceptions to this rule are so few that they may be safely ignored. I want you to understand clearly what I mean by "telling the story," and I think I cannot explain this better than by giving you an illustration.

Let us suppose that one evening you are strolling through the docks of some big city. A youngster, who had probably no business there at all, trips over a mooring cable, and falls head first into the dark waters of the dock. A middle-aged night watchman with a wooden leg dives in after the boy, and succeeds, after a tremendous struggle, in bringing him to the nearest landing stage. There is your story, and a very graphic little story it could be made.

The absolutely untrained writer, who thought it worth while sending an account of this rescue to his local paper (or even telegraphing or telephoning it to a London newspaper) would probably "turn in" copy something to this effect—

CHILD RESCUED FROM BARCHESTER DOCKS

"Last night, just as it was turning dusk, I was strolling along Barchester Docks, and I noticed a youngster playing near a ship that had been unloading grain during the day. While I was still some distance away, the boy caught his foot in a mooring line and fell into the dock.

"I rushed up as quickly as I could, and then noticed that old Mr. Bloggs, the night watchman, who had been sitting fairly near, smoking a pipe, had also seen the child fall. He at once got up, etc., etc."

Probably, somewhere towards the end of the little story, the novice would add, quite as an afterthought, "Mr. Bloggs' conduct is all the braver because he has a wooden leg. He lost his leg in a frontier

skirmish with Afghans, and won the D.C.M. at the same time."

How News is Presented.

Of course, from the newspaper point of view, the story, as the novice has told it, is atrociously bad. Its technique immediately betrays the amateur. Even so, the story itself might be published, because it is NEWS, and because no one else had chanced to see the rescue and send in a report. If it were published it would have to be rewritten by a competent sub-editor, and the story would then open something like this—

ONE-LEGGED HERO SAVES DROWNING CHILD

"Undeterred by his wooden leg, conscious only that a boy was in peril of drowning, James Bloggs, night watchman at Barchester Docks, a veteran of the Indian Frontier, already decorated for valour, plunged into the docks last night, and after a hard struggle, succeeded in bringing little Jimmy Robinson safely to land——"

Then the story would go on to give crisp details of the whole rescue, coloured with a little graphic description, but using as few words as possible to obtain the best effect.

Arrest Attention.

You see what I mean. Arrest your reader's interest right from the start. Then tell your story succinctly and end strongly.

The example I have given you is typically a news

story. The free-lance journalist may not have a great many opportunities of handling news stories, in the strict sense of the word. But even when he is only writing a general article, the same advice holds good. Tell your story in the first paragraph.

At times this may seem impossible, and I admit that, were you writing an article on some general subject, such as "Should Schoolgirls Read French Novels?" there is, again strictly speaking, no "news story" to tell. For all that, you must get well into the subject in your first few lines. You might, for example, open something like this: "Consternation was caused in the household yesterday, when Irene, aged fifteen, and just home for the holidays, was discovered curled up in her father's big armchair and deep in the pages of *Le Boniment*, the tremendously discussed, sensational novel of the French autumn publishing season——".

There is your arresting opening.

Sustaining the Interest.

Having dealt briefly with the subject of titles and opening paragraphs, I should like now to discuss the very important matter of sustaining the interest.

Obviously no fixed rule can be laid down to guide you in this difficult task. The great essential is to have the subject you are dealing with clearly outlined in your mind, and to stick to that subject without waste of words. Even for a short article, it is not a bad plan to write a précis or synopsis of what you intend to say. For an ordinary literary

page article, or indeed for any article, which does not exceed 1,000 words in length, this précis can easily be written in 50 or 60 words.

Quite at random I have turned up one of the newspaper files in my office and have come across a very typical little free-lance article, entitled "How Love Makes Beauty." This article suits my purpose very well because its subject is entirely general, and it is the *sort* of article that any free-lance might have written.

The article opens: "It has been noticed that girls engaged to be married often become prettier." This opening sentence, together with the title, is quite enough to arrest the casual reader's attention. The précis of the little article itself might be something as follows—

"Loveliness, the creation of love, Nature's mating plumage—Love, a healing and energizing force—During courtship plain girls become comely, and good-looking women beautiful—The stimulus of happiness has a bodily as well as a mental effect—Beauty is determined by the emotions."

The article concludes in an effective, though quite simple, little climax, to the effect that self-esteem imparts confidence, and the newly engaged girl "looks the world in the face cheerfully and bravely, rejoicing in the sunshine of love, which has brought her to life."

Once again I must emphasize that the foregoing illustration was chosen entirely at random. The article has no special merit or demerit. It is essentially the work of an outside contributor and the

theme is very slight, but it was sufficiently well handled to be published and paid for.

The most casual study of the daily papers will convince you that hundreds of articles equally within the range of every free-lance are being published every week. If you want to have your own articles published, remember that a good title and a good beginning take you a long way on the road to success.

CHAPTER VI

CLIMAX and anti-climax—The right ending—Summing up—Technique—Style—Some hints—English.

IN the previous chapter I referred, very briefly, to the question of sustaining interest.

It should be remembered that the great majority of free-lance articles do not exceed 1,000 words in length. Now, assuming that you have a real " idea," and providing that you capture your readers' interest with your title and opening, it ought to be the simplest thing in the world to hold that interest for the space of 1,000 words.

It *will* be, if you stick to your subject. In order to sustain interest you must think logically. Let your argument proceed by natural stages. Develop your theme in ordered sequence. Each paragraph should always lead to the next smoothly and easily. There should be no " throw-back," that is to say, no sudden setting down of an afterthought in order to make your meaning clear. There must be no afterthoughts. They will be avoided easily enough if you make a preliminary synopsis, and check the finished manuscript against it.

Climax and Anti-Climax.

Interest is usually sustained by a process of working up to a climax. Though you " tell your story " in your first paragraph, you do so only in the journalistic sense. In other words, you tell enough of it to hold the reader's interest right from the start, but

immediately afterwards you must build your article step by step to reach an effective and, preferably, a surprising ending.

The longer you can keep the reader guessing, the better, provided that you do not strain for this effect, and that your narrative does not sacrifice smoothness and style in the endeavour to reach an unexpected *dénouement.*

When you have told your story, stop writing.

Avoid the anti-climax as you would a rejection slip. Leave your reader satisfied that your article is complete in itself. If there is a surprise, don't give it away until the last paragraph. In that paragraph don't go on to explain the surprise. Stop!

The Right Ending.

Nothing is so difficult as a good beginning, except a good ending.

The perfect ending is the inevitable ending. By inevitable I wish to imply artistically inevitable. The last paragraph should leave the reader satisfied. Your ending may be on a query, an assertion, or even an exclamation. But it must complete the article.

I select another short newspaper article at random. This article deals with the subject of "Motor Poachers," and describes, brightly and very briefly, how the modern gamekeeper has to contend with an entirely new class of poacher. A harassed gamekeeper tells how he has been outwitted again and again by poachers, working in pairs with a sidecar and a dog, and ends in a single sentence which sums

up the whole, peculiarly dashing, effectiveness of this modern raider's methods—

"There's no shooting, no noise at all, unless the netted hare screams; nothing to show anyone has been at work, except, maybe, footmarks and a bit of fluff."

In a simple little article of this kind, you can see for yourself how effectively and finally the story is closed in the last paragraph.

Both in regard to beginnings and endings, the student cannot do better than study the daily newspapers, analysing each published article and trying to see for himself how the general effect has been reached.

Summing Up.

I have just said that, when one comes to the end of one's article, one should stop forthwith. Yet I have brought you, if not to the end of my subject, at least to the subject of endings, and I have no intention of stopping for several pages.

On the contrary, I feel that at this point a little summing up is called for.

I want to emphasize some of the points to which I have called your attention in preceding pages. I will do so numerically, as follows—

1. The first essential for every free-lance writer is a supply of good and fresh ideas.

Whenever possible, link your idea up with the news.

If you must treat an old subject, always look at it from a new angle.

Choose your medium carefully. Don't offer to a paper articles which you know, from a study of that paper, are unsuitable.

2. Having found your idea, take pains to find for it an arresting title. Get a title with action in it, if you can, but submit every title that occurs to you to the one acid test: "Will this title rouse the reader's interest and compel his attention?"

3. With your chosen article clearly in your mind, try to tell your "story" in your first paragraph.

If you are writing a news story, make sure that the essence of your news *is* in your first paragraph.

If you are writing a general article, be sure that your subject is definitely indicated and introduced in your first paragraph.

Whatever the nature of your article, see to it that its first few lines add to the interest which your title has already aroused.

4. Follow your opening with a logical sequence of ideas or facts. Make a synopsis of your proposed article in order to help you to maintain this sequence, and check your finished manuscript against your synopsis.

Cut out ruthlessly every paragraph that is not essential to, or usefully illustrative of, your main "argument" or theme.

5. Lead up to a climax. If you can "spring a little surprise" upon your readers, so much the better.

In any case, let your ending be definite, complete and *inevitable.*

Technique.

"Technique" and "style" are two words which are sometimes confused, and often wrongly used. The five points which I have just mentioned come under the general heading of technique.

"Craftsmanship" is a word which conveys the same idea, and may be more readily understood. A good piece of carpentry is good the world over, but styles in furniture and fittings vary enormously.

A competently constructed article is recognized as such by any editor, that is to say, by any experienced literary craftsman. It does not follow, however, that he will approve the style in which it is written. That is largely a matter of individual taste.

In the foregoing pages I have tried to indicate the *principles* of free-lance technique, and to suggest how that technique may be studied and acquired.

Let me say here that I believe any persevering writer of average intelligence can learn the craftsmanship of the free-lance article. Moreover, that knowledge takes one more than half way along the road to success.

Style.

Anybody can learn to play a piece of music correctly, but not everybody can learn to play it with expression and sympathy.

There is the same difficulty in regard to style in writing. People talk glibly enough of *good style* and *bad style*, but who can really decide where the one begins and the other ends?

Moreover, style, as I have already said, is *largely*

a question of taste—not altogether. Musical critics may differ in their opinion of any given artiste's execution, but they will at least agree that he has a good or an indifferent touch, that he plays with or without feeling, and so on.

In the same way, the writer whose style is good may please some readers more than others, but some indefinable quality in his work commands general recognition.

I do not think that *style*, as the word is usually understood, can be taught. Provided the technique is sound, literary style is largely a question of individuality.

In these pages I do not propose to discuss the varying styles of different writers.

My advice is to read widely, paying careful attention to the way in which literary men of established reputation obtain their desired effects.

I do *not* advise the beginner to model his style upon that of any one authority.

Read Shaw, Belloc, Chesterton, Wells and other moderns by all means. Learn what you can from all of them. Personally, Macaulay, Johnson and Shaw are my particular favourites, while the leading articles in *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* always fascinated me as a boy. Yet I think every successful writer has to cultivate his own natural style in the end.

Some Hints.

Without attempting to "teach style," I may be able to give some general hints that will be of help to the inexperienced writer.

First of all, I would remind the reader of advice given almost at the start of this book—

Use short paragraphs, short sentences and simple words.

That is advice which touches upon free-lance technique, but it also has a direct bearing upon style.

Another point of tremendous importance, if you wish to write effectively, is this—

Always find, no matter how long it takes you, the one word which exactly expresses the idea you wish to convey.

There are very few perfect synonyms in the English language. It is well worth taking pains to find the word which has just the very shade of meaning you want. Consider, for example, how vastly different is a *twinkle* from a *wink*, or a *blink* from either.

Avoid foreign words unless they are well known, and express a shade of meaning for which there is no convenient English equivalent.

Some people might tell you that there are no foreign words which can do that. I don't go quite so far, but I think there are very few.

Beware of adjectives and adverbs. Use them only with a consciousness of their real meaning.

This, I admit, is a counsel of perfection for beginners, when there are many experienced journalists to whom certain words, like *amazing* and *tragic*, have become almost as necessary as drugs to a drug-taker. But it is good advice nevertheless.

Do not exaggerate. Do not apply sensational adjectives to minute occurrences. In other words,

do not use a literary locomotive to draw a trivial happening.

Of course—there are exceptions—the journalist may always colour the facts he presents, so as to make them sound more interesting than they actually are; but it is well to err on the side of pedantry in your effort to use simple prose.

Recently I came across an article by a distinguished critic, in which he objected to the modern changes in the usage of many words. The writer preferred the monosyllabic "shop" to "market," "emporium," "repository," "lounge," and "bazaar."

In his day, he said, a person who sold drugs used to be called a druggist, but nowadays he is called a pharmaceutical chemist or an analytical homœopathist. Persons who cut your hair were known as barbers, and those who attended to your feet were called corn-cutters, but now the former are tonsorial artists and the latter chiropodists. A trifle overstated, but undoubtedly illustrating a tendency.

Avoid all grandiloquence and all snobbery, even though it be unintentional. Do not, for example, say *ladies and gentlemen*, when all you mean is *men and women.*

English.

If you want to cultivate good style, get to know your own language.

Be sure that you have a thorough knowledge of English grammar; that you can analyse your sentences; and that you understand how all the recognized figures of speech should be used.

It is quite possible that many beginners will find that last piece of advice the least palatable.

But a knowledge of the principles of your own language is the only sure foundation for literary success.

CHAPTER VII

WHY manuscripts are rejected—The harassed editor—The right length—A moot point—Market—Literary page requirements—Interviewing—Signed interviews—Methods of approach—American methods—Symposiums and signed articles.

THE ambitious young man or woman will certainly wish to lose no time before attempting to sell a manuscript. Very likely many of you have already the nucleus of a fine collection of rejection slips. Don't be discouraged by that. Nearly every writer before you has made a similar collection.

During the course of my editorial work I have had the melancholy task of returning thousands of manuscripts. Nearly always these were rejected for one or other of a more or less constant set of reasons.

In some cases the articles were frankly badly written, and therefore unacceptable. In others, the subject was badly chosen, and these were dismissed as unsuitable after reading the first couple of paragraphs.

" There ! I knew it," someone may exclaim here, " editors don't even read our manuscripts through." The obvious editorial retort would be that one does not need to eat a whole egg in order to know whether it is bad.

Another of my reasons for sending back contributions was that the actual " copy " was either so untidy, or so illegible, that I had no time to wade through the article itself.

Here I must risk a parenthetical repetition. In

5—(G.6035)

the first chapter I told you that all manuscript must be typed. Perhaps you have been told that providing your article contains the right stuff it may be handwritten.

Do not believe it. Such advice must have been given either by one who knew nothing of the journalistic market, or by an exceedingly young and very optimistic editor at the outset of his career. Believe me, that after a month in the editorial chair, that harassed and hard-driven young man would scarcely read half a dozen lines of handwritten manuscript.

Why MSS. are Rejected.

Probably the two main reasons for rejection of manuscripts are, as I have just stated, poor writing, or poor choice of subject. In very many cases, however, rejected articles are quite well written upon subjects which are not, in themselves, unacceptable. Why? Simply because the writers were entirely ignorant of the conditions under which they should have submitted their copy.

I have already emphasized the absolute necessity for studying your medium. Quite apart from questions of general quality and individual newspaper tastes, there is one elementary consideration which many young writers ignore. I refer to space. Countless manuscripts have been rejected simply because they were far too long.

The Harassed Editor.

It is not merely in the imagination of fiction writers that editors are busy and harassed people.

They actually are, especially editors of daily newspapers. Each of these could very well do with twenty-four working hours to the day, and even then they would have no spare time for unessential work.

They are constantly besieged by callers; they are worried with requests for favours by friends, or friends' friends; they have to placate their proprietors and their proprietors' political wire-pullers; they are badgered by sub-editors, leader writers, circulation managers, and business managers; and, in fact, their whole working day is one ceaseless fight against time.

Knowing all this, it is absurd to expect editors to do your work for you. They have no time, even if they had the inclination, to trim outside copy to their requirements.

The Right Length.

Always make sure, then, that your article does not exceed in length the average number of words used in articles of a similar kind by the publication to which you are submitting your copy.

Every new writer has a tendency to overwrite, but never has there been such a marked dislike for long articles as there is to-day.

This makes very little difference because, even in the dear days beyond recall, when newspaper articles could go to the length of a column, outside writers almost invariably submitted contributions twice and three times that length.

Nowadays, a quarter, a third, or at the most, half a column actually stands the best chance. Obviously, it is impossible to give any set rule for the

length of newspaper articles. You must study your medium.

A Moot Point.

It is a moot point whether, in writing an article, one should do so with a definite publication in mind, or whether it is better to write the article just as it occurs to one. In the first case, you could make your length fit the medium you have in mind; in the second case you could choose your medium to fit your article.

For the beginner, however, I strongly recommend the former method.

Quite apart from the question of actual length, the beginner will find that his efforts at adapting his style to meet the requirements of the one particular paper he has in mind, will prove very valuable general training in free-lance work.

He should remember, however, that although he writes to correct length, and even has the style of the paper, he can also increase his chances of acceptance by a wise choice of subject. That judgment will, undoubtedly, come in time.

After the writer has begun to command a market for his work he will find that, both in regard to style and choice of subject, he is given much greater liberty by editors who know his work. We must all make patient beginnings, however.

Market.

I now come to the very important question of market. Where is the outside contributor to sell his articles?

In the course of these pages I have already referred more than once to the literary pages of the daily newspapers. I do so because these pages offer such excellent opportunities to the new writer, and because the range of the literary editors' requirements is a very wide one. I think the novice cannot do better than to choose one of these pages as the target for his first literary shaft.

I give below a short summary of the literary page requirements of some leading newspapers. This list does *not* represent a complete index of market possibilities.

There are several other newspapers in London, and very many in the provinces, which give the most courteous consideration to any manuscripts submitted to them. All I have done is to pick some of the best known papers, and I leave any interested reader to supplement my list from his own experience.

Literary Page Requirements.

Daily Express: Needs leader page articles packed with facts up to 1,200 words. Opinion articles without factual background do not stand a chance. Short Stories up to a maximum of 2,000 words. For Women's and Home pages—human interest, 600 to 800 words in length.

Daily Herald: ARTICLES for leader page—1,200 words long on current topics, social, political, and economic, treated mainly from the "human" angle and generally from the point of view of the man in the street. First-hand foreign affairs articles by

the person interviewed is well known to the public, or, failing that, is able to speak authoritatively about something which is topical.

While it is true that most newspapers order the everyday interviews they require, there is considerable scope for initiative by the local correspondent if he will follow the hints I offer.

Probably at least one eminent man or woman lives somewhere in your own neighbourhood. Has he or she any views on the subject of the day ?

Suppose, for instance, that you happen to live in an industrial centre. Each year, when the budget is introduced, such and such proposals for raising revenue are hotly criticized, and amazement is expressed that other possibilities have not been studied.

What has your leading commercial man to say on this matter ? What would he do if he were Chancellor of the Exchequer ?

Signed Interviews.

Approached in the right manner, your leading magnate might give you an opportunity for a first-class article or interview.

If you have managed to get on with him very well, you might write the substance of what he says in the form of an article, and then submit it to him for his signature. In that event your article would be a signed one by him, and would bring you in many guineas. The method of approach, however, must be carefully thought out. It is, indeed, largely a matter for tact and psychology.

In the first place you will go armed with certain definite questions that you propose to ask him. In order to do this you must have studied your subject very closely, as a lawyer would study his particular brief. Then you must make up your mind whether your memory is to be trusted, in which case it will help a great deal in opening the interview.

It is a mistake, once having been granted an interview, to pull out your notebook, thus making your "victim" conscious that what he is about to say will be used as evidence against him. You must make the approach in a courteous and composed manner. Whatever you may feel, you should not exhibit any trace of self-consciousness or nervousness; but whether you should be affable, blunt, serious, determined or meek, must depend upon the man or woman you are out to interview.

Methods of Approach.

The right approach will come with practice. To some persons, you must give the impression that you are conferring a great favour by asking them to talk for the paper. To others, you will indicate, without saying as much, that after all, publicity is not a bad thing.

Others again will make a show, pretended or real, of reluctance to talk of publicity, but these you will "play up to," by suggesting that the matter, upon which you seek their opinion, is of such national importance that the public will be keenly interested to read an authoritative and expert opinion.

There is yet another type of "victim" who grants an interview as though it were a personal favour, and who expects you to be suitably impressed. Indeed, your method of approach must be governed by the personality of the man or woman whom you seek to interview, and you will need as much tact and persuasiveness as does a successful commercial traveller.

Bear in mind, all the time, that your job is to make your victim talk.

American Methods.

It is said that a famous journalist once interviewed an uninterviewable man in his bath, and the great unapproachable man was so taken with the enterprise of the young journalist that he accorded him what became a famous interview.

Still, I am not sure whether interviewing victims in their baths is going to pay in the long run. These aggressive methods are adopted with varying success in America, but it has become generally recognized by the American public that "newspaper interviews" should be taken with a large grain of salt.

This is not meant to be derogatory to the American press, which is enterprising and up to date in the extreme, but there is a vast difference between the press in America and the press in England, and this refers particularly to interviews.

Some American journalists, receiving merely a "Good morning" from their victims, will proceed to write a column of imaginary talk. Over here we do not "stand for" these things. The British press insists upon strict accuracy. If the interviewing

journalist has failed to obtain an interview, that is the end of the matter.

My own experience in interviewing has been varied. I have interviewed both kings and beggars, and sometimes I have had to use more deference to the latter than to the former.

Obviously, an interviewer with personal charm has a much better chance of success than one with a brusque manner. Cultivate the magnetic manner. Be among the first to break down the reserve of those big personalities who have hitherto refused to talk for publication.

Where it is possible to obtain a personal introduction the interview naturally becomes a much easier task.

As a last word on this subject, let me enjoin you *never to betray a confidence.* If the person you are interviewing tells you something strictly for your private ear, don't "let him down" by "writing it up." This kind of thing is not done.

Symposiums and Signed Articles.

Both for magazine work and for the daily press, the free-lance writer cannot afford to overlook the commercial value of work written and prepared by himself, but signed by persons whose names are well known to the public.

The symposium was a very popular feature with the weekly newspapers, and still is so, though it has developed to series of full length articles on the same subject by different writers. Most readers will probably realize the kind of thing I mean.

Innumerable symposiums have been published on subjects which, in themselves, have no particular value. For example, half a dozen actresses are asked to mention their favourite colour, their favourite flower, their favourite author, and so on. Similarly, a group of leading professional athletes may be requested to give an opinion on transfer fees or mascots, or, indeed, anything else. The variations are absolutely endless.

The new writer who hits upon a good idea suitable for working up as a symposium, would do well to write to half a dozen or more of those celebrities whose names will serve his purpose, and ask them for their views upon the particular subject which he is discussing.

Some of them will not even acknowledge his letter. Others will have nothing to say, but there are nearly always a few who are quite ready to write a few lines, either from simple good nature or because they welcome the resultant publicity.

Having obtained half a dozen good names, it is merely necessary to arrange the symposium attractively, and a good and profitable market for the finished article is almost a certainty.

Many free-lance journalists earn a good deal of money by writing articles which they get some celebrity to sign. Of course, I am referring only to perfectly legitimate work. For example, a free-lance journalist might manage to have a chat with one of our leading pugilists, and obtain from him a good deal of interesting information in regard to, say, championship titles and their value.

CHAPTER VIII

Side lines—The gossip page—Topical verse—Poets are born, not made—Verses that will sell—Book reviews—Dramatic and musical criticism—A very restricted field—Articles for magazines—How photographs help—Magazine style and magazine subjects—The popular weeklies—Original and newsy—Their chief need—Suggestions welcome.

The reader will have already gathered, during the study of previous chapters, that there are no very rigid limits to the work which may be undertaken by the free-lance journalist. In the ordinary way, however, he is really a writer of articles. He may write on any subject and at almost any length, although, since most of his work is intended for the daily or weekly press, the majority of his manuscripts will not exceed 1,000 to 1,200 words.

The outside contributor can often derive a good deal of profit by exploring the "side lines" of his profession. These "side lines" are more numerous than one would at first suppose.

The reader who has never worked on the staff of a newspaper would be astonished to learn how many thousands of paragraphs, society and other jottings, short poems, and other relatively insignificant features of a newspaper are supplied by the free-lance journalist.

Side Lines.

Certain features, which the general public regards as strictly editorial, are frequently contributed from

outside sources. For example, although there is almost no scope for leader writing, it may be admitted that editors do occasionally use "leaderettes" that they have received from outside sources.

Obviously, before such "leaderettes" are accepted, they must conform to the general views of the paper to which they are submitted. Quite often a little article sent in for general purposes is used as a "leaderette," because it happens to impress a given editor as being particularly suitable.

A study of the leader columns of the daily and weekly press will soon enable any free-lance to realize the kind of short article or paragraph to which I refer. These leaderettes are invariably topical, and generally refer to some minor social question.

The Gossip Page.

Nearly every daily and weekly paper devotes a certain part of one particular page to gossip. Frequently, on other pages in the same newspaper, there will also be one column or half a column of gossip under the theatrical and cinema headings. The gossip page proper is not restricted in its choice of subject.

Most of the gossip paragraphs deal with social news. Generally the gossip page is edited by someone on the staff of the paper, and there is a very wide, but quite mistaken, impression that every paragraph is written by this man himself. No doubt many of them are, but it is equally certain that the majority of them are derived, in one way or another, from outside sources.

Probably the most paying paragraph of this kind is the personal item. Some little fragment of really interesting personal news about a celebrity is always welcome, and, provided there is no doubt of its authenticity, will be paid for very readily.

Since all beginners have been advised to make a close study of the daily and weekly press, it is, perhaps, hardly necessary to elaborate this suggestion, but in these paragraphs, as in all free-lance work, any touch of the unusual or unexpected adds value to the work.

Suppose a daughter of the Bishop of Grandchester becomes engaged. This fact will eventually form a society paragraph, but if it is known that her father is a champion of orthodoxy, while her fiancé is, let us say, a convinced Mohammedan, the piquancy of this additional news makes the paragraph of tenfold value.

Suppose Ted Slogger, the fabulously wealthy lightweight champion, retires to some remote estate. Here is a fine paragraph ready made; but if you happen to learn that he spends his mornings wrestling with the theory of relativity, you have a "tit-bit" of gossip which no editor could refuse.

Similarly, should you discover that Theophilus Silverton, the "vers libre" poet, is, in his moments of recreation, an enthusiastic patron of the skittle alley; or that Lord Exe, the "die-hard" diplomatist, likes nothing better than a game of golf with "Sandy" Wye, the communist orator, you have material for two gossip paragraphs certain to be accepted.

The paragraph writer who specializes in this class of work is always on the look out for *bright* social news, and very often two facts, apparently unrelated, may be blended into a news item of real interest.

Topical Verse.

It is generally admitted that "poetry does not pay." The phrase is a very loose one, and is only partly true. Verse writing, as a journalistic side line, can be made to yield very fair financial returns. Indeed, the writer, with a knack for this kind of work, can make a good deal of money very easily.

As Mr. St. John Adcock once wrote—

"DON'T rely on making much out of poetry; only one or two papers pay anything like an adequate price for it. I have made two hundred a year by writing humorous verse for various weeklies and dailies, but I doubt if I have derived so much as a hundred pounds in the whole of my life from the writing of more serious verse; and for the behoof of a pottering literary person, who denounced my sordid outlook when I mentioned this once before, I may add that, for sentimental reasons, I am more than satisfied that this should be so."

Poets are Born, Not Made.

Poetry, in the higher sense of the word, is outside the province of the average free-lance journalist and need not be discussed here. Verse-writing is another matter. It is not my purpose to discuss the technique of verse-writing, but it may be worth mentioning that the only kinds of verse which command a

ready market nowadays are topical and humorous. The student cannot do better than study the columns of the journals to which he proposes to contribute verses.

It is very important that all such work shall be soundly constructed, and it is advisable to secure originality of meter. Ingenious rhyming also adds to the market value of this kind of verse, and there is no objection to clever punning.

Verses that Will Sell.

Persons who have this knack of writing light verse will find an endless source of ideas in the columns of the daily press. The most trifling sentence in a speech sometimes supplies the keynote to a verse. Occasionally an extract from some other newspaper is reproduced above the verses which this extract suggested. It is useless for me to give instances which will necessarily be out of date when this book is read. I must again refer experimenters to the weekly papers already mentioned.

Short sentimental verses also have some market value. These are used in many of the better magazines as "fillers." A story may, for instance, end half-way down a page. The blank space is accordingly filled with verse or an illustration.

Punch is always ready to consider verse of real quality, but all such verse, whether it be fanciful, satirical, or humorous, must be polished, and beyond criticism in regard to metrical construction.

Before leaving the subject of verse, I may add that there are many American publications which

use short poems. These papers and magazines are both prompt and courteous in their treatment of outside contributors, and they pay higher rates than do English publications of a similar standard.

Book Reviews.

Book reviews are generally supplied by members of the staff. To all intents and purposes, it is useless for the outside contributor to submit a book review.

On the other hand, quite a number of the reviews published are written by outside contributors who specialize in this class of work, but such contributors are either men whose names count in contemporary literature, or, alternatively, men who have secured an established position as critics.

For those readers who are particularly interested in critical work, my advice would be to begin with articles of a more or less general literary value. Do not criticize the latest published book. The staff critic will do this in any case. Discuss tendencies.

Is it not time, for instance, that the price of novels should lower from 7/6 to 6/–? If not, why not? Has the modern tendency towards realism resulted in writing which is merely sordid? Does the novelist of to-day attach too much importance to psychological study?

These are merely two or three subjects which occur to me at random. There is really a great wealth of material at the disposal of the literary free-lance, but in writing articles upon general literary subjects,

it is wise to use apt and effective illustrations and quotations in support of one's argument.

The acceptance of a few such articles may very well lead to an occasional piece of commissioned book reviewing, and once a commission has been obtained, the free-lance should do his utmost to consolidate the position gained.

Dramatic and Musical Criticism.

What has been said about book reviews applies, in the main, both to musical and to dramatic criticism. The latest productions, whether of stage plays or of musical compositions, are almost invariably criticized by members of the various newspaper staffs. Naturally, in regard to musical criticism, considerable technical knowledge is necessary, and the writer who is not trained in music would do well to avoid any efforts in this direction.

On the other hand, the trained musician can frequently secure a market for intelligent and original critical work. Here too, however, he is well advised, in the first instance, to deal in generalities and comparisons rather than in particular criticisms of the latest musical work.

Dramatic criticism also requires much technical knowledge, but the opinion of the general public has more importance, and is of more interest in regard to the stage than in regard to musical production. Once again, the free-lance journalist will do well to discuss tendencies rather than actual performances. Comparatively recently, the London theatres played a number of comedies and farces translated from the

French. Nearly all such productions were somewhat "risqué," and most of them contained bold scenes of no particular artistic value.

Here was a subject for an article already made. Indeed, there was material, not for one article, but for dozens. Why, for instance, should the English producer go to France for his comedies? Did the public really demand comedy that was somewhat salacious? Was the censor impartial in the exercise of his censorship? And so on, and so on.

There is nearly always room for bright articles of topical value, dealing with the theatre in general, and the theatrical tendencies in particular.

It is probably unnecessary to elaborate suggestions in this connection, but I can assure beginners that a cleverly written article, discussing the "pros" and "cons" of advance bookings for seats in the pit, is much more likely to be published than is a detailed criticism of the latest play.

A Very Restricted Field.

In regard to all critical work, the field for the free-lance is very restricted. Unless you have a strong desire to write literary, musical, or dramatic criticisms, you will be better advised to devote your time to more remunerative work.

If you have that special desire, I can only repeat that you must first try to make your way by writing articles which have a general interest and a general appeal, quite apart from their intrinsic value as criticism.

In this work, as in all other free-lance work, it is

essential to find some original aspect of any question which you propose to discuss. Some novel idea, some clever, even if far-fetched, comparison ; some daring suggestion of innovation or change always adds commercial value to this kind of work.

Articles for Magazines.

Throughout these pages the daily press has been recommended to the new writer as the market most easy of access. There is no doubt that it is not only the most easy, but the most important market for the free-lance.

Nearly all the advice given in regard to newspaper articles applies to articles for the magazines, but there are naturally certain differences in style and presentation to be considered when writing for monthly publications.

In the first place, there is a different standard of values. The magazines attach much less importance to topical interest than do the daily papers. I do not wish to be misunderstood in this connection.

Even the monthly magazines prefer work which is of topical interest, but what is topical for a magazine may often be regarded as " stale news " for a newspaper.

Merely for the sake of example, let us suppose that a Norwegian scientist claims to have discovered a cure for infantile paralysis. Startling results are said to have been obtained, and for several days the daily press devotes much space to accounts of the new cure.

A week later, no daily paper would even look at copy on this subject, but for quite a
the claim was first made public, the

of selling interesting general articles, preferably illustrated, on this subject to the monthly magazines. In other words, "news" has a longer life in the monthlies than in the dailies.

The length of magazine articles is also very much less restricted than that of similar articles intended for the daily press. Provided your subject is of sufficient general interest, there is no reason why you should not "write it up" to the extent of from 3,000 to 5,000 words, and still find a market in the monthlies. Obviously, a daily paper cannot possibly give space to articles of this length.

The treatment of magazine articles also differs materially from the treatment of articles for the daily papers. In the first place, you are writing for a very different public. Without making any invidious comparison, it must be clear to every thoughtful person that readers of the shilling magazines differ in their tastes from readers of the penny papers. Moreover, the man or woman who buys a magazine does so to read it at his or her leisure, whereas, in the ordinary way, people buy newspapers to skim through them and to keep abreast of the news.

This being the case, the magazine article can be treated in a more leisurely way. Scholarly and thoughtful work is welcomed in the magazines, whereas it might quite possibly be regarded as "too heavy" for the purposes of a daily newspaper.

How Photographs Help.

Another point of importance to be considered in regard to magazine work in general is that usually

good photographs or good illustrations will help to sell an article.

There are many free-lance writers who realize the importance of illustration, and can often find a ready market for their work largely because they are able to offer with it a number of appropriate and attractive photographs.

Some of these writers do their own photographic work. Others work in collaboration with a photographer, or even purchase photographs from some agency.

Some years ago, a young French writer, who lived in Paris, conceived the idea of writing an article on beards. He and a friend spent some amusing hours on the Boulevards with a camera, and they managed to obtain a number of really amusing snapshots of bearded Frenchmen.

The writer picked out half a dozen of these photographs, each illustrating a different type of beard or whisker or moustache; wrote an amusing article which fitted his photographs, and sold both article and photographs to an American publication, which paid him one hundred dollars. There is nothing very remarkable in this example, beyond the fact that the photographs by themselves would not have been published, and the article, unillustrated, would not have been printed.

Magazine Style and Magazine Subjects.

It is not possible in the space at my disposal to do more than hint at the kind of subject which is suitable for magazine articles. My strong advice to

all free-lance writers is, once again, to study the different media. If you glance through half a dozen of the modern illustrated magazines, you will realize at once the sort of work which they accept.

Magazine articles must be of general interest, but they may deal with almost any variety of subjects. There is a very big demand for popular scientific articles, preferably dealing with some new development in regard to science, medicine, engineering or industry.

There is also a big demand for biographical sketches, particularly when such sketches or reminiscences relate to a person who is in the full limelight of publicity. Articles dealing with national and international politics, with questions of currency and exchange, with recent developments in literature and the arts, and with special happenings of wide general interest, are all likely to find a market.

As I have already suggested, the treatment accorded to any and all of these subjects should be modified to meet the requirements of the particular magazine for which one is writing. The writer of a magazine article has a much larger canvas upon which to work. He does not need to secure quite the same sharp effects, but the general rule holds good, *that he must arrest attention with his opening*, and hold that attention by careful development of the interest to an effective climax.

The Popular Weeklies.

A very important market for the free-lance journalist is to be found in the popular weeklies, of the

Everybody's Weekly, The Leader, Tit-Bits, Answers, Pearson's Weekly, type.

Here again it must be obvious that the treatment called for is not quite the same as that which is needed for the daily press, and once more I must urgently advise you to study your medium.

For your general guidance I cannot do better than quote from a letter, in which the editor of *Pearson's Weekly* kindly gave me an idea of what *he* expected from his outside contributors.

"Original and Newsy."

"In addition to fiction, humorous sketches and articles, *Pearson's Weekly* publishes a 'splash' (or star) article on an attractive and topical subject each week. Contributors should remember in writing these special articles to hit upon subjects which will make a good poster. Imagine, when selecting a subject, that it is due to you to write a selling poster.

"Short, bright articles on topics which crop up periodically are also welcome. They must give information and facts, but do not need to be statistical. *It is essential that they should be original and newsy.*

"No article should be drawn out to make a greater number of words in the hope that the payment will be bigger. Very often we pay as much for a *good* short article as we would for an article twice as long, because of its greater relative value. There are a thousand and one subjects on which the outside contributor can write these little articles."

The only comment I wish to make on this simple and clear statement of requirements is that, even for publications of this kind, which do not profess to be *news*papers in the strict sense of the word, one can hardly over-estimate the importance of topical interest.

Make your articles original and newsy.

Their Chief Need.

The editor of *John O'London's Weekly*, Mr. Frank Whitaker, writes to me: "Most of our articles are commissioned, but we are always glad to consider articles on philology and other literary subjects, as well as articles on painting and science, provided that they are not too technical. The lengths we prefer are a thousand words and fifteen hundred words, and our usual rate of pay is three guineas per thousand words.

"We also publish verse, of not more than about twenty-four lines.

"Our chief need, however, is for short stories of about three thousand words in length, for which we also pay three guineas per thousand words. It is one of our rules to pay on acceptance, and not to wait for publication."

Mr. Maurice A. C. Gorham, editor of the *Radio Times*, a journal which "specializes in articles about forthcoming broadcast programmes, is willing to consider non-technical articles of general interest to listeners and televiewers. Minimum rate four guineas a thousand. Length 500 to 1,100 words. Illustrations in half-tone and line."

Suggestions Welcome.

Friendly consideration of the outside contributor's work may be expected from *Tit-Bits*, whose editor, Mr. Leonard Crocombe, wrote in a letter to me—

"I am always delighted to have an opportunity of considering the work of new writers. There is plenty of scope in *Tit-Bits* for suitable contributions. I am always very glad to have suggestions for 'special' articles, for interviews, and short articles containing interesting and out-of-the-way information.

"I am anxious to do all I can to encourage writers of humour and of short stories. When I find a writer whose work shows promise, even if I cannot accept any of his work at the moment, I often make a point of giving him a personal interview so that I can explain to him the types of contributions that are required for *Tit-Bits*.

"Payment is at a high rate and is made upon acceptance, but it is most important for would-be contributors to study the paper itself. If only aspirants to journalism would do this they would save themselves—and editors—a vast amount of unnecessary labour."

Before leaving the subject of "the popular weeklies," I should like to add that the attitude of the editor of *Tit-Bits* is a very general one. Outside work is always given sympathetic consideration, provided it is submitted in the proper way, and provided it conforms to the general requirements of the paper to which it is sent.

There are people who affect to despise these journals, published to entertain "the man in the street." Don't be misled by such people. They are usually as foolish as they are snobbish.

Many a writer who has since become well known received early encouragement from well-edited papers like *Answers*, *Tit-Bits* and *Pearson's Weekly*, and any articles which these newspapers publish must be good work. Make no mistake about that.

I strongly advise the amateur free-lance to make a study of the popular weeklies, and try to enter the very useful market which they offer.

The payment made is good, and the experience to be gained is invaluable.

CHAPTER IX

HUMOUR—*Everybody's Weekly*—*The Leader*—Sunday newspapers—The feminine interest—Of paramount importance—An ever wider public—Men not debarred—Value of fashion knowledge—Stories that appeal to women—Women in politics—A word of warning—Society gossip—Women's movements—Dress—Children—The stage—Where to sell—What to avoid—Last "do's" and "don'ts"—Business side of authorship—The great American market—Agents.

ONE market for free-lance work to which I have not yet referred is that supplied by a group of journals which may be described as the "black and white weeklies."

This group includes *The Leader*, *Everybody's Weekly* and *The Humorist*. Though they cannot be said to be modelled upon, yet they are all to some extent inspired by, the prince of all humorous weeklies, *Punch*.

Humour.

Humour is a priceless gift from the gods. If, as a would-be writer, you have that gift, use it to the utmost. If you have it not, stick to facts and to news and to topical-value articles.

Humour cannot be taught and I don't think it can be acquired, but it can be cultivated.

"The black and white weeklies" want humorous work. They are not merely "ready to consider it," they are "on the look out for it."

In addition to these papers, which have a frankly

humorous appeal, it is not too much to say that witty and humorous work is welcome to *any* publication of interest to the general reader.

"Everybody's Weekly."

The editor of *Everybody's Weekly*, Mr. Trevor Henley, has kindly given me an outline of his requirements. I give these below for the guidance of would-be contributors, but, once again, I urge the importance of a close study of each individual paper before your manuscript is submitted.

"The requirements of *Everybody's* cover a wide field. Articles, of any length up to 1,200 words, are used on all subjects which have a topical and a strong story value. Short stories of from 1,000 to 3,500 words are also required. Contributions to sporting, stage, film, wireless, general gossip, etc., sections are welcome.

"Joke drawings—line or wash, with the point put over in a minimum number of words are used in considerable number.

"For the photogravure section, striking, thrilling photo-series, and single photographs are needed."

"The Leader."

The editor of *The Leader*, Mr. Castel Button, tells me that his requirements are as follows—

"Topical news-feature articles of 800 to 1,000 words; News-behind-the-News paragraphs, 100 to 200 words; short stories, about 1,600 words. Sets of striking and interesting pictures for Photographic

Supplement. Original joke drawings. Payment for contributions on publication."

Sunday Newspapers.

Another very important market is that of the popular Sunday newspapers.

The great desire of the editor of every Sunday newspaper is to receive good *human interest* stories of news value and exclusive to his paper.

"Human interest" is an overworked phrase in newspaper offices, but it is applied to the sort of "story" which arouses sympathy, or sympathetic amusement, or wonder or admiration in reference to the person described.

Supposing a business man has just been given a title. That is news. Supposing you happen to know that when he was a struggling young man he gave up tobacco in order that his poor old dad might have invalid fare which he could not otherwise afford; or that his iron constitution was built up exclusively on porridge in the morning and beefsteak at night; or that his little daughter is the one person in the world to whom he can deny nothing. Suppose you know of any of those things, you have the material for a "human interest" story.

It must be remembered, however, that the popular Sunday newspapers want *news* more than anything else.

They don't want the same sort of news as the dailies. They don't, as a rule, care very much about politics, or literature, or science. They want "human stories" about people in the news—duchesses,

actresses, mannequins, "vamps," dukes, "down-and outs," "crooks," successful men, anybody, anywhere, as long as the public are interested in him or her.

If you can give the Sunday newspaper that kind of article you will find a ready market for your output.

The Feminine Interest.

The subject of "human interest" stories leads me to the equally important subject of "feminine interest" stories.

No study of the daily and weekly press, however casual, can fail to impress one with the efforts that are being made to "play up" to the woman reader. In point of fact, many editors devote a preponderating share of space to articles and "stories" having a special appeal to women.

Curiously enough, editors and advertising managers did not realize the immense importance of appealing to women readers until comparatively recently.

The late Lord Northcliffe, always a pioneer in newspaper enterprise, launched the *Daily Mirror* at great cost, as something new in pictorial journalism. Originally, that paper was published with no special view to interesting women readers, and at first it looked as though it would prove a failure.

Suddenly someone had a "brain-wave" and suggested to Lord Northcliffe that he should turn the *Mirror* into a woman's newspaper. This was done with immediate and phenomenal success.

Since then there has been a steady increase in the number of publications intended definitely for women, and an even more notable increase in the percentage of space accorded to subjects of feminine interest in all the dailies, weeklies and monthlies.

Of Paramount Importance.

It is not too much to say that in many respects, and for the special purposes of numerous publications, the "feminine interest" is of paramount importance. First of all, an appeal to women is of great importance commercially and, since nearly all newspapers are published with a view to profit, this is a good and sufficient reason for emphasizing this special interest.

Editors, prompted by their advertising and circulation managers, woke up to the fact that if they could sufficiently interest the women, their newspapers would become "papers for the home," and that this would prove a telling advertising slogan. When an advertising canvasser can convince big advertisers that the publication which he represents is taken home, "because the women like to see it," his chance of booking an order is very largely increased.

An Ever Wider Public.

One is apt to forget that many advertisers—drapers, provision dealers, furriers, manufacturers of toilet requisites, and the like—would rather their

advertisements were read by one woman than by ten men. Man *may* control the purse strings, but woman spends the money.

For commercial reasons, therefore, it is beyond all doubt that editors must continue to cater for "the feminine interest."

Quite apart from this aspect of the case, there are psychological, educational and other reasons for the increased and still increasing, demand for work which will appeal to women. The extraordinary progress and development of woman herself during the past fifty years has *compelled* a correspondingly larger attention to her interests.

Men Not Debarred.

Without enlarging upon this theme, let us merely recognize the fact that editors must cater for their women readers and that, as a direct consequence of this fact, all free-lance writers—*men as well as women*—will be well advised to pay particular attention to "the feminine interest."

Probably there is no topic of interest to women which has not been written about by men. Certainly the average man is not likely to write about fashions, cooking, fancy stitches and teething, but there are men who do write on such subjects, and even write as experts.

Moreover, it is a vast mistake to think that women's interest nowadays is purely domestic. Except that there are certain subjects which appeal particularly to women—just as there are topics which particularly interest men—the interests of the woman

reader to-day are no more circumscribed than are those of her husband or brother.

Value of Fashion Knowledge.

Admitting the importance of " playing up " to the woman reader, it becomes evident that any free-lance journalist, whether man or woman, should cultivate his or her powers of observation with this end in view. Dress and fashions are worthy of attention, not merely for the purpose of writing technical articles, but because little descriptive touches add enormously to the selling possibilities of many " stories."

There is an anecdote, for the truth of which I do not vouch, concerning a young reporter, who was instructed to " cover " the opening of an important bazaar in the West End. A lady, who had reached the pages of *Debrett* via the stage door, made the opening speech and was faithfully reported.

But when the youngster handed in his " story," the one comment of the grim sub-editor was: " Bless the boy ! " (or words to that effect) " Who cares a hang what she *said* ? What did she *wear* ? "

In describing social functions of any kind, in working up character sketches, in interviewing, and in writing nearly all articles which depend upon some central personality, a graphic descriptive touch—just those few words that convey a picture to the reader's mind—may make all the difference between a sale and a rejection slip.

The name of the late Joseph Chamberlain

immediately conjured up a picture of a well-groomed man wearing a monocle, and having an orchid in his buttonhole. To-day, Mussolini and his white spats are inseparably associated in the public mind.

Just a word for men. One does not need to know all about fashions in order to write some comment upon a lady's dress. It is quite easy to keep informed of the general trend of fashions and thus avoid flagrant mistakes. Even the least observant of men could hardly have been unaware of the passing of the old "hobble," and the advent of the short full skirt which succeeded it, and the various changes which have finally led to the present fashion.

If a man be ordinarily observant, he may even keep track of the movements of that mysterious line which fashion terms the waist.

Some men refer to all materials in a vague and general way as "cloth" or "stuff," yet it is quite easy to learn the names of, and even to recognize, the materials mostly in vogue. Moreover, everyone should be able to recognize colours, but, if you ask the average man what sort of dress his wife wore yesterday, he will probably say: "Some sort of darkish stuff."

This would be inexcusable lack of observation on the part of the free-lance journalist. He should at least be able to recall colour schemes, materials and any striking ornament or ornamentation.

Stories that Appeal to Women.

What are the stories which appeal to women? Faint-hearts may reply that there is nothing fresh

to write about as far as women are concerned. This is just as true as the aphorism that "there is nothing new under the sun."

In actual fact there are innumerable subjects of feminine interest, for, let it be repeated, woman's interests are no longer circumscribed. Another young woman who worked on my staff, recently began to contribute little articles to the daily press.

In three months she "placed" no fewer than twenty-four articles, all on topics of interest to women, and most of them on topics which were of considerable interest to men also.

The *kind* of story that appeals to the average woman is usually the "human" story, which also appeals to the woman's men folk. It is dangerous to generalize, but I think most people would agree that women are more interested in persons and things than in events and abstractions.

When reading the account of an aeroplane disaster the average man will look for the details of the mishap itself. He will want to know what defect of machinery, what accident of weather, what error of judgment, brought about the disaster. The woman reader may be interested in all these things, but she will be particularly eager to learn all about the dead pilot, and about his family and career and, perhaps, his sweetheart.

Articles dealing with children, especially when they bring fresh light to bear upon some phase of infancy, or some aspect of children's training; articles, written from a new angle, upon marriage and marriage

problems, upon domestic economy and household difficulties; upon love and courtship and motherhood; and upon woman's work in the home and at the office, in business and in politics; all have a somewhat special appeal to women readers.

Because women are now competing with men in business, in the professions and the arts, and in politics, it is evident that there is a limitless opportunity for the free-lance writer to produce articles on almost any subject, and still present them in such a way as to hold the interest of women readers.

Women in Politics.

Woman's incursion into the field of politics has already yielded a rich harvest to article writers. The published contributions of free-lance journalists in connection with this single phase of feminine activity have ranged in subject and treatment from elaborate examination of the possibilities of the new era for women, down to the trivial comment on the question of hats or no hats for women M.P.'s; and there are certainly as many fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

A Word of Warning.

Let me give a general warning at this point. There has been, and to some extent, there may still be, an impression that one should "write down" to the woman reader's requirements. Never was a more mistaken notion. Write to interest women, by all means, but don't write rubbish.

Women are no more tolerant of cheap sentiment and poor writing than are men. Unfortunately, in the early days of "feminine interest articles"—when most of the work was done by men—there was a great deal of silly nonsense, sentimental bathos and, what would be called in American slang, "sob stuff" written for women. This kind of work is no longer tolerated by any publication of repute.

Society Gossip.

Society gossip affecting women is always welcomed by any newspaper. If you happen to move in circles where interesting items of social news can be heard, and may be written up without breach of confidence or sacrifice of good taste, write them up by all means.

Many guineas may be earned by sending in bright and *timely* paragraphs of this kind, and some of the best known women in society are frequent contributors to the press. Naturally, all news items of this kind must be sent in without the slightest delay. "Stale" news is unsaleable.

Women's Movements.

Do not fail to make the most of any new movement among women, or of any fresh development or extension of feminine activities.

Snap up stray items, such as the employment of the first woman stoker on the gunboat of some South American Republic; the convocation of the Women's Confederation of Practising Attorneys in Lapland;

the inaugural address of the president of the Women Grocers' Pure Food League of Tierra del Fuego, and so on.

These are extravagant imaginings, but they may serve to illustrate my advice. If you keep abreast of the news there will be very few weeks in which you fail to discover some little happenings of essentially feminine interest.

Dress.

Quite apart from its possibilities for the fashion pages, women's dress may often supply the subject of an entirely general article.

One might discuss, for example, the singular fact that domestic servants nearly all do (or do not, as the case may be) wear silk stockings or Russian boots; or that lace is seldom worn (or, alternatively, is always worn) by the Nottingham mill girl. One might introduce a furious discussion among travelled Englishwomen by propounding the (probably fallacious) theory that the Englishwoman on the Continent is always recognizable by her low heels, and the indescribable way in which her hat is perched on the top of her head.

Then again, a saleable article might conceivably be written, lamenting the fact that gold curb bracelets have never enjoyed the same measure of popularity since the unregretted departure of the elastic-sided boot.

This *kind* of dress article is not in the least technical, and offers opportunities to every free-lance writer to whom it may appeal. Moreover, as you

will have gathered, the possibilities of subject-finding are infinite.

Children.

There is a fair demand for "stories" that deal with children. I am not now referring to stories *for* children. However varied may be her outside interests, the average woman is intensely interested in all subjects which deal with the bringing up of children.

Experiments in education and in training, methods of physical culture for children, problems of diet, questions of pocket money and of toys, of holidays and of games; all these, and a great variety of other subjects, may provide the free-lance with good saleable material. For this sort of work, write brightly and simply and, above all, aim at common sense. Few men are able to deal with this particular type of article successfully.

The Stage.

The stage and everything connected with it always supplies good material "of feminine interest." (Please note that I am not referring to dramatic criticism, which, I repeat, is nearly always covered by some member of each newspaper's staff.)

Gossip about stage personalities, incidents of their career, news of new productions, details about stage dresses and scenery and side-lights on all manner of theatrical activity are all worthy of attention.

It is not a bad plan, if one has the opportunity, to ask some stage celebrity for his or her views on some topic of current or general interest. If you cannot get an appointment—and unless you are a writer of some repute, it is not easy to do so—you may, nevertheless, get a reply to a letter.

If you obtain an interview, write up your article, and then send it to the artiste for his or her approval and signature. You will then have a signed article which will bring you in several guineas. Remember, however, that the topic must be striking and the stage celebrity really celebrated.

Where to Sell.

Articles, or "stories," as they are termed in Fleet Street, of feminine interest may be submitted to almost any newspaper or periodical. Where the article will have very little appeal to any readers *except* women, it is wise to offer it for publication on the woman's page of the paper for which it is intended.

In that event address your manuscript to the editress, and it will be read by a woman from a woman's standpoint. Other articles, although they may be written primarily for women, having a general appeal should be submitted to the literary page editor.

What to Avoid.

The rules applicable to all free-lance work naturally apply with equal force to the "feminine

interest" type of article. I have already warned you against cheap sentimentality, and against the very mistaken idea that any kind of chatty and, perhaps, shoddy English, is good enough for this kind of work.

What you want chiefly to avoid is dullness. This is an unpardonable fault. If your subject-matter is very slight, then your treatment must be correspondingly bright. Gossip is permissible, but it must be bright, interesting gossip. Don't platitudinize and don't lecture.

Last "Do's" and "Don'ts."

Before I conclude this chapter, and this section of the book, there are a few small points of practical, rather than technical, importance to which I would call the attention of all readers.

Wherever it is possible write under your own name. I consider this advice to be immensely important, and it is advice which I have given to more than one writer whose names to-day are well known. No free-lance journalist can afford to ignore the value of publicity. It stands to reason that a writer whose name is already known is much more likely to sell his work than is a writer whose name has no publicity value whatever. The more articles that are published under your name the more readily will editors consider fresh work from your pen.

If, for reasons of your own, you prefer to write under a pen name, *never change that pen name.* In this way, you will safeguard its publicity value.

Don't allow any publication whatever to use your work without paying for it. If your article is worth printing it is worth paying for. Don't bombard a paper with manuscripts merely on the strength of a single acceptance. It is never worth while to run the risk of wearying a well-disposed editor by your importunity.

Never offer a manuscript for sale that you have not carefully revised. The most experienced writers are occasionally guilty of careless construction, or even definite inaccuracies of statement, and, as a rule, errors of this kind are detected on revision.

Always keep a careful record of all work in the post, and *always retain a carbon copy in case the original is lost.*

Never send an unrevised article to the same paper twice.

Do not discard any manuscript until you are quite certain that it is commercially of no further value. Two or three rejections do not necessarily imply complete failure.

Above all, do not be readily discouraged. Quite frequently work is rejected for reasons which have nothing to do with its intrinsic merits.

Business Side of Authorship.

The business side of authorship in free-lance work presents fewer problems than does the business side of authorship in regard to fiction.

Most published free-lance work is ephemeral. An article that is topical one day may be commercially valueless the next week.

This being the case, articles may, in practice, be sold to any daily or weekly paper outright, and without reserve of any kind. Probably 90 per cent of published newspaper articles cease to have any commercial value after they have been printed.

It is, however, an established custom of the profession for the author to retain all book rights. In my own experience I have on more than one occasion used a series of published articles to form the nucleus of a book. As a matter of courtesy, it is usual to ask the editor of the newspaper which first published the articles for permission to reprint in book form. Such permission is always readily accorded by reputable papers.

Suppose, for example, you were to contribute a series of expert articles dealing with the progress of international aviation. Such a series might interest a publisher who would make you an offer for the book rights.

You would then obtain formal editorial permission to reprint, and the published book would consist of your original articles, much as they appeared in the first place, although you would probably have found it necessary to re-edit, re-arrange, revise and, perhaps, enlarge your first work so as to make it more suitable for presentation in book form.

Occasionally a series of articles is written for a newspaper with the definite intention of subsequent publication in book form. In that event it is, perhaps, wiser to indicate that you are selling serial rights only in the first instance.

Cinema rights, which are very seldom worth

thinking about in connection with free-lance work, also remain the property of the author.

There is no need to send "covering letters" with one's manuscripts. Occasionally, when a given publication has used some of your work, it may be worth while to send a short covering letter, something to this effect—

"Dear Sir,

"Since you liked my recent articles on '——' well enough to publish them, I am sending you some further work, treated in much the same way, on '——,' and I hope that these will be of similar interest to you."

A letter of this kind will make the "first reader" of your manuscripts realize that your work must merit careful consideration.

The Great American Market.

No free-lance can afford to ignore the great American market for literary work. Almost without exception, an article sold in America will fetch a higher price than it would have done in England.

If you wish to write for any American journal or magazine, I cannot too strongly advise you to get acquainted with the publication itself before you submit any of your manuscripts.

You must particularly remember that you are writing for American and not for English readers, and on this account you must studiously avoid subjects of controversy between the two countries.

Your articles must be of general and, preferably,

of "universal" appeal. Do not forget that literature, the arts and sciences, and the study of human nature have no national boundaries. *Write, without prejudice,* on any subject of wide interest, and make certain that your "copy" is "live" from the first word to the last.

Agents.

There are many good literary agents who can be of the utmost assistance to authors, but I think most of them would endorse my advice to the amateur *article* writer: *market your own manuscripts.*

A reputable agent does not charge fees; he works on a commission basis only. From his point of view it takes almost as much time and trouble to sell a short article of 500 words as to sell a story of 5,000.

Therefore it is not worth his while to deal with short manuscripts of this kind.

If you wish to sell magazine articles of considerable length, then possibly a literary agent would be of help to you. It should be remembered, however, that the reputable agent will only accept what he considers to be saleable work. You may, therefore, find it almost as hard to get such an agent to accept your manuscripts as you would to sell them direct to a magazine.

Don't on any account entrust any of your manuscripts to agents who demand fees in advance.

Finally, bear in mind that even the best agent cannot sell bad work. He *can* save you trouble, and he *may* obtain favourable terms, but he can't accomplish miracles.

There is another thing the agent can't do for you: he can't give you experience.

For all these reasons I advise the beginner to get to know the market for himself, or herself, and to sell his or her work unaided.

I wish you all success.

Part 2
SHORT STORY WRITING

CHAPTER I

WHAT is a short story?—"The jolly art"—A complete work—Novelettes—Sketches.

IT is sometimes assumed that the man who can write an attractive article must also be able to write a good short story.

Unfortunately, that assumption is not justified by the facts. It is *not* necessarily true that a successful free-lance journalist can become a successful writer of fiction.

But it is true that journalistic training and practice are likely to be of enormous help to the would-be story writer.

I do not want in this opening chapter to temper enthusiasm or to discourage even extravagant ambition, for I believe that, given average intelligence and education, the man or woman who is *keenly ambitious* to write stories can learn to do so.

I stress the two words, "keenly ambitious," because, as I had occasion to remark in the first part of this book, I do not believe that a real longing to write, or to paint, or to play can exist without some inherent ability.

And, to succeed in fiction, as in music, one must have *some* natural gift. The existence of that gift is suggested, and almost proved, by the irresistible desire to play or to write.

I admit that there may be people, naturally gifted, who have no ambition to exercise their talents; people who have a fine musical ear, but will not learn to play; or who have the "story sense" strongly developed, but who are quite satisfied to read other people's fiction.

It seems to me, however, that all the great writers and the vast majority of those who have achieved even moderate success, have been people who felt that they had it in them to write and that they *must* write.

If you—readers of this book—have that feeling, that longing to express yourself in the written word—then I advise you most strongly not only to try your hand at fiction, but also to persevere until some measure of success is yours.

If, however, you have no special wish to write *stories*; if facts appeal to you far more strongly than fiction; and if the "news sense" is yours almost to the exclusion of any other literary perception, you cannot do better than stick to free-lance journalism.

Many writers have been successful in both branches of literary work, but I do not think they have ever had equal enthusiasm for both. I myself have written short stories and novels, but journalism was my first love and I think it still holds pride of place in my affections.

Yet, in many ways, the writer who chooses fiction is to be envied. This branch of writing is often the most remunerative, besides providing the most convenient form of occupation for those who travel. The article writer has to keep in touch with the general

and political situation, so that his movements are not so free as those of the story writer or novelist. The latter can combine pleasure with work and obtain his inspiration amid ideal surroundings.

Moreover, for the beginner, or for the writer with very little spare time, short story writing has the immense advantage that it never necessitates rushed work.

The free-lance journalist is always haunted by the "topical value" bogy. His carefully written article becomes useless if it is not sold at the right time. And, very frequently, because time presses, it cannot even be so carefully written as he would like.

The story writer, on the other hand, may take a day, a week, a month, or even a year over a single story. He may start a story, and because other work interferes, or because his inspiration goes temporarily lame, he may lay it aside just as long as he wishes, to resume it later with unimpaired chances of success.

In a dozen different ways short story writing is more convenient than article writing, and it is certainly at least equally well paid. Moreover, its ultimate possibilities are undoubtedly greater.

What is a Short Story?

Assuming that the reader has now decided to enter the fiction lists, the first question which arises is one of definition: What *is* a short story?

Until you begin to think about the matter you may not realize that there is any need for a definition at all. You may be inclined to say: "Hah! He

might as well ask, 'What is a table?' A short story? Well, it's a——it's a kind of——. Oh, well, everybody knows what a short story is."

In actual fact it is not easy to define a short story, and even great writers hold slightly different views.

It must be clearly understood that the short story is *not* a concentrated novel. It is an entirely separate literary form.

The definition given by Mr. H. G. Wells in the preface to a collection of his own short stories, *The Country of the Blind*, is as comprehensive, and at the same time as clear, as any I have read.

"The Jolly Art."

"——I refuse altogether," says Mr. Wells, "to recognize any hard and fast type for the short story. It is a fiction that may be read in something under an hour, and so that it is moving and delightful, it does not matter whether it is as 'trivial' as a Japanese print of insects seen closely between grass stems, or as spacious as the prospect of the plain of Italy from Monte Mottarone. It does not matter whether it is human or inhuman, or whether it leaves you thinking deeply, or radiantly but superficially pleased.

"Some things are more easily done as short stories than others, and more abundantly done, *but one of the many pleasures of short story writing is to achieve the impossible.* At any rate, that is my conception of the art of the short story, as *the jolly art of making something very bright and moving;* it may be horrible or pathetic or funny or beautiful or profoundly

illuminating, having only this essential, that *it should take from* 15 *to* 20 *minutes to read aloud.* All the rest is just whatever invention and imagination and the mood can give—a vision of buttered slides on a busy day, or of unprecedented worlds. Each is intended to be a thing by itself."

A Complete Work.

Sir J. A. Hammerton, in an editorial note to *The Masterpiece Library of Short Stories*, gives a similar definition, and shares the view that a short story must be "a thing by itself."

"A short story," says Mr. Hammerton, "may be a mere anecdote of 300 words, or a work of ten or fifteen thousand. In contents it may be anything from a glimpse of a character, an incident, to a highly finished picture of life. But it should be a complete work of imagination, its effects achieved with a minimum of personages and events.

Novelettes.

I do not feel that I can add much to either of these definitions, but I am inclined to emphasize the theory that the short story "should take from 15 to 20 minutes to read aloud."

Mr. Wells had first written that a short story was "a fiction that may be read in something under an hour." Doubtless he gave the broader limit because he would not recognize any "hard and fast type," while his narrower limit possibly applies to the ideal short story.

I agree that one cannot *exactly* limit the length of

a short story, but I think that almost any fiction of less than 1,500 words could be better described as a *sketch*, and almost any narrative of over 10,000 words could be better described as a *novelette*.

To my mind the short story proper should be of any length between 1,500 *and* 10,000 *words.*

This question of length has more importance than would at first sight appear. For it may involve style and treatment.

I have already said that the short story is *not* a condensed novel. The treatment of the one and the other is totally different.

Where then does the short story end and the novel begin? My view is that the story becomes the novelette after about 10,000 words, and the novelette merges into the novel at about 30,000 to 40,000 words.

The effect of the novel need not be achieved with "a minimum of personages and events." On the contrary, a novel may introduce very many of the former and describe scores of the latter, and still remain an admirable work. Any one of Charles Dickens's novels proves this fact.

But a short story *must* deal with few people and very few events. And so I think that the author who needs more than 10,000 words in which to tell his story, must be trespassing on the domain of the novelist.

He will probably have written something which is neither a short story nor a novel—in other words, a novelette.

Every rule has its exceptions. Occasionally there are works of fiction which conform absolutely to the

short story type, and which yet greatly exceed the normal short story length. Somerset Maugham's wonderful story, *Rain*, is one of these.

As far as the beginner is concerned, however, I would almost go so far as to say that it is impossible to write a good short story of over 10,000 *words.*

And until you have sold a good many of your manuscripts I strongly advise you never to write a story of more than half that length, i.e. 5,000 *words.*

Let me remind you of an old anecdote. There was once a showman at a country fair, and in his tent he kept "the most wonderful dwarf ever known."

When the crowd had paid its sixpences the showman would draw the curtain on a very ordinary little man, not much below middle height.

"What is there wonderful about him?" the indignant spectators would demand, "he must be five foot tall."

"That's just what is so wonderful," the showman would reply, "*he's the tallest dwarf in the world.*"

Never try to write a short story remarkable for its length.

Sketches.

Before closing this chapter I should like to explain why I think that there should be a minimum as well as a maximum length for short stories.

Mr. Hammerton has written that a short story may be "a glimpse of a character, an incident," but he adds that "it should be a complete work of imagination."

Now, it seems to me that a *mere* incident or a mere *glimpse* of character is not sufficient to make a short story and is not, in fact, a *complete* work of imagination.

These single incident, single glimpse, narratives are sketches, not stories. They deserve their place in literature, but they are very different in construction from the short story proper.

Moreover, the sketch is on the border line between free-lance work and fiction. Any good journalist should be able to record a single incident vividly—and that makes a sketch. Any trained interviewer can give a glimpse of character—and that again is a sketch.

The story writer converts the sketch into a story by constructive imagination. *Usually he gives it some kind of plot.* And this cannot be done in much less than 1,500 words.

In a later chapter I shall consider the Sketch in greater detail, for it is a form of fiction (or journalism for that matter) which should by no means be neglected.

For the present I think I have said enough to explain why I do not include either the sketch or the novelette with the short story proper.

CHAPTER II

STYLE: Three hints—Short story anatomy—Plot finding—Three great themes—Classes of story—Specialization—Dangers of models—What to read.

FOR the story writer, as for the free-lance journalist, there are a few small practical details in regard to the actual preparation of typewritten sheets that should be noted.

Every manuscript submitted to editors or publishers must conform to the following conditions—

1. *It must be typewritten.*
2. *It must look clean and fresh.*
3. *It must be packed flat, and preferably should be folded once only.*
4. *It must have a title page on which should be written your name and address, the title of your story with your name or pen name as the author underneath, and the number of words in the manuscript.*
5. *Use double spacing, leave a margin of a full inch and a half on the left-hand side of each sheet; and do not start very near the top nor end very near the foot of the page.*
6. *If you wish your manuscript to be returned, it must be accompanied by a sufficiently stamped, addressed envelope.*

If your manuscript conforms to these six conditions, editors will be satisfied at least with its appearance.

There are a few other points to consider of more importance to yourself than to editors.

1. *ALWAYS keep a copy of any story you send out.* If you type your own manuscripts, make it an absolute rule to take a complete carbon copy. If you have your manuscripts typed for you and wish to save money, at least make certain that the original manuscript is safely in your possession before the typescript is dispatched.

Loss of a manuscript in the post or in editorial offices is always a possible contingency, and, if the author fails to keep a copy of his work, such loss may be disastrous.

2. *Fasten the loose sheets of your manuscript together at the top left-hand corner with a paper clip.* I recommend clips which perforate the paper and cannot be accidentally disengaged. This precaution prevents the occasional annoying loss of a single folio.

3. *Always keep a manuscript record.* Unless your work is dealt with by an agent, it is most important you should know where your manuscripts are, when they were dispatched, and to what publications they have been previously submitted.

Nicely printed and well arranged manuscript records can be bought, but an ordinary notebook has always served my purpose.

My plan was to keep a page for each manuscript. I would head the page with the title of the story and its length. Then the fortunes of that particular manuscript could be followed down the page. I don't mind admitting that in my early days some

of those yarns did go right down the page and, perhaps, without finding a permanent home even then.

Supposing your story were called *Better Times*, this is how an ordinary manuscript record book might record its fortunes—

Better Times—2,500 words

Completed—2/9/34

Sent to	*Date*	*Returned*	*Remarks*
Dash Mag. . .	3/9/34	20/9/34	Regrets
Dot Mag. . .	25/9/34	10/10/34	Regrets
Asterisk Mag. .	12/10/34	3/11/34	Letter
Blank Mag. . .	8/11/34	—	25/11/34 £7 10s. 0d.

As regards the practical preparation and dispatch of manuscripts I do not think there are any more important points to consider. Minor details of presentation are best decided by individual taste, but I do not advise any elaborate manuscript covers. They are a needless expense, and may cause an editor to think that he is dealing with a beginner's work. I don't think the professional writer often uses them.

In counting the number of words it is quite sufficient to follow the method indicated at the beginning of the first part of this book. Count the number of words in a score of lines and thus get the average per line. Then count the number of lines to a page and make the necessary multiplication.

Once you have found out the average number of words to a page the rest is simple, typewritten pages vary very little indeed; they usually go from 200 to 250 words to the page.

Style—Three Hints.

Readers of the first half of this book will remember that I discussed at some length the difference between style and technique.

I do not intend to resume that discussion here, but I may mention in passing that, whereas technique is perhaps more important than style to the free-lance journalist, style is possibly more important than technique to the story writer.

At this stage I want to call your attention only to three general hints in regard to style.

1. In story writing, as in writing articles, *it is better to avoid long words, long sentences and long paragraphs.*

2. In story writing, perhaps even more than in free-lance journalism, *the actual choice of words is enormously important.*

Flaubert says: "Whatever one wishes to say, there is only one noun to express it, only one verb to give it life, only one adjective to qualify it. Search, then, until that noun, that verb, that adjective, is discovered. Never be content with very nearly. Never have recourse to tricks, however happy, nor to buffoonery of language to avoid a difficulty. This is the way to become original."

The writer who follows Flaubert's advice will not only become original; he will achieve distinction of style.

3. *Always beware of adjectives and adverbs.*

It has been my experience that adjectives, adverbs, and adjectival phrases are a particular source of danger to the new writer. The tendency is always to

use too many adjectives and to qualify too strongly. Heavy, but ill-directed, fire from a battery of adjectives and adverbs produces less effect than a direct hit by one well-chosen, qualificative word. Always exercise rigid economy in this respect.

Short Story Anatomy.

I was once gravely told that every short story must have a beginning, a middle and an end. It sounds so simple as to be almost inevitable, but, if you had been obliged to reject as many manuscripts as I have done, you would realize that there are thousands of crippled stories that lack one of these essential parts.

Let it be admitted that here and there clever writers have sold entirely plotless stories. Genius, and I suppose even great talent, is a law unto itself. But, so far as *you* are now concerned, never make the mistake of writing a story without some sort of plot.

No hard and fast rule can be laid down with regard to plot laying. There are almost as many methods of story construction as there are writers. But, *for the beginner, it may be safely said that preliminary plot construction will always amply repay the labour it entails.*

It is a very good plan, as an exercise in plot construction, to select the best short story you have recently read of the type which you are intending to write, and to make a précis or summary of that story in not more than 50 or 100 words. (One hundred words should be the maximum necessary for the outlining of the plot of a 5,000 word story.)

This précis is simply a skeleton of the finished story. The narrative thrown at intervals on the moving picture screen is something of the same kind of thing, but it is by no means complete, for the story is told in the pictures, and the writing occasionally flashed on the screen merely fills in gaps in précis form.

Before setting out to write your own story, prepare a similar skeleton plot. Just as the artist must have a knowledge of anatomy before he can present a truthful figure study, so the writer must have a clear conception, written or mental, of the skeleton upon which his living story is to be built.

You will often discover, when you have constructed your skeleton, that the anatomy is all wrong. Perhaps the sequence of events is not a logical one; perhaps, to reach your desired climax, you have been compelled to use a forced situation; perhaps, even, you will be able to see that the resultant story cannot possibly "hang together," either because of contradictions in the plot itself, or because several of the bones in your skeleton are missing.

Plot Finding.

In the first half of this book I devoted considerable space to the subject of idea finding, because I regarded it as a most important part of free-lance journalism.

The ability to find plots is essential to the story writer, and a plot is often no more than an elaborated idea.

It does not follow that an idea suitable for an article will lend itself to the short story form, but

the writer of fiction may well take a leaf out of the free lance journalist's book when it comes to looking for ideas. The suggestions for idea finding, which I gave in Chapters III and IV, can certainly be adapted to the use of the short story writer.

The utilization and development of ideas varies with the requirements of the writer, and it will be necessary to consider this matter carefully later on.

What the story writer must realize at the outset is that a plot is merely a variation on a given theme.

There is a common saying that there are no new plots. That is neither more nor less true than the proverb: "There is nothing new under the sun."

Another epigrammatical half-truth is that there are only seven plots; and four of these have never been used. Here the word "plot" is wrongly used as synonymous with theme.

Three Great Themes.

I am willing to admit that there are no new themes. In fact, I think that there are only three—Sex, Love of Power, and Love of Life.

Nearly every story that has ever been published has been written upon one of these themes. *You cannot escape them, but the variations upon them are infinite.*

The most casual study of current fiction will show you how these themes predominate to the exclusion of all else, and yet lend themselves to an inexhaustible supply of relatively fresh situations and plots.

Love of man for woman and of woman for man is

the biggest theme of all, and I think it would not be an exaggeration to state that more than 50 per cent of short stories (and also of novels for that matter) are based upon a love interest.

All other stories are included in the love of power and the love of life themes, and it is, of course, not uncommon to find stories in which two themes are blended. An adventure story with a love interest is a case in point.

Classes of Story.

The principal variations upon the three great themes may also be classified into main groups. The sex theme, for example, includes—

(*a*) Simple romances,
(*b*) Triangle stories,
(*c*) Domestic stories,

and many other less important groups.

The love of power theme comprises stories of the attainment of success, and many stories of hate and revenge, greed and envy and even, in certain circumstances, self-sacrifice and endeavour.

The majority of adventure and mystery stories form part of the third theme—love of life.

At this stage I do not propose to analyse the various groups. The average reader is quite satisfied to describe a story as a love story, an adventure story, or a mystery story. Probably, if none of these descriptions will fit he will get out of the difficulty by saying "a queer sort of yarn" or "an unusual tale."

What I *do* think important is that each would-be

writer should make every effort to discover the *kind of story* which most appeals to him or her, and which will consequently afford the biggest scope for his or her individual talent.

It is, perhaps, hardly necessary to emphasize the need for reading the best published fiction. Unfortunately many persons dissipate their energy in a vain endeavour to discover what is most worth reading for their own purposes.

Specialization.

In story writing, as in every other branch of the literary profession, specialization is advisable, but this must necessarily be a counsel of perfection, because until one's reputation is such as to command a market, the ordinary writer cannot afford exclusive specialization.

At the same time, everyone has individual preferences, and I cannot too strongly advise the reader to concentrate as far as possible on the type of story which has for him or her the strongest appeal. One of the many advantages of such concentration is that the field of one's reading can be proportionately limited. If, for instance, the adventure story does not appeal to you, you can afford to ignore this class of fiction almost entirely.

Danger of Models.

The problem of what to read must necessarily be one of elimination. At the very outset there is a grave danger to be avoided. Do not, in your admiration for any particular author, so soak yourself in

his special style that your own work becomes a pale imitation of your model.

Kipling, whose short stories have inspired more young writers than those of any other living author, is a genius whom it is very dangerous to imitate. Yet thousands of aspirants have turned out "Kiplingese" which never stood any chance of success.

A similar cult for O. Henry exists in the States, and I was told by an editor of an important group of American magazines, that his sub-editors (or, more properly, publishers' readers) instantly recognize the O. Henry touch, and, in nine cases out of ten, reject such manuscripts summarily because the writers had assimilated the style, but not the *finish*, of their model.

Obviously, both Kipling and O. Henry rank among the masters, and there is an immense amount which can be learned by a study of their works.

What you must avoid is the attempt to handle your own theme in the style of the master until you have the master-style. Study their technique; analyse their method of story building; note the fine touches which produce their boldest effects, but always remember that your own work must be original. *Technique may be learned; style, to a certain extent, may be borrowed; but slavish imitation is foredoomed to failure.*

What to Read.

Successful writers of fiction hold different views as to the value of reading stories, and particularly contemporary stories. One of my personal friends,

who contributes to leading magazines both in this country and America, assured me quite recently that he did not think he had read a single magazine story for more than five years.

"I don't read them," he said, "on principle. Good or bad, my own work is at least individual. When I read stories they stick in my mind and are apt to colour my own fiction.

"Besides, so few modern stories are really worth studying."

That is a view with which I largely disagree. On the other hand, I do believe that the *mere reading* of contemporary short stories is waste of time for the would-be author, unless he studies them carefully to examine their structure, notice their good points, and criticize their defects.

But I am definitely of opinion that *the new writer should study the masters.*

Read widely, but read with discretion. I can recommend H. G. Wells's collection of short stories published in a single volume under the title of *The Country of the Blind.* Every one of these is a model to the young writer. Do not, however, confine yourself to English authors. Read O. Henry's stories; read Richard Harding Davis and Gouverneur Morris in the American magazines, and study some of the French short story writers. Guy de Maupassant stands as an acknowledged master, and any of his collections are worthy of study.

I do not think that all these writers should be studied one after another, or that their stories should be hurriedly perused. Mental indigestion is

at least as prevalent as physical. But I am confident that real study of the recognized short story masters will be of enormous help, not only in regard to style and technique, but also in regard to plot finding.

CHAPTER III

READING and observation—Danger of plagiarism—Plot construction—Blank road mystery—Question and answer.

ALTHOUGH I believe that discriminating and careful reading will help in the matter of finding ideas, reading alone is quite inadequate.

I have already advised study of the idea-finding methods recommended to the free-lance writer, and I would now add that the idea book is also almost as useful to the writer of stories as to the writer of articles.

Every beginner should keep an idea book. Many experienced authors find such a book invaluable to them.

In your idea book you should jot down any good idea, any picturesque incident, any striking thought, that may occur to you just as and when it does occur. Never waste an idea no matter how fragmentary.

The incidents of your own daily life, the conversation of friends, your own impressions on reading a story which appeals to, but does not satisfy you—any or all of these may contain the germs of new ideas.

In reading, particularly, you will so often find that after finishing a story you are lost in reflection and, almost before you know it, you have thought of various alternative endings or possible developments. *Don't lose these casual musings.*

Reading and Observation.

Important as reading is, it should never be allowed to oust observation from the story writer's armoury. *You must learn to see.*

Seek for the unusual in the sights around you—the significance of details—the meaning of trifles—the effect of certain incidents on certain people.

In walking the streets do not be afraid to stand still and *look*. Do not shirk the experiment of wandering in out-of-the-way places. You will see nothing unusual at first; but gradually the pageant of life—its sadness and its terror, its wild humour and its irony—will sink into your soul.

Even though it may be admitted that there are no *absolutely* new plots, yet there is an infinite number of *original stories*.

Many writers, who had no particular aptitude for involved plot-weaving, have become successful merely by borrowing ideas that seemed usable.

Whenever, in reading or in observation, an incident or an episode, a fragment of dialogue or an unusually interesting character is encountered that seems to be "good material"—out comes the notebook and the idea is recorded, to be developed afterwards at leisure.

Much finished work is a composite of just such ideas, ingeniously blended and fitted together to form a whole.

The same thing can happen without deliberate method, but merely by a natural and instinctive process of assimilation or rejection. Something encountered suggests a good title, opening or central

idea; from that first flash, the whole story can be built up.

Everything that is read will contribute to the material that the author has at his command. Everything that is heard, seen or experienced will assist the author in his work. Concentrate on that first central idea until it becomes embodied in a character, who must then do certain things that will develop the theme in the story.

Add incidental characters as demanded; move the characters towards an unexpected and unusual climax, and the plot of the story is complete. It is a good plan to develop as many such skeleton plots as possible, writing them down in a short synopsis of two or three hundred words. A "plot-book" carefully kept by the author can be made an almost inexhaustible mine of "worth-while" literary material.

While it is certainly not the intention to advise the writer toward conscious plagiarism, it is to be remembered that story ideas are universal property; the basic idea used by another author in a story or found badly described in a newspaper article, given a different development, will often result in a plot-outline that has every aspect of originality, and, in fact, is original, in just the proportion that the author has added his own material to that idea.

Danger of Plagiarism.

It is absolutely essential that the new writer should understand the essential difference between the "borrowing" of ideas and plagiarism, *the greatest*

of literary crimes. Plagiarism does not mean only the actual stealing and reprinting of another author's work; it may be only the actual stealing of a complete plot, or of the theme of another strikingly original story.

Plagiarism is not only dishonest; it is also unprofitable. The dependence on other men even for themes is literary suicide. It kills imagination, and absolutely destroys the power of original conception. Stories are where you find them; characters, plot developments, even the striking phrase or the trick in construction should be absolutely your own.

With this note of warning it becomes permissible to reiterate the value of wide and extensive reading in every branch of literature. No writer can write successfully who is not also a great reader.

When you can disagree with the writer's conclusions, his construction, or the way in which he has brought about the climax of his story, try to re-draft that plot as it seems to you it should have been done. The result will probably be an *entirely new conception* —a story which you will be justified in writing as your own.

The daily newspapers are a never failing source of stories. Learn there how men and women react to certain circumstances. Find there the germ of an infinite number of stories that need only a little more development to become successful fiction tales.

It is a good plan to clip out any suggestive stories and keep them for future reference. Newspapers present, perhaps, a somewhat crude and distorted reflection of life, but it is the life of the man in the street, and just the kind of human material that

should find more effective presentation in the stories which are intended to appear in the magazines.

Above all, remember that every scrap of information which can be acquired by the author will at some future time be useful. The writer need not specialize in any particular kind of knowledge, but he should know something about almost everything, enough, at least, to know where more complete information can be found when it is required.

The more general information he has, the better his equipment will be to present pictures that wear an air of authority. That capacity to make the illusory creations of the story world appear solid and natural to the reader is the very essence of literary realism.

Plot Construction.

I have suggested where you may look for your ideas, and I have told you that a story plot is only a developed idea. Naturally it is rather too much to hope for plots ready made, no matter where you look for them. Just now and again a complete plot *may* be given away by happy chance, but it is very rare and the gift is seldom exclusive.

I remember one such case quite recently. An advertisement appeared in the agony column of a London paper. It consisted of only four or five lines to the effect that the advertiser, an old man approaching his end, begged the forgiveness of one, known as Le Balafré, for a lie told in Paris in 1870. "Pardon," said the old man in those few lines of print, "pardon, and give peace to a troubled soul."

Well, there, for anyone with any imagination at all, was a story all ready made. Within a week, three or four journalists had woven romances about that advertisement in the Sunday newspapers, and I doubt not that the plot was used by many short story writers in the magazines.

Generally, however, one is given only a fragmentary idea, by reading, or by circumstance, or by casual observation. The idea dwells in the mind; directly it begins to take shape it is noted down in the idea book; gradually other ideas are added to it; and suddenly it becomes a plot.

It is not easy to give definite instances of this mental plot construction, because, I fancy, the process of idea building varies with the individual. Moreover, that process is often almost unconscious. But supposing, for example, your attention is arrested, when you pick up your paper by a little paragraph like this—

BLANK ROAD MYSTERY

"Late last night the body of a man about forty years of age was discovered in the area of a house in Blank Road, Wapping.

"The dead man was wearing evening dress and does not appear to have been injured in any way. A platinum and gold cigarette case and a gold watch were found in the pockets, but there were no letters or papers, and so far the body has not been identified——"

There is nothing very remarkable in a paragraph of that sort. Any observant readers of the papers

will, in the course of an average week, find a dozen other paragraphs equally fruitful of ideas.

If, however, this particular paragraph happens to stick in your mind, your imagination is *bound* to begin asking questions, and so, eventually, finding answers and building a story.

What sort of a man was the unknown? Middle-aged certainly and probably wealthy. Very likely a clubman and a bachelor.

Why was he wandering, presumably late at night, down a dreary road in a poor district frequented by seamen?

Quite possibly the real explanation is that the man was the worse for drink and died of heart failure after a night out, but the story writer will never accept so uninteresting a solution to his problem.

Question and Answer.

The more you think about this unknown man the more mysterious the case appears. If he were murdered, who killed him, and why? How is it that his valuables were not stolen?

Probably it was a case of revenge, but not the banal revenge of a ruffian, otherwise the unknown man would have been shot or knifed or knocked on the head with a sandbag.

How *was* the man killed? He bore no trace of outward injury, therefore his heart must have failed. Poison seems out of the question in view of the general circumstances.

Very well, what made his heart stop? Perhaps —just perhaps—it was fear, dreadful, immense,

unspeakable fear. At last, when he least expected it, his avenger had come upon him.

Avenger for what crime? No vulgar, ordinary crime would have inspired such hatred and caused such relentless pursuit.

You see, by this time, your mental cinematograph has unwound a reel or two, and the different pictures are beginning to connect up into a story.

It is hardly necessary for me to take the plot any farther, but probably you will assume that there has been a woman in the case. It may be the wife or daughter of the avenger; and the clubman had cruelly wronged this woman.

Or, perhaps, he had done nothing of the sort. Perhaps he had been cruelly and wrongfully suspected of another man's treachery.

The possibilities are infinite. I don't pretend to have presented you with a plot—scarcely more than the very beginning of one.

All I wanted to do was to suggest to you one of the mental processes of plot construction.

It may very likely happen that you reach a certain point in this plot-building and can get no farther. If you have really made any progress at all you should certainly jot a few notes down in your idea book.

Days later, perhaps months later, there may come to you a sudden flash of illumination, and you will see a triumphant conclusion to your incomplete story.

Or it may be that another paragraph, or possibly some little incident quite unconnected with the death

of the clubman in Wapping, may just fit in to your partially constructed story and complete it for you.

For example, among *Wills and Bequests* you might come across a paragraph like this: Testator made a special legacy of "Five shillings to my wife Theresa, which I judge to have been the measure of her affection for me."

If you cared to do so, there is no doubt that you could link up the two paragraphs in a story which would borrow from both, but would nevertheless be a creation of your own.

It may be objected that the plot obtainable in this way would be suitable only for a mystery story, or some kind of popular and rather melodramatic fiction.

What then? I have not attempted to find a plot for you. My sole object has been to suggest to you how you can find, or rather *make*, plots for yourself.

Perhaps the *Blank Road Mystery* would not appeal to you at all. That doesn't matter, because there will be a thousand other paragraphs and countless incidents among which one or more is bound to give you the idea you want for the kind of story you like, if you will but keep your mental eyes wide open.

And the process of plot construction, though it will vary according to your own temperament and imagination, will serve for one type of story as well as for another.

I should like to make it clear at this point that I do not use the word "plot" in any restricted sense. I do not mean for a moment that a well plotted story need be a mystery story. I speak of "plot" in the technical

sense, only as the skeleton or framework upon which a short story is built.

I have tried to show you how a newspaper paragraph may supply you with a short story plot. A single incident, or a casual remark may be equally effective in setting up the necessary train of thought.

In order to illustrate this I may be pardoned if I refer to a little story I wrote during the war, which was afterwards chosen by an influential committee of literary men, including the late Sir William Robertson Nicoll, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Clement Shorter and Edmund Gosse, for inclusion in the *Masterpiece Library of Short Stories.*

The Owner of Achi-Baba, as I named the tale, was simply the story of a man whose name had been mentioned to me, in the course of a conversation, by a soldier at the Dardanelles. He said to me one day, when we were about to attack that almost impregnable hill, Achi-Baba, " See that man who has just passed ? He owns Achi-Baba, and now he's washing our shirts."

I think it may be of help to the reader if I reproduce in part the result of my soldier-friend's observation. After a brief opening ; a word about Imbros, which was " being used at the time as a rest camp for troops that had just arrived, or who had returned for a little spell after the difficult fighting ' across the road,' " ; and a paragraph or two describing the island," once the residence of the mythical Greek Gods, now inhabitated by a number of modern Greeks " : the central figure is introduced—

"The Owner of Achi-Baba."

"He stood in the centre of the 'main street,' and pointed with a gaunt shaky finger in the direction of the Greek huts.

"'They are robbers!' he exclaimed, in crescendo. 'They make profit and profit, and yet they charge more!'

"A good-natured Tommy went over to him. 'Never mind, Bill,' he said, 'they won't last long; the ship is coming.'

"'Bill' yielded to the softened influence, but as he went he unburdened himself of his complaint.

"'Three-halfpence for an egg instead of a penny!' he moaned. That was all; but 'Bill'—or Dmitri, to give him his unmilitary appellation—was far from satisfied.

"'You see' said the Tommy to me, 'it's jolly hard lines on Bill, and I can understand the old chap being a bit put out. He has had such rotten luck. I suppose you know who he is?' Much to my friend's disgust I had to confess my ignorance.

"'Why,' he cried, 'he is the owner of Achi-Baba!' And then, seeing my incredulity, 'Yes, it is a fact,' he went on, 'and now he is doing our washing!'

"I laughed away the story, but others confirmed it. It seemed that Dmitri was a large landowner, and possessed practically everything tenantable on Achi-Baba, where he had lived and dreamed in blissful unconsciousness of the terrific bombardment that was to awaken him.

"As soon as war broke out, 'Bill' did not stop

to argue with the Turkish gunners, but made sharp tracks for the nearest place of security, which happened to be Imbros. Since war is no respecter of persons or positions, and 'Bill' could not live on prestige or sentiment, he took up the only available job offered him—washing the clothes of the men who were doing their best to sweep up what remained of his property on Achi-Baba.

"And yet, somehow, with the exception of the extortionate traders who wanted three-halfpence for a penny egg, he appeared to be fairly happy in his new associations. He knew, at any rate, that in the midst of 'khaki' he was a little safer than he would have been among the 'Kuftans.' He became keenly pro-British, and joked with Tommy as far as his limited understanding permitted him.

"But one day I came across him on the summit of one of the neighbouring hills. He did not see me, but I saw on his face a dreamy, yearning expression which almost transformed him. I wondered at the cause of it. When I reached him I saw the reason. He was gazing across the water in the direction of the hill whose top had been flattened out like a table.

"It was Achi-Baba, and from it there issued a thick black vapour, as if it were a volcano in eruption.

"The owner of Achi-Baba knew the cause of it—the gallant British Fleet, which was engaged every day in this process of flattening.

"'It is hard lines, Dmitri,' I said; but I had to repeat it before he heard me.

"Then he turned slowly and said: 'It is nothing, nothing, monsieur,' and he went down the hill with his head bent in sorrow."

That was all—a mere trifle, but the committee which chose the story thought that it did not strain for effect and had much human interest.

Now the first thing which occurred to me when I saw the owner of Achi-Baba and heard the soldier's brief comment, was that it could be made into a light sketch, or that, alternatively, it could be used merely as a piece of interesting news.

That was my first thought, and as a newspaper man I might very well have used my story merely to give substance to a chatty column, but very soon I began to paint a mental picture, and what I saw was the pathetic figure of this old man, a great land-owner, but pro-British and willingly washing the shirts of the British soldiers.

I imagined how mixed his feelings must be as he heard the big guns of the British super-battleships pounding away at Achi-Baba. Those big shells meant victory for the Cause, but they also meant the destruction of his property. Essentially, this man suggested a silent, sorrowing figure, who witnessed the gradual devastation of his home without a murmur.

That was how I came to write the finished story, and I refer to it now as an instance of a story built upon a single incident and a chance-heard phrase.

A friend of mine, singularly prolific in ideas, said to me recently: "Life is teeming with story plots. I cannot read a paper, or ride on the top of a bus, or

dine in a restaurant, or go to a theatre, without some possible potential plot entering my mind."

Not everybody is so fortunate, but if this chapter has shown the reader how plots *can* be built up from some of the inexhaustible ideas of daily life or reading, it will have served its purpose.

CHAPTER IV

HACKNEYED situations—A French example—The forced situation—Don't be lazy—Too bad to be true.

READERS may imagine, because I have attached so much importance to plot-finding, that when they *have* finally constructed a plot from some idea or series of ideas, which has occurred to them, their principal difficulty has been overcome, and all they need do is to sit down joyfully and rattle out the story.

Alas! That would be far too optimistic. I have a good deal more to say about plots before I can begin to discuss the actual writing of the story.

It often happens, particularly with the beginner, that a plot which seems most attractive in its inception, won't really pass muster. *Even a dream castle must not be jerry-built.*

Hackneyed Situations.

When you are considering your own latest plot, remember that, of two great dangers to be avoided, the first is the danger of the hackneyed situation.

As has been said already, there are only three *main* story themes, and all the principal variations upon these have been used again and again. Few plots, if any, are *altogether* new, and that is why it is of such immense importance to make your situations as bright and fresh as possible. Try with all your powers of imagination to think of a fresh situation, and if after all you find that the plot which you

have carefully thought out is not altogether new, then you must do your utmost to give a fresh aspect to it. It then becomes possible to relieve a fairly ordinary situation by some novel and original idea.

Take the case of what has been described as "The Eternal Triangle" situation. The three points of the triangle are represented by one man and two women, or, alternatively, by one woman and two men.

All triangle stories belong to the sex group, and treat the elemental age-old problem of conflicting love interests. Hundreds of thousands of "triangle" stories must have been written, and no effort of imagination can forecast the number of these tales which are yet to be born.

Nevertheless, the writer with ideas can always discover some little twist of incident or circumstance to lift even a "triangle" story out of the ordinary.

Quite recently I came across a little story of this kind which may serve to illustrate my meaning. The central character was a man cast for the "strong silent rôle." The central character often is, but in this story the man was a hollow sham. Behind an appearance of dominant over-bearing personality was a craven spirit.

You see here the novel twist to an old idea. The "hero" had managed to deceive not only all his friends, but also his wife. There had been a passionate scene of jealousy and mutual recrimination, culminating in the "hero's" threat that if his wife ever again met the other man (the third point in the triangle) he would shoot on sight.

Our craven "hero" returns home one evening, is ushered in by his servants, and passes to his study, at the door of which he pauses, to overhear his wife pleading passionately with the *tertium quid*, and warning him of the husband's dreaded ferocity.

The climax is sufficiently ingenious. The "hero's" lifetime reputation for courage is imperilled by this situation. This is the moment in which he, the "hero," must shoot on sight. The servants know that the husband is in the house and has gone to his study. He cannot crawl out of the inevitable encounter, and yet fear plucks at his heartstrings.

Making a desperate call upon his remnants of courage, he bursts open the door—only to find that his wife is talking into the telephone!

This little story of the craven hero was chosen at random, but I hope it may illustrate my remarks. After you have formed your plot, try deliberately to break away from conventional treatment and conventional situations.

Ask yourself: "Has this, or anything very like it, been done before?" Reflection will nearly always convince you that your idea is not new.

Make it new. Give a new twist to it.

At this point I must once again emphasize the fact that when I speak of "plot" I mean the fabric of every story, not of one particular type. There are countless stories which do not depend for their success on novel situations or ingenious dove-tailing of strange happenings. There are many stories almost entirely without action, of which the tragedy or comedy lies only in the portrayal of character.

But even in stories of this type there is the same urgent need for originality of idea.

It stands to reason that if one is writing a story in which the play of character is more important than the progress of events, originality must be sought in a somewhat different way.

In stories of this kind the smallest details of description may be of vital importance. An immense effect may be obtained by the lift of an eyebrow, the scent of a gown, the heaviness of a footfall.

A French Example.

Take, for instance, that little gem, *The Fez*, by Henri Duvernois. Perfect in construction, with a curious blend of strength and delicacy, it reveals the keenest perception and observation, and is, above all, exceedingly simple in style.

The story is merely about an old Turk who has lived in Paris since boyhood, and has become as far Westernized as environment can permit. He is fond of a woman despite her bitter temper, her many years and her lost beauty. All he wants is her companionship, but one day she taunts him with not going to fight with his brother Turks, and she "rubs it in" by reading out to him the tales of disaster to the Turkish army. At first, poor Nissim pleads with his love not to worry him about the war. "Kiss Nissim, and not talk politics," he urged. "Not like to talk of poor beggars————"

"You'd shake with fright if they made you go and fight! How old are you?" He made a vague

gesture. He didn't know. He didn't know anything about himself. He was Nissim. That was all. He was used to sell sweetmeats out in the big world; he thought of nothing but his trade and her. She must not ask too much of him. He clapped his forehead with his fist.

"An old animal, my dove. Nissim an old, old animal who loves you——"

But the foolish woman flogs the memory of her protector until suddenly he begins to realize. She sees her mistake—too late. Nissim was standing drawn up to his full height before her, and suddenly fear seized her. Up in his little room on the sixth floor of the rue de Helder, Nissim had, in a flash, recaptured his old Eastern spirit; he became filled with the poignant distress, the impotent rage of his vanquished race who had fallen in that distant land.

"Quick! Quick! Get out," he commanded. She pleaded. "Get out!" he cried again in a tone that was new to her. Panic-stricken she dressed in haste. In five minutes the old idiot had relapsed into a Turk. He was throwing her out as he would have thrown her out of a harem. She fled, banging the door behind her with an oath.

"Nissim was alone. He rummaged in a trunk, and got out his fez, the fez he wore when he sold rahat loukoum and nougat. It was all moth-eaten, but he threw his high hat aside and put it on his head. Then some irresistible force made him bow his head . . . . and he fell on his knees sobbing, his face turned towards Mecca."

This example is merely intended to show the

reader just where and how Henri Duvernois gets his effects. Not one man in a thousand can hope to write a story of the same level; but the *workmanship* of this story, or of any other acknowledged masterpiece, can be studied with great advantage.

The Forced Situation.

I want now to pass on to the second great danger which besets the plot-builder. This is the peril of the forced or unreal situation.

In order to develop one's original, and, perhaps, very attractive, idea, one is very apt to stretch the long arm of coincidence to the extreme limit. That is fatal. Rather than force your situation, reconstruct the whole plot.

It is by no means in action stories alone that situations may be unreal and plots may not hang together. Indeed, the very popular psychological story of to-day is often sadly unconvincing.

I could give you innumerable instances of forced situations which I have encountered in manuscripts that have passed through my hands. Unfortunately, these instances are not confined exclusively to beginners. The popular magazines are full of them. By this I do not mean to imply that published stories contain very glaringly forced situations, but owing to the dearth of real talent, editors are often compelled, reluctantly, to pass over faults which are, to some extent, condoned by fairly good writing.

Supposing, for example, that the plot of your story necessitates a scene at an Assize Court. Possibly your hero is charged with a grave crime, which,

of course, he did not commit. This is an age-old plot and many fine stories have been written round it, but to every good story of this type there have been a dozen poor ones, which have exasperated the intelligent reader by their careless inaccuracies.

Don't write a story about the Law Courts unless you know how a trial is conducted in real life. There is no excuse for not knowing. If you must have a trial in your story, then take the trouble to go and hear one. Our courts are open to the public.

Recently, a well-known journalist gave a lecture detailing a number of examples of wrongly described situations which have actually appeared in well-known books. It was but lately that I was asked to read a play by a friend of mine, who has written excellent little plays around situations with which he is very familiar. This time, however, his play centred round a big trial, the details of which he never bothered about! I was not surprised, therefore, to find that *he was wrong in procedure from beginning to end.*

Such carelessness is inexcusable, and I told him so!

Don't be Lazy.

So many people refuse to take trouble. They think that if they have a certain knack of writing, nothing more is required. This is a complete mistake. *The greatest writers have taken infinite pains to see that their stories measure up to the facts of life.*

A young writer whom I knew some
whose then untrained talent compell
tion, came to me one day with the

story. His scene was laid in a little Breton fishing village.

The story was very slight. It contained only four characters, and the central motive was the fierce jealousy of a hard middle-aged Breton fisherman for a wife twenty years his junior. The story ended with an unexpected discovery of this girl's love for her husband, and the sterling honesty of the young Breton whom he had believed to be her lover.

The plot, as you can see for yourself, was by no means original, consisting as it did of one of the endless variations upon the triangle theme. Nevertheless, the story as it had been written was moving, and had an instant appeal to the emotions.

I told my young friend, in journalistic slang, that his story was a "sure winner," and I am quite certain that he could have sold it just as it stood, untouched.

He did nothing of the sort because he was a real craftsman, with an infinite capacity for taking pains. He went to Brittany on his next annual holiday. He soaked himself in the atmosphere of a rural Breton fishing village, and as a result of his holiday, I think he may have changed a couple of pages in his original manuscript. He sold the story, thus changed.

He would have sold it, possibly equally well, without a single finishing touch, but he satisfied the artist that was in him. He gave the picture that was true to life, and that was his only immediate reward.

Now I do not suggest that it is necessary, or even desirable, to follow this young man's example. Life

is too short and too difficult. But I do say that every ambitious writer must take reasonable pains to check his verifiable facts and to make sure that the details of descriptions and the record of incidents are, as far as possible, true to life.

I have felt it absolutely necessary to emphasize the twin peril of the *hackneyed* and of the *unconvincing* plot, because I am confident that *plot-weakness accounts for the vast majority of rejected manuscripts.*

At the same time I do not want the readers of this book to be too readily discouraged.

Make sure that your plot is *reasonably* plausible, and that it has *some* originality of idea or freshness of situation. Then, if you are not satisfied—and you probably never will be—remember once again that the absolutely original plot does not exist.

Even the *comparatively* original plot is treasure trove. The rehashed plot is even more general, and is quite acceptable if it be cleverly flavoured with some spice of original idea.

Remember this point when you have written a story which is not quite satisfactory, or when you have projected plot after plot without finding anything that is entirely to your liking.

I know that this is dangerous advice. It merely means, however, that, while striving to the utmost or your capacity to achieve original and artistic work, you should not be disheartened when you fail to break entirely new ground.

There are certain plots, however, that can be counted upon to bring an instant rejection. They have been used, and ill-used so often, that editors

and publishers' readers recognize them as quickly as a bank cashier detects a false note. It is impossible to list all such plots here, but one may mention four imperishable evergreens as illustrations.

THE WARD AND HER GUARDIAN. A dying man begs his gallant friend to care for his orphan daughter. The appointed guardian sheds a manly tear and adopts the child. The girl, admirably endowed with riches, develops into a creature of amazing beauty and infinite charm. Surrounded by young men she, nevertheless, falls in love with the mature guardian who is the most honourable, and most obtuse, of all men. In the end the girl is forced to propose to him, or else contrive a compromising situation which will force him to declare his passion for her.

THE GRANITE FATHER AND WINSOME DAUGHTER-IN-LAW. The only son of a stern old nobleman, or millionaire, falls in love with Flossie Twinkletoes of the chorus, a very good little girl. Flossie is not introduced to the stern father, however, because he would not for a moment tolerate his son's marriage to an actress. But Flossie, cleverly disguised as a typist or playing some similar rôle, wins the old man's admiration to such an extent that Archibald, overjoyed, feels safe in introducing her as his fiancée. The old man's blessing and a gratifying large allowance end the story.

THE WEALTHY WANDERER'S RETURN. The young hero leaves his home at the age of twenty to seek fortune in a foreign land. The only girl he ever loved is left behind where she, at the proper interval, is going to be forced to marry the hard-hearted villain

to save her once wealthy father from disgrace. The young hero becomes rich, returns just in time to snatch the heroine from the villain's arms. Then he reaches for his cheque book to win the girl and the father's gratitude at one and the same time.

TWO ON THE DESERT ISLAND. The boat is wrecked: two at least—or most!—are saved. After a series of adventures in which the despised male proves his manhood to the scornful girl, the rescuing ship arrives just in time to prevent the conventions being shattered to fragments. And the wedding bells in England ring again.

Too Bad to be True.

Many of my readers will be likely to think that these particular plots are really too bad to be true. But these very plots (with their hundreds of variants) are submitted to long-suffering editors every day in the week.

Occasionally a miracle happens, and one of them gets through. Some really ingenious twist to the old situations aided, perhaps, by unusually bright dialogue added to the fact that the editor is in a good humour and short of copy, may explain the editorial oversight.

But it is too much for the beginner to expect that this particular miracle will happen to him. For every such story accepted there are some thousands of justified rejections.

Here, in briefest outline, are a few more of the plots that beginners ought most conscientiously to avoid—

THE CINDERELLA STORY. Detailing the ultimate triumph of the despised member of the household.

THE FOOL WHO BECOMES A GREAT MAN. The masculine version of the Cinderella story.

THE CUB-REPORTER STORY. The plucky youngster beats all the old hands, makes a series of amazing scoops, and becomes the son-in-law of the editor and owner.

THE RURITANIAN STORY. After (very much after) Anthony Hope in *The Prisoner of Zenda.*

THE BROTHER WHO BORE THE BLAME. How the younger (or elder) brother (or sister) shielded another member of the family from prison or disgrace by confessing to a crime that he or she had not committed.

One could extend this list very considerably, and I think that beginners might find it worth while to do so for their own amusement and instruction.

CHAPTER V

WHAT makes a good title—Openings—Endings.

ALTHOUGH I have devoted a good deal of space to the problem of short story plotting, I should discuss it at even greater length were it not that there are other matters, of almost equal importance that must now claim our attention.

I want to assume, therefore, that you have found a plot which is not too hackneyed, and which is at least reasonably plausible. This done, your first problem is to find a suitable title. Many people do not find their titles until they have written their stories, but I think this is a mistake.

A good title is *almost* as important in fiction as it is in free-lance journalism.

When you yourself pick up a magazine and glance idly through the contents page, what is it that makes you start your reading with one story more than another ?

Nine times out of ten it is the title. True, you may be looking for the work of a particular author, and in that case the title hardly counts, but, if other things are equal, there can be no doubt whatever that an attractive title predisposes the reader to like the story.

That is important enough in any case, but consider how important it must be to the unknown writer whose story is only one of a heavy pile on the desk of the editor or the editor's reader. I do not mean to

say that such a writer's manuscript will not be read if the title is a poor one. But I *do* mean to say that a really good title will arrest the attention of your first and most important reader, and make him take more interest in the story behind it.

I think, moreover, that a good title is an inspiration to the writer himself.

What Makes a Good Title?

The very natural question now arises as to what constitutes a *good* title. In answer to that I would say that *a good title must arrest attention* by its general sound, or its colour value, or its hint of mystery and adventure, or its touch of paradox, or even, in some cases, by its almost irritating inconsequence.

A title for a short story should be brief, containing not more than three or four words.

Consider the title of that striking and once discussed novel, *The Green Carnation.* Here is a brief inconsequent phrase, with some colour value, yet somehow it excites curiosity because one feels that it must be symbolic.

A good title often does contain some piece of effective symbolism. Note the curious suggestiveness of a title like *Butterflies in the Rain.*

Every title should have a direct bearing upon the story itself. The reference may be picturesque or symbolic, but it should not be merely incidental and unimportant. In other words, the title should really fit the story. The kind of title which the story writer should particularly avoid is the mere label. Don't call your story *Angelina's Mission,* or *The*

Ambition of Edward, or *The Adventure of Mr. Jones.*

Don't use titles, nowadays, like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, or name titles like George Eliot's *Adam Bede* and *Silas Marner.* These are masterpieces of a day when novels were published in two and sometimes three volumes.

There is a vogue for single-word titles just now, but I do not recommend them to the beginner. It takes an H. G. Wells to invent a title like *T'onobungay*, (and if you could invent such another it would not be much use to you unless you could write such another book).

Don't hunt desperately for something unusual, but seize upon it when it happens to fit the story. G. K. Chesterton used a title of the unusual kind in *The Man Who Was Thursday*, but at least equally effective was his curious, adventure-breathing title, *The Flying Inn.*

Get colour into your title if your story permits you to do so. Consider the effectiveness of *The Blue Lagoon, Under the Red Robe, The White Company.*

At all costs avoid any title that is dull. I would rather have the wildest flight of fancy than anything so banal and feeble as *The Maxwell Affair* or *The Halifax Mystery.*

Before leaving the subject of titles I feel I must add that if you, as a beginner, manage to write a story which is accepted, and if the title of the story is not a good one, you may be fairly certain that the editor will change it for a better.

That does *not* mean that you need not bother to

find the best title you possibly can. On the contrary, I mention the matter merely to show you how much importance editors do attach to effective titles.

Openings.

If a good title is important, then it must be admitted that a good opening is even more so and, what is more, it is far more difficult to achieve.

Many an indifferent story has reached print solely because it opened strongly and attractively, and thousands of potentially good stories have been rejected because they opened badly.

In the first half of this book I said how important it is for the free-lance journalist to arrest the reader's attention right from the start. In fiction this is equally necessary, but whereas the free-lance should tell his story in the first paragraph, the story writer should never do so.

When your story is of the adventure type lose no time in "working up" to action. "Jump right in," as our American cousins say. Stanley Weyman's great novel, *Under the Red Robe*, begins with a two-word sentence: "Marked cards."

Before you have turned the first page you are in the thick of really stirring drama. The circumstances which led to that sudden fierce accusation of cheating come to your knowledge with the gradual unfolding of the plot. The characters themselves tell the story, and the reader, his attention gripped from the first line, never loses interest, as he would have done had he been compelled to digest several preliminary pages of explanation.

I do not suppose that it would be safe to propound any hard and fast rule for story writers, but the advantage of quick action in opening adventure stories can hardly be gainsaid.

You will find that if stories of this kind do not open with an actual, stirring incident, the descriptive passages which lead up to the first action are usually brief, or are designed to make the reader expectant of action shortly to come. Such descriptions are nearly always essential, and not incidental, to the story theme.

Even with simple stories of the domestic type, you should get into your stride in the first couple of paragraphs.

The psychological tale which may contain no action at all requires an arresting opening just as much as, and perhaps more than, any other type of story. This kind of story, you will find, often opens with a striking suggestion of a mental state. This sort of thing, perhaps—

"It was the silence that frightened him, not the darkness and the loneliness, but just the absence of those little sounds to which he had become so utterly and completely accustomed, her faint breathing, the scarcely noticeable rustle of her gown."

I think it is a very good exercise for any beginner to pick up a good magazine and glance at the openings of all the stories it contains, asking himself in each case whether, and why, they make him want to read further.

I also advise every would-be writer of fiction to pay particular attention to the openings of stories

by such masters as Wells, Kipling, O. Henry, W. W. Jacobs, Gouverneur Morris, Edgar Allan Poe.

Among the stories written by these famous authors you will find every possible kind of opening, but, whatever kind may have been used, your interest will be aroused before you have turned the first page, probably before you have finished the second paragraph.

Again I must repeat that no hard and fast rule is possible, but *for modern magazine requirements it is not advisable to open a story with an elaborate description, either of persons or places.*

Don't paint a word picture of the scene in which your story is enacted, give what description is necessary as and when it becomes necessary, not before.

Don't start off with a detailed description of your hero or heroine. Let your readers get to know him or her as the story progresses.

More often than not you will find an opening which consists of dialogue, or has immediate action, most likely to grip the interest of your readers.

Endings.

Of scarcely less importance than the beginning is the ending. *Work to a climax and then stop.* Don't add another word. If your climax leaves the story in need of explanation, you have either written a poor story or you have reached the climax too soon, by neglecting essential construction work.

If you are gifted enough to evolve an unexpected and yet convincing ending you may be assured of

immediate success. The power of surprising his readers is of immense value to any writer.

I once read a story dealing with a secret society of anarchists, threatened with betrayal by one of its members. Members met together again and again, but failed to discover the traitor. Any move to trap him was difficult, because the details of such a move would have been discussed in his presence.

One night, while a meeting was in progress, the doors of the council room were broken open and a body of police entered, covering the anarchists with revolvers, which they were evidently ready to use at the slightest sign of resistance. Most of the anarchists stolidly stood their ground, but one among them immediately called out—

"Don't fire! Don't fire! I am one of you!"

That was enough. The traitor was immediately surrounded and the supposed police removed their disguises. A barrel of gunpowder was placed in the middle of the room and the doomed man, bound and gagged, was set down close beside it. A long fuse was then laid, which would take three minutes to burn out before it reached the powder. The fuse was lighted and the traitor was left alone. Terror-stricken, he watched the little flame flicker nearer and ever nearer. Presently three inches remained, then two, then one . . .

In half an hour the traitor's comrades returned and found him dead. He had died of terror—the barrel was empty!

The reader will observe that there are two good points in this story. One is the ingenious discovery

of the traitor, and the second, which plays on the same idea of surprise, is the empty barrel.

The ordinary climax, amounting almost to anti-climax, would have allowed the traitor actually to have been blown to pieces by the powder. Many amateurs would have ended the story with words something to this effect: "And so the traitor was sent to his doom!"

This would have been the obvious ending. But this is not an obvious ending. It is given you as a specimen of the sort of thing O. Henry constantly achieved in his little masterpieces. By accomplishing the death of the traitor which was inevitable, in this totally unexpected way, the author achieved a surprise ending—that new twist on which I have been so insistent.

Probably in adventure and mystery stories the value of the surprise ending is increased, but almost any story gains if it has in it the quality of the unexpected.

Even the threadbare plot, and the old, old, story, many times retold, can sometimes be saved by an original and unexpected ending. The beginning of your story must immediately attract the attention of the reader. In the second paragraph, and thenceforward, the task of the writer is only to hold the interest thus gained. By hints, suggestions, happy phrasings, suspense, the desire to see "what comes next" and strong character delineations, the attention of the reader is held until the end. Then, when the story is ended, *end it.*

Don't overwrite. Many a story has been spoilt,

artistically, by the writer's inability to see when his story ends. A paragraph too much, and the climax is robbed of all its strength and power. It is equally ineffective if the climax comes in the middle of the story—as it is sometimes made to do.

The reader may be inclined to wonder why, if beginnings and endings are of such vital importance, I have not said so much about them as I have about idea-finding and plot construction.

The explanation is simple enough. If your plot is a good one you can hardly avoid both a good opening and a good ending. You may not be able to write them at first, but if the plot is *really* adequate, they are there for the skilful writer to use.

That is why I have urged the beginner always to draw up a skeleton plot before he begins to write his story. I don't think it will ever be waste of time.

If you have any story sense at all, if you can appreciate what is dramatic and what is not, your own instincts will teach you how to make good use of a plot that is in itself worth while.

As you gain in craftsmanship, and as you learn more of the "tricks of the trade," so will you find it easier to increase the strength of a strong plot, or disguise the weakness of a weak one. You may even learn to "get by" with a bad plot, but that is dangerous knowledge.

The beginner who sits down to write a story before he has the essentials of that story—that is to say, the plot, beginning, middle and end—clearly in mind, is simply wasting his time.

CHAPTER VI

FIRST and third person methods—Cultivate your own style—Colour—Local colour—Use your environment—Imagination.

A GOOD plot, then, with an arresting opening, and a strong finish, make a good story, or, at all events, they are the principal components of success.

There remains the task of putting these components together, or, in other words, of actually telling the story.

Quite apart from actual style there is the question of method. You may, for example, tell the story yourself, or you may make one of your characters tell it; and you may use either the present tense or the past tense.

First and Third Person Methods.

In beginning to write, the amateur will probably hesitate as to whether to put his story into the first or third person. Let me strongly advise the THIRD PERSON.

It is quite true that many famous writers have employed the first person method successfully, but I venture to think that, were a well-known writer to submit a first person story under an assumed name to a modern publication, his manuscript would be rejected more often than not. No further remarks of mine can show you more clearly how strongly I am in favour of the third person form for nearly all classes of fiction.

It may be true that certain narratives justify the use of the first person, just as it is undoubtedly true that certain writers of quite exceptional ability can treat this form of narrative successfully, but the general advantages of the third person form are overwhelming.

A writer describing the creatures of his imagination in the third person is able, as it were, to stand off and view their thoughts, their actions and the results of their actions impersonally. This is the great advantage.

If you doubt it, try to write any given story in the first person, and then translate it into the third person form. Carefully and studiously criticize the results. I feel sure that, in nine cases out of ten, you will find the latter method much the stronger.

There is another big advantage. The first person method circumscribes your narrative, because you must see through one person's eyes, and you can only describe incidents that directly touch upon one person's life and actions. By the use of the third person you eliminate all these restrictions.

Characterization in the first person is also very much more difficult, and many other minor objections, important in their cumulative effect, will occur to the reader himself.

Occasional experiments have been made without notable success, to combine the two methods in one story. For the beginner, any attempt of this kind is doomed to failure.

I should also like to warn all writers against letting your characters write long letters and using these to

tell the story. Nearly always any device of this kind breaks the continuity of the narrative and jars upon the reader.

The temptation to use the present tense is much less frequent than the temptation to use the first person.

Let me say at once and very definitely, that *the inexperienced writer should never tell his story in the present tense.*

As you gain experience, as you begin to sell your stories and to obtain a real knowledge of the market; so you will feel a greater confidence in your own judgment, and have a fuller understanding of your capabilities and limitations. You *may* find it possible and advisable, just now and then, to use the first person for certain types of story. I do not think you will ever find it advisable to use the present tense and, if you make the experiment, you will find that editors are not appreciative.

Cultivate Your Own Style.

Although one may have very definite theories in regard to method and technique, it is, as I explained in the first half of this book, almost impossible to lay down hard and fast rules about style.

A great deal is spoken and written about "literary style" even in these days of pot-boiling commercialism.

"He has a peculiar style" is a phrase often heard in newspaper offices, meaning that a writer has a style that is uncommon, but, perhaps, not quite effective in making his meaning clear.

"He has a nice style" may mean anything, from writing that displays no obvious errors to writing that has some measure of attraction, no matter what the subject matter may be. "Distinctive style" will always make its own way in the better magazines.

The writer who can acquire a "light, humorous, breezy style" will always find his work in great demand, although such a style might be quite unsuitable for work with a serious purpose.

The truly accomplished, most fortunate writer, is he who can command almost any literary style as required, almost unconsciously adapting his way of writing to the material with which he has to deal.

Study the style of the magazines to which you hope to become a contributor. Imitate, but do not slavishly copy, that style.

One would not, of course, expect to sell a story written in the rather serious, very careful style suitable for "Blackwood's" to the editor of *Romance*, although it is possible that stories suitable for the one or the other might be of equal merit.

It is only a difference in style—much more than in content—that marks the distinction between *The Times* and the *Daily Mail*. One kind of style may work with crude colours and bludgeon strokes; another with pastel tints and with the delicate play of a rapier—both may be equally effective for the purpose that the author has in mind.

The best style, and the only one that is infinitely adaptable, is developed by a never-ending search for exactly the right word in the right place.

All other literary merits deal with the story as a whole; *style must be gained word by word and sentence by sentence.*

Never be satisfied with any word unless that word expresses the *exact* shade of meaning which you wish to convey. Never be satisfied with a completed sentence unless that sentence is, in itself, euphonious, can be read easily aloud, and contains the complete idea you want to express in a way that leaves it absolutely impossible to misunderstand your meaning.

Make a constant study of style. Contrast the abrupt emotional value of the one-word exclamation, with the pleasant leisurely flow of a long, composite sentence, in which each phrase has a meaning and value of its own.

Write and rewrite. Practise and revise. Labour over each sentence, if necessary, until you come to have an instinctive appreciation of the value of words; until every word in your vocabulary comes to have a character of its own as distinctive as the character of a well-known face.

This careful choice of words, and even more careful arrangement of your sentences for a predetermined effect, together with your whole attitude towards life itself—the nature of the thought that you clothe with words—will presently determine your own distinctive style.

Reading of authors who are master stylists—writers like Stevenson, Flaubert, Thackeray, Conrad, will be helpful. But do not imitate; let their work be your inspiration rather than the model towards which you strive.

Colour.

The curse of the amateur writer is the adjective. In the desire to describe things minutely, many new writers form the habit of using even two or three adjectives to every noun; many of them perfectly obvious and most of them quite useless.

The adjective should be employed to add light and colour to the sentence, rather than for exact description when that description is obvious. It is in the case of adjectives especially that the beginner should strive to find the word that exactly expresses the meaning he intends.

Let us take two or three such adjectives almost equivalent in meaning. Now carefully consider the difference between the following words—

ruby . . .	ruddy
sparkling . .	scintillating
dull . . .	dreary
cloudy . .	muggy
milky . . .	opalescent

It is never sufficient to employ a word which is "something near" the meaning intended by the author. In the following passage, which is quoted from H. de Vere Stacpoole's novel, *The Blue Lagoon*, see how the use of carefully selected adjectives adds colour and atmosphere to the description—

He had no compass to guide him, and he needed none. He knew the woods by heart. The mysterious line beyond which scarcely an artu tree was to be found. The long strip of mammee apple—a regular sheet of it a hundred yards broad, and reaching from the middle of the island right down to the lagoon. The

clearings, some almost circular, where the ferns grew knee-deep. Then he came to the bad part.

The vegetation here had burst into a riot. All sorts of great sappy stalks of unknown plants barred the way and tangled the foot; and there were boggy places into which one sank horribly

. . . . .

This was the haunt of the jug orchid—a veritable jug, lid and all. Raising the lid you would find the jug half filled with water. Sometimes in the tangle up above, between two trees, you would see a thing like a bird come to ruin. Orchids grew here as in a hot-house. All the trees—the few there were—had a spectral and miserable appearance. They were half starved by the voluptuous growth of the gigantic weeds.

In the above passage the beginner should note that many more adjectives are used than would be advisable in ordinary descriptive writing, because an attempt has been made to crowd a great deal of atmosphere and colour into a very small space.

It should also be noted that each one of these words is used with a definite purpose. Not one of these adjectives could be eliminated without robbing the sentence of some of its meaning

For brilliant examples of the use of "colour words" in writing, the reader is referred to the following passages: The descriptions of the feast in the gardens of Hamilcar, of the advancing army of the barbarians, and of the valley of the lions in *Salammbo*, by Gustave Flaubert; the description of a storm at sea in the *Nigger of the Narcissus*, and the jungle description in *Youth*, by Joseph Conrad; the passage in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, describing the labour of the farm girls in the turnip field, and the last chapter of *Jude the Obscure*, by Thomas Hardy; for description of scenery, Blackmore's picture of Doone Valley in *Lorna Doone*.

It will be seen in each of these examples that not a single descriptive word can be taken from its place without spoiling the entire passage, or subtracting from the meaning of the text.

Try, as an experiment, the substitution of any adjective of your own for any adjective used by any of these writers, or try adding new words to those used in the passages quoted.

The result of such an experiment will be a more thorough comprehension of the value and use of "colour words," than could be gained by any other method.

Local Colour.

The consideration of colourful adjectives brings me to the important subject of *setting and local colour.*

It will be obvious, even to the beginner, that an effective setting has contributed very largely to the success of many stories.

Here again artistic truthfulness is of the utmost importance. If your story admits of a setting with which you are personally familiar, so much the better. You will be able to supply your local colour with a sure hand, and the effect will be a convincing one.

This does not mean that you may not wander as far afield as you like, but local colour must then be applied very warily indeed. *There are authors, who have achieved great popularity with stories in foreign or unusual settings, and who have, nevertheless, obtained all their local colour from research work at the British Museum.* To do this they must have had unusual ability with a wonderful capacity for taking pains.

I know of a successful writer of cow-boy stories who has never ventured beyond Brighton Pier.

Probably, if you search your memory, you will recall various stories and novels that have been spoiled for you because their local colour was all wrong. A great many short stories have been set in Paris, but when written by persons who do not know Paris, they have nearly always betrayed their author's ignorance. How different, in this respect, are Paris stories by Leonard Merrick or Arnold Bennett. Their local colour convinces even those readers who have never crossed the Channel, while it delights the reader with continental experience.

Probably most great novels and great stories have a setting with which their author is intimately familiar. Compare *Lorna Doone* with any other of Blackmore's works. See how Flora Annie Steele has used her personal knowledge of India to give colour and distinction to her novels. Notice how Pett Ridge scored success after success by setting his stories in Suburbia, the most unpromising of backgrounds. If you are old enough, recall the great vogue for the late Marion Crawford's novels of Italian life.

Instances could be multiplied indefinitely, and the conclusion is inevitable: that, while the author *need* observe no boundaries, other than those imposed by his own imagination, yet he will almost certainly get his effects by the use of a familiar setting.

Use Your Environment.

I was once asked to read the unpublished manuscript of a young man who was born and bred in the

East End of London. What do you think he wrote about? Society! I told him to go away and to write the first great story of East End life. And he seemed disappointed! The glamour of the "gilded life of leisure" had taken hold of him. He afterwards wrote a really first-class story in a setting with which he was intimately familiar, and he is now engaged upon his first full-length novel on the same lines.

This injunction to write from first-hand material does not mean that your stories should contain verbatim accounts of actual conversations or line upon line descriptions of actual scenes. That would be too dull and inartistic. Even a photograph, in the hands of an artist, undergoes a fair measure of touching up. The artist in you will suggest omissions in, or embellishments of, your real life story. To make your story vivid, you, too, must see that there are high lights and good contrasts.

Let me also make it clear that setting and local colour are of *relatively* small importance in a story which is primarily a psychological study; or in tales which depend for their interest almost exclusively on dialogue and the interplay of character. Yet even in these stories it often happens that the setting—scarcely hinted at, it may be—is exceedingly valuable as background to your portraits.

Imagination.

There is a great deal that may be achieved by any author *merely by taking pains.* I doubt whether any writer, man or woman, won notable success without very hard work, and I am perfectly certain that half

the would-be authors, who complain that they are unlucky and not appreciated, have only themselves to blame. They may have ability, but they have been too lazy to do their best work.

It is partly because of this that I have emphasized the great importance of the right word and the accurate and truthful description. I have advised you to draw largely upon your own environment and your own experience. *But I do not want you to underestimate the need of imagination.*

Whether you write short stories or novels, imagination is the one indispensable gift. Nearly all the faculties engaged in the big adventure of story writing come under this convenient general term.

Imagination is magic, and, through it, the dross of the commonplace is transmuted into the gold of romance.

Wordsworth says: "Every author so far as he is great, and at the same time original, has had the chance of creating the taste by which he is to be enjoyed." That sets a high standard, involving much hard work, much patience, and—alas!—much heart-burning.

Imagination is a gift, *but it is a gift which can be cultivated.* In the first place, I would urge you to have the courage of your convictions. Break free from all fetters of conventional thought or tradition. Write what you think and feel with an utter sincerity, regardless of consequences. *Yet remember there is a code of decency even in courageous writing.* Never—never violate this code. So-called fame achieved through the mire of sensationalism is not worth having.

There are, however, many outspoken subjects which writers may seriously and decently develop. I am convinced that many writers linger, shivering on the brink of accomplishing great things, because they are held back by a nameless dread. Get over this mental diffidence and let your imagination have free play.

If I have counselled courage in the use of imagination, let me at once go to the other extreme and urge you not to despise the "ordinary story." Use your imagination to the utmost, but direct it towards the kind of story which editors want.

When your work has "got there"; when the editor is looking out for further contributions from you; then will be the time to write just as your fancy dictates. Until that time comes, you must limit yourself severely as regards matter, style and outlook, trying to, as far as possible, conform with the normal standards of published fiction, and yet using your imagination to give your stories vividness and to make them individual.

CHAPTER VII

UNNECESSARY characters—Dialogue—Heroes and heroines—Reality —Minor characters.

IT has always been my own experience that, once the plot of a story has taken definite shape in my mind (and then been committed to paper), the imaginary characters who are to enact that plot gradually become real to me.

And if you want to write a powerful story it is very certain that your characters must become real to your readers.

I am not at all sure that, having obtained your plot, it is really wise to begin writing your story at once; but I am not prepared to give any definite advice on this matter. It is largely a question of temperament.

A friend of mine, who is a successful writer of popular stories and does not profess to be anything else, tells me that, when the gods on Olympus send him a really good plot, he never loses a moment. He writes the whole story there and then at a single sitting.

"It may be pretty rough work," he told me, "but I get at it while it is red-hot in my mind. I can always rule it into shape later on at my leisure."

Well, if *you* happen to be of that temperament, you can't do better than follow my friend's example; *but don't forget to rub the rough story into shape before you send it to an editor. Don't lose interest once the*

tale is written. Don't shirk the duller work of careful revision.

If you are not an impetuous writer, you may share the views of another of my literary friends.

"I have often found," he told me one day, "that after I have a general idea of the story I am going to write, it helps me to wait some little time before I actually start writing.

"I like to think about my characters and try to *see* what they look like, and *hear* how they speak. I notice people on the buses and in the tubes, and suddenly I realize that one of them is almost exactly like my hero, and another one, perhaps, like the woman who helped him in his career.

"You may say that really it is not the person in the 'bus that is like my hero, but that I happen to have invented a hero like the man in the bus. Not at all. My character is, or at all events becomes, a clear conception in my mind. The fellow I meet in the bus or the tube merely serves as a sort of mirror.

"*I* know just what my characters are like, but thinking about them and seeing likenesses, helps me in a way I can't quite explain to make other people, who read my stuff, see the same pictures that I see."

Once again I must admit that the question is largely one of temperament, but I think the beginner will find it very helpful to make friends with the characters of his own creation.

And do not forget, where possible, to let characters describe themselves in the course of the narrative. Do not label your characters, but let the reader

become familiar with them by what they do. Always strive to show character in action.

If one of your characters is lame, for example, it is usually better to *suggest* this fact, rather than to *describe* it. "Gripping the arms of his cane chair, Jim Loring levered himself to his feet and moved forward, limping painfully, to meet his visitor," would be better than a purely descriptive paragraph informing the reader that Jim Loring had been the victim of an accident, which had left him with a permanent limp.

If the foregoing is true in regard to descriptions of physical characteristics, it is equally true, and more important, when you are delineating character. Minor personalities may be described directly to economize space. Even then it is very wise to put in some graphic little suggestion; for example: "A cruel man, *at whom dogs instinctively snarled.*" Your central characters should nearly always be portrayed through their actions, or indirectly in conversation and incident.

All great writers use this trick of indirect description. You may remember, in one of the Sherlock Holmes stories, how a dangerous criminal picked up a poker in Holmes' rooms and, after bending it double, hurled it back into the grate as a warning that he was a dangerous man to meddle with.

After the blusterer had gone on his way, Holmes picked up the poker *and bent it straight again.* This clever suggestion of force is infinitely more striking because of its indirectness, and because it leaves something to the imagination of the reader.

You may always draw freely upon your readers' imagination Do not tell them, in so many words, that X is a skinflint, Y a coward, and Z a generous man. Let them deduce these facts from your description of each character's actions.

When, on a bitter winter's night, the avaricious landlady carefully removes the coal scuttle from her lodger's rooms, her grasping, greedy nature is instantly suggested, and leaves a much stronger impression upon your readers than would a mere statement by you, the author, that Mrs. Jones is a miserly woman.

In this connection let me add that, since the average author writes to please the general public rather than the fastidious minority, it is generally advisable to make your characters fairly consistent. I do not mean to say that there is no room for clever light and shade, but I do mean that bold work in sharp contrasts of black and white is more readily appreciated by the majority of the reading public.

Unnecessary Characters.

I must strongly warn every beginner against the introduction of unessential characters. The novelist has some excuse for the creation of characters not strictly indispensable. *The short story writer has none.* He has absolutely no room for lay figures. Each person, introduced by you to the reader, must have a definite mission to accomplish in that fragment of his or her life which you are describing.

No time must be lost in getting into action. Consider a music-hall performance. Recollect any good

"turn" which interested you. You will remember how the two or three artistes engaged did not waste a second in getting to grips with their audience. You, too, must arrest the attention of your audience from the very start; and you, too, like the music-hall artistes, must retain that attention throughout your brief appearance in the limelight.

Dialogue.

The popular short story of to-day usually contains much dialogue, and any writer who means to enter the fiction market and sell his work, must learn to write interesting and natural dialogue.

If your characters live in your own minds you will not only be able to describe them vividly: you will be able to make them talk convincingly. Conversations, which form part of a short story, should seem to the reader as though they might actually have occurred, *but they should not be merely reported from life.*

A phonographic transcription of the cleverest conversation would often make uninteresting reading, and a purely descriptive passage may be perfectly accurate, as in a lawyer's brief, yet lead to the awakening of no emotion whatever. If one described the actual conversation in the drawing-room of a boarding house, the result, while truly realistic, would be too pointless to bear reading.

This would still be true even though the author wished to illustrate the humdrum life of the average boarding house. It is not necessary to bore the reader in order to indicate boredom; one does not

attempt to frighten the reader in order to create a sympathetic feeling of fear when a character is in a situation of peril.

Dialogue must have the *effect of a transcribed conversation*, although it may have very little relation to the things that people usually say. Because a story is a reflection of life, the image must be accurate in effect; it cannot be an exact imitation.

Beware, therefore, of the stilted phrase, conversation that is redundant, and the use of words in dialogue that have no place in the vocabulary of the average man.

It is a good plan to *read all dialogue aloud;* if then *it sounds like people talking*, it is good work. Dialogue, in common with every other component of the narrative, *must advance the story.* If the speeches of the characters do not do this, they should, in nine cases out of ten, be eliminated.

While it is true that conversations in real life do not include many striking epigrams, it is just as true that most conversations are scarcely worth listening to, and much less reproducing in print. Therefore, although you must make your characters talk reasonably and naturally, you should only reproduce that part of the conversation which is best and most interesting—the part that is essential to describe your action, or otherwise to develop the theme of your story.

Improve on actual conversations whenever you can. Make your dialogue sparkling and entertaining. Do not bother about mere cleverness. Even Oscar Wilde's scintillating wit palls upon one after

a time. One begins to see how the epigram is made; how the turned sentence is articulated. If your dialogue is witty, so much the better, but it should have all the effect of spontaneity.

Above all, let your dialogue be natural. I have said that it is wise to read it aloud to yourself. Perhaps it is even better to get it read to you. If the conversations sound forced and unnatural to *you*, you may be doubly certain that they will jar upon your readers.

Heroes and Heroines.

It does not necessarily follow that the writer who can paint a clever word picture of his characters can also make them talk convincingly, but the probabilities are that good characterization and good dialogue will go together. It is obvious that this is likely to be the case, because, as I have already said, indirect description is generally preferable to direct, and conversations are continually used to convey impressions of character on this account.

I do not think that the average magazine reader is highly critical. So long as you entertain him he will say that your work is good. But readers, like authors, change with the times, and the reader of to-day demands a story about people who act and talk like real human beings.

Fashions change in heroes and heroines as much as they do in everything else. There was a time when all popular heroes were splendid fellows, immaculately, or at least picturesquely, dressed, invincible at sport, ready with their fists or six-shooters, and

superbly, dominantly masculine in their relations with the opposite sex.

That type of hero survives, but in fewer numbers. Heroes, nowadays, are frequently lame, or one-armed, or have some other physical disability. Sometimes their outward appearance is insignificant. Quite often they are not heroic. The strong, silent man, so popular a character in the fiction of a previous decade, is, to-day, much less in evidence.

In brief, the ordinary man is coming into his own. The emphasis upon material things, upon physical appearances and the like, has largely disappeared. The play of temperament and the analysis of character are now more generally emphasized. Psychological studies are in some demand. There is a strong tendency towards realism, and the writer of fiction is left absolutely free in his choice of characters.

Reality.

One thing is essential. Your hero must have all the semblance of life and actuality. Make him a tramp, greedy and broken-down; a middle-aged stockbroker, fleshy and unromantic; a suburban clerk, henpecked and spiritless; a rising politician, unscrupulous and ruthlessly ambitious; make him what you will, courageous or craven, conventional or eccentric, but—*make him live.*

Reality is the essence of good characterization. Dickens, the master novelist, never created an unconvincing character. Had Dickens not been masterly in his delineations he could never have held his

readers' attention throughout works thrice as long as the modern novel. The day of the *Three-decker*—that is the three volume—novel has gone by, but the demand for truthful characterization is more insistent than ever.

If the foregoing is true of heroes, it is at least equally true of heroines. The conventional heroine is a creature of the past. She is as dead in fiction as is the mid-Victorian Miss in actual life.

Always remember that your readers will include a large class of women and girls who work for their living. A score of years ago this class was very much smaller, and since nowadays most women are among the world's active workers, it naturally follows that the fiction in which they take the keenest interest is that which concerns girls who think and do things.

There is no longer any need that your heroine should be of surpassing loveliness. She may even be middle-aged and unromantic, *provided she has character and is interesting.* Commonplace names stand as good a chance as unusual ones; everyday vocations are quite as popular as romantic professions; and the business girl has ousted the society lady from first place in popular fiction.

Here again, what editors and the public want more than anything else is powerful and convincing character-drawing.

Minor Characters.

I have spoken of heroes and heroines where, perhaps, I might have better said "central characters." The old-fashioned idea of the hero and heroine story

has changed, but the principles of good characterization are pretty much the same as they have always been.

In certain respects you may find that your minor characters will cause you more trouble than your major ones—you will certainly have to picture them in much fewer words.

Be very careful to preserve your sense of balance and proportion.

Again and again in reading the manuscript of beginners I have found that a promising story has become tedious, because the author has wandered off into elaborate and utterly needless descriptions of minor characters. (Equally annoying digressions are often made in regard to places and events that do not advance the story interest.)

Here, again, is a danger which may be largely avoided by preliminary plot construction.

I have already warned you not to introduce more characters than are strictly necessary to the development of your plot. As far as the minor characters are concerned, I would add the advice never to devote more space to them than is absolutely unavoidable.

For the purposes of your story they must do or say some given thing. Let them get on with deed or word without wasting any time.

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE scenes—Some classic love scenes—Strength with restraint——Avoid " piling it on "—Humorous relief—The pitfall of pathos—The definite aim—Revising and retouching—The inexorable blue pencil—Rejections and their lessons—The editor's reason—Fiction fashions—How to reshape old manuscripts.

IN previous chapters I have discussed the general construction and technique of the short story. I now wish to refer more particularly to certain types of story.

If it is not entirely true that the greatest stories in the world have all been love stories, it is at least true that the most appealing stories have, almost without exception, had a strong love interest.

The reader of stories lives, in imagination, with the characters in the story. For a time the reader enters into the lives of those characters, and the writer must always attempt to picture those characters so vividly that the reader will think with them, and feel with them. Obviously, then, the reader lives a sort of second life with the characters that the author has drawn; the reader himself becomes the lover, the adventurer, the actor in strange situations.

Now, it is true that there are always a certain number of readers who have a natural taste for adventure, or for ghostly experiences, or even for that nightmare sort of mental adventure that can be experienced by proxy in the tale that is replete with horror. *The desire to love and be loved, however, is an almost universal longing*, and therefore, the

author who makes love the theme of his story is *appealing to the widest possible audience.*

Editors recognize this fact by demanding that more than half the stories they publish shall be written on a love interest theme—the one theme that never fails to find an appreciative audience. *Even the adventure story, or the "horror story," will find a readier market if it contains love interest interwoven with the predominant theme.*

This statement would appear to set a very definite limit on the material at the author's command. Quite the contrary is true. The adventure story must, within curt limits, describe a danger to life. The domestic story cannot extend much beyond the limits of the home. The "horror story" is still more definitely limited by the small number of readers who like to shiver as they read.

Love alone belongs to no one race or to no country. It embraces all emotion opposite to hate, from the pure love of a mother for her child, to the dark passion that ends in destruction. It is the one theme that is capable of infinite variety, and the only theme that sets no limits to the imagination of the author. Possibly for this reason, it is the one type of story most in demand and most difficult to write.

Love Scenes.

There is only one rule for the writer who writes of love or about characters who are in love—*be sincere.*

In dealing with the loves of men and women it is the author's privilege to picture any type of emotion,

from the insincere self-seeking of love that desires a mean advantage to the overwhelming passion of a man or woman face to face with emotions that are beyond control.

The great fault with the majority of love stories is in their extreme insincerity, the lack of truth in their representation of fundamental emotions.

Be sincere in the love scene as in no other part of the story. Ask, after each sentence is written, these important questions—

1. Is this character true to type ?
2. Would he or she, being the kind of man or woman you have portrayed, react to the situation in just this way ?
3. Is this really the way in which these characters would talk in this situation ?
4. Do they say things which you would say if you were this kind of person, and found yourself in just this situation ?

Here again, it is a good plan to read all the dialogue aloud, and if there is the least note of insincerity in it, if it does not reproduce the emotion that you think your characters would feel, then it must be rewritten until the note of naturalness is attained.

It must, of course, be understood that by " sincerity " in this connection one does not mean that every character must be sincere and admirable. One can conceive the character of a poor man who desires, for monetary reasons, to marry a wealthy woman, and who uses every art of which he is capable to attain that end. Necessarily the whole keynote of his dialogue will be touched by insincerity, but your

portrayal of the man may be true and, therefore, "sincere."

A bashful man will make love bashfully; a bully will try to force his affections on the woman of his choice. The bully, however, will not stutter, nor will the bashful man grow grave nor speak like a Cyrano de Bergerac.

Insincerity in love scenes is the greatest fault of the Victorian novelists. There was, perhaps, some excuse for them; they were writing for their public when the whole attitude of the age made love between men and women the reflection of secrecy and insincerity. To the Victorian, love was somehow or other a shameful thing which must not be mentioned too openly. Sincerity was, therefore, unprintable.

There is no excuse for the same methods to-day. Proposals of marriage are not the signal for a swooning scene; we have gone beyond all that, and there is a franker and more equalized relationship between the sexes.

Some Classic Love Scenes.

It is this spirit of sincerity and frankness that is innate in all the greatest love scenes ever written. Many of these are worthy of the closest study on the part of the fiction writer. The range of emotion portrayed is very great, from the simple, adolescent love of Romeo and Juliet to the half-crazed passion of the daughter of Herodias for St. John, in the *Salome* of Oscar Wilde.

I commend to the reader's study the following love scenes from widely differentiated authors—

Shakespeare: *The Merchant of Venice, The Taming of the Shrew,* and *Antony and Cleopatra; Héloïse and Abélard; Paul and Virginia;* the book of Ruth, in the Bible; the meeting of Aylmer with the singing girl in Joseph Conrad's *Aylmer's Folly;* Rudyard Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy,* and the more curious and the more recent example, the love-making of the two misers in *Riceyman Steps.*

For the lighter touch the reader is referred to the *Dolly Dialogues,* and the closing love scenes in *The Prisoner of Zenda,* by Anthony Hope; also the closing chapters of the *Morals of Marcus Ordeyne,* and the various love scenes in the *Beloved Vagabond,* by William J. Locke.

No two of these love scenes have any resemblance to each other, but all of them have in common that indispensable note of realism and sincerity.

Strength With Restraint.

Particularly in writing the love scene, the author must strive for strength by exercising a certain restraint in the methods he employs to get that effect. Both dialogue and description should have suggestion value and not consist merely of a series of bald statements, which represent the author's ideas instead of the actual emotions finding expression through the words and actions of the characters.

Much can often be done with a single exclamatory word, which suggests, rather than describes, a great storm of emotion. The garrulous man or woman is not struggling with excess of feeling, and it is almost

an axiom that the man who makes love with many words is not the man who is the greatest lover.

Strength in the love scene, as in all fiction writing, is more readily gained by what the author feels about his characters than by what the characters might actually say or do. Here, again, phonographic dialogue and photographic description of events are not required. It is the author's task to exercise the imagination of the reader, so that the reader will fill in for himself the spaces that the author has left blank.

In Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy*, we do not see the death of the beloved nor the actual anguish of the man who returns to find his home wrecked by circumstance. We see only a deserted courtyard grown up with weeds and washed clean by the rains. The effect of the suggestion, by which the reader visions everything that has not been told, is to create a situation much stronger than any more lengthy or more detailed description could have done.

Avoid "Piling it On."

The same artistic restraint is necessary in every scene in a story that is meant to awaken some strong emotion on the part of the reader. In a story of war, for instance, the accomplished writer would seldom describe, with minute exactitude, the pathological effects of suffering, or the detailed horrors that made life in the trenches terrible.

The reason is this: these things in themselves were relatively unimportant; their reactions on the minds of men were the important thing. Very often,

by only a word of suggestion here and there, one may tell more than any number of words could tell. The imagination of the reader will always outstrip the descriptive power of the writer, if the writer will supply material for imagination to feed upon.

It is one of the most usual faults of the beginner, in handling a "strong" scene, to leave nothing to the reader's imagination. The result is that the imagination of the reader refuses to move beyond the words that the writer has set down.

The value of suggestion becomes more evident when one considers "horror stories." If you will think of all the most powerful ghost stories you have ever read you will find that the most successful are those in which the ghost never appears, except as an unseen terror in the dark.

All strong emotions—love, passion, fear, jealousy, hatred, envy—are best portrayed by little touches of description or incomplete explanations that show the effect of those emotions on the characters involved.

Often the effect desired can be gained indirectly much more effectively than by direct description.

Humorous Relief.

In every one of the old Greek tragedies, which are marvellous examples of story construction, there is always at least one character, often crippled or in some way deformed, who is the victim of the laughter of the gods. The "figure of fun" appealed to a somewhat undeveloped sense of humour, and was used for contrast to make the tragedy more poignant and complete.

The purely humorous story, which, by the odd, fantastic, laughable, absurd or farcical situation, or the stupidity or comic nature of the characters, excites the mirth of the reader, needs no other excuse.

If you are a humorist, and can write merry, amusing stories, you are exceedingly fortunate, and your literary fortune is more than half made for you.

Humorous relief, or light relief, is another matter. It is almost an axiom that tragedy or pathos demands some relief of this kind.

There are two reasons for this. The mind of the reader refuses to entertain the idea of stark tragedy very long at a time, and, without some element of humour, the attention of the reader will wander to the detriment of the story. Again, the value of humour in such stories is pre-eminently the value of contrast: with the two opposing elements of tragedy and comedy—which are nearly akin—in close relation to each other, the tragedy becomes more pitiable and the humour itself pathetic. This arises from the instinctive—and right—feeling that tragedy is never absolutely black, nor is comedy ever free from some element of the tragic.

An old man who loses dignity chasing his hat on a muddy street is always comical—only because the loss of that hat may actually present a kind of tragedy to him. Think about it long enough and you will find something intrinsically absurd in the situation of two lovers who die to escape from life grown unbearable. We recognize that, if they had been made of sterner stuff, they might have been

able to bend life to their own uses and even find happiness in the end.

There is one other and even more practical reason for humorous relief. Stark tragedy will not sell. A touch of humour will often avert rejection of a manuscript.

The Pitfall of Pathos.

It is this instinctive appreciation of the humorous aspects of the most tragic situations that makes the use of pathos very dangerous for all except the most accomplished writers. One may say this: If the writer is writing for an audience entirely ignorant of life—cheap fiction for those who pay for the luxury of a forced tear and the pathetic situation—then lay on "sob-stuff" with a spade. For any other class of reader—don't.

True pathos, even more than tragedy, needs a touch of humour to make it touching and vital; the emotion is awakened by an appreciation of human futility, and only kindly, tolerant humour can save pathos from a mean sort of cynicism.

Beware, lest the incident intended to be pathetic and "touching" becomes, with unskilful manipulation, mere bathos and cheap, insincere, sentimental maundering, all of which leads the reader, not to laugh and cry with the writer, but to laugh *at* him—an effect which the author would certainly not desire.

The Definite Aim.

Any critic of unpublished fiction constantly reads stories in which the story is lost in the manuscript,

because the author had no very definite idea as to the kind of story he was trying to write.

One theme must be predominant in a story. If your story is a love story, make all the other parts of the story subordinate to that *motif*. If your story is an adventure story it may contain, and probably should contain, some love interest, but the love theme should be subordinate to the adventure element.

Good short story construction demands that the opening should be interesting, and the body of the story should drive directly forward, following that main theme from the opening to the climax. This can be done only if the author has a very definite aim in mind before a word of the story is written.

It is only another way of saying once again, that nothing must be put into the story that does not directly contribute to the development of the plot.

If it seems an easier method of working, write, in the first draft, everything that would seem to be of any value, and then revise the first draft carefully. Eliminate anything that is not consistent with your main theme, or that is unnecessary to the logical development of your story.

Revising and Retouching.

All this leads to the absolute necessity for careful revision and arduous rewriting of every story, and sometimes many such revisions before the story is ready for publication.

It has been previously pointed out that no sentence should be left until it exactly expresses the author's

meaning, and until no word can be changed without detracting from the perfect construction of that sentence. In like manner, no story should ever be sent out until the author is quite certain that no possible change he could make in the construction or development of the story would result in improving the story as a whole.

The successful story is made to fit together in every part, and to present a certain pre-arranged aspect when finished. A good story is like a beautiful building; every word and every sentence, which may be likened to the stones and girders of the building, have a definite place in the construction as a whole. Good writing in this respect has nothing in common with the false front and empty interior of a building erected for the cinema, in which first appearance counts for everything and contents for nothing.

The Inexorable Blue Pencil.

The young journalist's first adventure into the copy room of a daily newspaper brings his greatest surprise, and his first disappointment, when he learns how ruthlessly efficient is the blue pencil of the editor. All his fine descriptive phrasing and his personal ideas are cut out of his manuscript very skilfully, but not without pain. There is left of all his beautiful writing only the bare skeleton of the day's news.

The writer of short stories never finds his manuscript thus mutilated, but the editorial blue pencil is a weapon which he may justifiably fear, although it is never seen. That mental blue pencil operates, not to prepare manuscript for publication, but for the

post which returns it to the hopeful author. It is better for the author to blue pencil his own manuscript as inexorably as the editor would, if he had the time and inclination to teach beginners their jobs.

The manuscript which is often rewritten is not so often returned, and this is, or should be, a cause of some satisfaction to the author. It is much better to have cheques follow labour than to have much labour follow non-receipt of cheques.

Rejections and Their Lessons.

There are a number of definite reasons why a story will not sell. Most of these reasons will be found in the following list—

1. Poor or slovenly writing as regards English composition, punctuating, paragraphing, and those obvious faults that betray the illiterate writer.

2. An uninteresting opening that does not attract and hold the reader at the very beginning of the story.

3. A plot which is weak, hackneyed (stale), unconvincing or dull.

4. A climax which does not actually bring the story to a close, or one which is so obvious that it disappoints the reader.

5. Unsuitability of theme and subject matter. The new writer, especially, should carefully avoid "horror" stories, ghost stories; any controversial mention of religion; stories that embody propaganda; profanity; the "risque" story, and stories that deal with any other theme that is unpleasant or likely to offend any class of readers.

6. Padding. Never pad your stories in any circumstances. It is an unpardonable offence.

Nine-tenths of the stories which are rejected for inherent defects are rejected for one or more of the above-mentioned reasons.

In addition, there are a few reasons for rejection which have nothing to do with the merit of the story. Among these may be mentioned—

1. Ill-advised choice of market—the submission of adventure stories to magazines which make a speciality of romance, or of sentimental love stories to magazines that make their greatest appeal to men readers.

2. Unsuitability of length. Many magazines will not consider manuscripts of less than a certain length or longer than a certain length. Be sure that the manuscript is of the right length to meet the requirements of the magazine to which it is submitted.

3. Accidental circumstances outside the author's control. Perhaps a magazine has on hand, or has recently published, similar material. Even in such a case, if the story submitted has sufficient merit, the editor will usually ask that other material be submitted for his consideration.

Before submitting any story to any magazine, analyse that story carefully in regard to the above editorial requirements. If you can be sure that the theme of your story is acceptable; the opening interesting; the plot well developed; the climax good; the construction of your story sound, and style and construction technically correct, you have a story that will sell.

A failure to meet any one of these requirements may mean a long series of rejections. If your story meets all the above requirements, choose your markets with judgment, keep your story on the road and, sooner or later, that story will bring back a cheque.

The Editor's Reason.

Instead of feeling that the editor is a public enemy, the new writer should feel that the editor is the best of friends he will ever have. The editor must necessarily consult the tastes of a wide section of the reading public, and publish the material that will appeal to that taste; otherwise his publication will pay no dividend to shareholders and no cheques to aspiring authors.

Put yourself in the editorial chair. Remember that the editor's problems are your problems, and, as an author, you will be successful in the exact measure in which you can help the editor to do his work. His work is to create an interesting magazine, and one that appeals to a large section of the reading public.

No matter what the editor's opinions may be, he cannot afford to publish matter that will offend his readers.

Remember, too, that it is the editor's business to buy the best manuscripts that he can find. He is forced to select from five to twenty readable stories each month, out of a mass of many hundreds that are addressed to him.

For one or other of the reasons stated above, not

5 per cent of the manuscripts that reach the editorial office are, in any sense, acceptable. Both the editor and the readers who are employed by the editor are spending their lives in a continual search for acceptable work. The manuscripts of the writer who can write are the most welcome part of the morning's post in any editorial office.

If you can write, editors everywhere are looking for you. If you cannot write you simply add to their unrewarded labour. *It is safe to say that no short story writer who pays sufficient attention to editorial requirements can fail to gain recognition and financial reward for his work.*

Fiction Fashions.

The writer should understand that rather frequently the fashion in editorial requirements, or, more justly, public taste, changes. The fiction writer, unlike the journalist, need not pay much attention to themes of topical interest. At any given time, however, the fiction writer should pay some attention to *types of stories* that editors demand.

For instance, some years ago, most editors—a reflection of public taste—had a real prejudice against stories introducing Chinese and other Oriental characters. Then *Chu Chin Chow* on the stage made a big popular success. Thomas Burke followed this success with his Limehouse stories: *Broken Blossoms* was the artistic success of the year on the films. A new public taste had been created. For months the magazines were filled with Chinese stories. There is no objection raised against the Chinese story

to-day, although the demand is not so evident as in the recent past.

South Sea stories, despite the work of Robert Louis Stevenson, once created no flicker of public interest. But after the advent of *The Blue Lagoon*, which was hardly a South Sea story in any real sense, but was a popular success, the public became acquainted with the setting and atmosphere of the South Sea Islands.

The Bird of Paradise pushed that interest a little farther. Somerset Maugham, in *The Moon and Sixpence*, and one or two other writers, at about the same time, helped to develop that interest. Beatrice Grimshaw followed with a long series of delightful stories. To-day there is no type of story that finds a readier reception than one with a South Sea setting, provided the author be familiar with his material. The interest, however, is just beginning to wane, for, like so many other successful ideas, it has been much overdone.

The "Desert Island" story is already an editorial abhorrence. In the same way the "Wild West" story and the "Canadian North-west" story arose, flourished, and died. Only the very exceptional story of this kind will now find a market without a very definite touch of originality. Bolshevik stories are almost moribund. Victorian sentimentality is dead and buried as far as the story writer is concerned.

The successful writer of tales spends his life in a search for a new, original and interesting material. New—but not too new! Presently the West Indies, South America, Australia will have their day in the

magazines. The day is not yet, but good Colonial stories are always in demand. *The beginner in doubt should rest on an assured bulwark—a good, local, English atmosphere.*

Careful study of literary fashions, however, cannot fail to be of help to the new writer.

How to Reshape Old MSS.

Stories which, to their authors, were worth writing, must have somewhere in them the germ of an idea that, properly developed, will sell. Now when you have written your story analyse it carefully. Criticize it; choose the parts that do not satisfy the tests I have already enumerated.

Ask yourself first: "Does this story get well away from the start to a winning ending? Have I indulged in several pages or even several paragraphs of unnecessary description before anything happens to my characters?" And "Have I successfully introduced my chief characters right at the start; have I said something about them that will make the reader want to know them better as I develop the story?"

How about the plot? Is it too "thin" for the length of your manuscript? Will it compel the reader to go forward to find out what the author will presently disclose—that is, does it create the necessary feeling of suspense? Are your characters interesting in themselves; people whom you would like to meet and talk to, or would they be unspeakable bores if you met them in real life? Do they do things that you would like to do?

How about your climax? Try to imagine that you are reading your story for the first time; can you anticipate the ending by the time you are halfway through the story? If you can your plot is weak and must be recast, so that it is necessary to read right up to the last paragraph for the solution.

There may be other changes. You may need only a new opening, or drastic cutting out of uninteresting material from the body of the story. Perhaps a slight change in conception will give that climax a new and interesting twist. Perhaps certain changes in your characters will bring you to the desired end. Yours is the master-hand to mould the characters, the plot and the story to perfection. Do so!

It may be that when you have finished such a mental revision you will have nothing left but the basic idea with which you started. In that case a complete rewriting of the story may be necessary. Well, great writers have had to do this before now. Take the idea as an idea alone; think about it in every possible development. Do not be satisfied with your use of that idea until you have wrung from it the last drop of interest.

Then rewrite—rewrite and revise. Make every word and every sentence full of meaning to carry a due proportion of your story. Be sure, of course, that your sentences are grammatically correct, and each word the only possible word in that particular place. More than that, be sure that there is not an unnecessary word or unnecessary sentence in the completed story. Every pen-stroke must help to build your story as a whole. *Remember that this*

painstaking apprenticeship will save you many hardships and disappointments later on. Take it for granted that hours spent in revision on first manuscripts will presently save days of useless writing when your time will be more valuable to you.

The "constructive sense" that you are building up now with much effort will presently become an instinct that will not permit your story to go wrong.

Therefore *toil* at your early stories.

CHAPTER IX

SHORT story lengths—Novels and novelettes—How to sell manuscripts—More hints—Serial short stories—Serial novels—Novels in book form—The commercial side of authorship—Copyright—American and English rights—Prices—Proof correcting—Letters to the editor—Literary agents—A word in farewell.

WHEN your story is written and carefully revised, when you are honestly satisfied that it represents the best you can do, the time has come to send it out on its travels.

It may safely be said that the requirements of *no two* magazines or journals are *exactly* alike in the fiction field.

Often the requirements of a *group* of magazines, however, are so nearly alike that a story of a certain type will have a chance of sale with any one of the group.

A good love story is always saleable, and commands a bigger market than stories of any other type.

Humorous and jolly stories are almost equally in demand.

Horror stories *can* be sold, but the market is extremely limited—so small, that it is scarcely worth while writing them unless you have *exceptional* ability in this direction.

There, is a good market for adventure tales, and the domestic story is always in fair demand.

The market for the fantastic is more limited, but the magazines that use such stories generally pay

well. Study the magazines, study the markets; there is where the writer's income lies.

It is a good beginning to make a list of all the magazines to which the author hopes, at one time or another, to contribute. Now, by reading and making an analysis of the number and kind of stories such magazines have used over a period of time, the writer can get a useful idea of what is required.

It is often the case that lower priced magazines are more concerned with story value than with style.

"Give me a story," says the editor in effect, "and sell your style elsewhere."

This, however, is not universally true. A good combination of both style and story will be acclaimed generally by all editors.

Under each magazine heading write out a list of the kind of stories used, such as domestic, love, adventure, fantastic, pathetic, foreign, British, sea, desert, etc. Extend this by classifying their styles, plots, and types of openings.

Such an "analysis sheet" consistently arranged will prove invaluable. It is a ready-made guide to the kind of stories on which you can risk your hopes —and postage stamps.

If you are really keen, you can extend this home-made guide even further. Prepare a secondary list now dealing with particular types of stories. For instance, make a list of as many publications as possible that accept "short humorous stories" of 1,500 words or less, and another of those magazines which always contain some stories, 1,500 to 5,000 words, in which love interest is predominant. Such

classification can be carried as far as the author finds it useful.

Two useful sources of information to all amateurs are the *Writers' and Artists' Year Book* and *What Editors Want*, both of which contain practically complete lists of British publications. *One Thousand and One Places to Sell Manuscripts* embodies the same information for the American market.

I do not consider, however, that any year book will serve the beginner so well as a *personal study of the actual publications to which he intends to contribute.* You may then use the year books to supplement your own knowledge of the markets.

Short Story Lengths.

The standard short story length, which only means the length of the average published story, is between 4,000 and 5,000 words. A story *may* be 15,000 words in length, but few magazines use such long stories, and, as I said before, I place them in a separate class and call them novelettes.

Many magazines will not accept manuscripts of more than 3,500 words, while a few specialize in very short tales of not over 2,500 words. Almost all magazines like an occasional very short story, and for the manuscript of the last mentioned length, because it is a rarity, there is always a steady demand.

There are a number of weekly publications especially, that use a great deal of fiction of 1,500 words or less. This very profitable market includes the very short tale, which I prefer to call a sketch.

Often a story is rejected on the question of length alone—a needlessly irritating experience both for the editor and contributor, because careful attention to the magazine's requirements would have indicated that rejection was a foregone conclusion.

Novels and Novelettes.

I hope I have made it clear to my readers that there is an essential difference between short story writing and novel writing.

At the same time, I would make it equally clear that the man who can write a good short story *usually* has it in him to write a novel if he cares to turn his attention to this kind of work.

From a purely practical business point of view I do not advise beginners to attempt a novel until they have had some measure of success in the short story market. Nor can I, in this book, devote any considerable space to a consideration of book length fiction.

For the reader's general information, however, I shall mention the more usual lengths of manuscripts for book and serial publication.

The novelette, a form readily acceptable in America, and to a somewhat lesser extent in England, varies in length from 15,000 to 40,000 words.

Minimum novel length (serial publication only in America) about 60,000 words. English book-length novels, serial or book publication, minimum 75,000 to 80,000; maximum usually about 120,000, but there is no absolutely fixed rule, although the tendency is towards the shorter novel.

It sometimes—rarely, in fact—happens that very long novels by established writers are published in more than one volume; it is not expected that the new writer will have occasion to employ this greatly extended form.

How to Sell MSS.

You should choose very carefully the magazine to which you will first send your story, because you *know* that it constantly publishes stories of the same type.

Then make a brief list of four or five magazines which publish similar material. If your story is rejected by the magazine of your first choice, then send it out resolutely to each of the others in turn until it is accepted or returned by the magazine last on your list.

Even then, if you are convinced that your story is a good one, don't despair because your view has not been shared by editors. Many stories have been sold after having been addressed to more than a dozen magazines.

If, after you have entirely exhausted the list of likely markets, the story is still unsold, it is better to put it away for a while. Later you may be inspired to add some fresh touches, and you can begin at the beginning and send it round again. Editorial requirements may have changed, or, perhaps, an editor has used up much of the material he had on hand.

Remember that an editor, like any head of a business, may have a good stock in hand; yours may have arrived when "House Full" was the order of

the day, and that may have caused the rejection of your story.

More Hints.

Never send out a manuscript after the pages become dirty or dog-eared; it is economy to retype in such cases.

Do not fasten the pages of your story together when sending it to an American magazine.

If you fasten the pages together for a British magazine, a practice which is permitted, fasten them only at one corner and in such a way that the corners of the pages can be clipped off when the manuscript is given to the printer.

Do not enclose short story manuscripts in a tight cover that holds the pages bound. A light "manilla" cover into which the manuscript can be inserted is valuable in helping to keep the manuscripts clean.

Never roll a manuscript; fold it once if you must. It is better, with quarto paper, to buy two sizes of envelopes, one just the size of the manuscript for return, the other slightly larger for address to the publisher. Manuscripts can be posted perfectly flat and will always be returned in good condition.

The same short story may be sold in both the American and the British markets. If it is your intention to do so write "First British Serial Rights" or "First American Serial Rights" only at the top of your manuscript.

Serial Short Stories.

Novelettes meant to be published in two or more

instalments are not readily saleable in the English market. There are many American magazines, however, which offer a profitable market for such work. The Street and Smith publications, and the Munsey publications, both of New York, use a number of such novelettes each month. Indeed, they offer a ready market for fiction of all lengths to the new writer, since they publish more than 1,000,000 words of fiction monthly.

Fiction of the novelette type is difficult to write acceptably. For this reason, there is always a tendency on the part of the writer to expand unnecessarily a theme that could better be condensed into a five thousand word short story, or else to condense material that, with a little more plot interest, would make an acceptable serial or book length novel.

There is, of course, the short story series in which the stories, although each is complete in itself, are all bound together by one or more characters who appear successively in each story. This type is equally acceptable in both the British and American markets.

The Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle are, perhaps, best known among examples of this kind of work. Many such characters, created by their authors for use in a series of short stories, have become living personalities.

Serial Novels.

Long manuscripts, 50,000 to
length, intended to be publish
thirteen instalments, are widely

and America. Most fiction magazines publish at least one serial instalment in each issue, and many daily and weekly papers will buy manuscripts for serial publication, even although they may not use any short fiction. Syndicates which supply groups of newspapers, are also open to purchase serials of this length.

Here are some hints as to the type of serial which may find a ready market—

Love and adventure interest; a plot cunningly contrived, developing the fullest measure of suspense from chapter to chapter; and division into chapters of about 1,200 words (one news column) or 2,400 words, the usual daily paper instalment. Magazines usually publish instalments of 6,000 to 8,000 words each.

It is absolutely necessary in writing serials to get *an effective "curtain" or sub-climax at the end of each instalment.* Each sub-climax must be of a nature to hold the interest of the reader, and arouse his curiosity to such an extent that he will feel compelled to read the next instalment. The effect is more easily accomplished by leaving the characters in a perilous situation, or, in some situation where an event of interest is demanded but not disclosed.

Because the serial requirements of different publications vary so widely, it is not good policy to complete a manuscript before offering it for publication. The usual practice is to draft a list of characters; indicate the theme, nature and setting of the story; add a list of chapter headings, and then write the first chapter only of the proposed serial.

Follow this with a *detailed chapter by chapter synopsis* of the proposed story and submit this manuscript to the editor, asking for an expression of interest. Unless the editor is acquainted with your style and literary ability he will not buy your serial from you merely on the strength of a synopsis of this kind. But, if he has been favourably impressed, he is very likely to send you a letter to the effect that he would like to see the story when completed. That means that if you are able to complete the work on the lines promised in your synopsis, the story will have a very good chance of acceptance.

Sometimes, if your synopsis is promising, you will be asked to call to discuss the matter. This, of course, is far more satisfactory.

Novels in Book Form.

There was a time when the demands of the novel (except in regard to repeated "curtains" or sub-climaxes mentioned above) were practically the same as those of the good serial story.

At present the only possible definition of a novel is that it is a long manuscript of from 60,000 to 120,000 words in which a story is unfolded. Beyond this, it may have all the characteristics of the serial, or it may be autobiographical, biographical, or simply a straightforward record of events practically without a plot.

The novel is, in some respects, the easiest form of fiction. That is because it is the only form which is not more or less fixed by literary practice and tradition. On the other hand, and with equal truth,

the novel may be regarded as the most difficult type of literature for the beginner to handle successfully. The absence of set form and the looseness of construction which is sometimes permissible, is very likely to lead the beginner into producing something that is amorphous and entirely without artistic value.

It is easier to maintain consistency of action in characters which appear in the space of a short story. Far more difficult is it, in a long manuscript in which the entire life of a character may be unfolded and developed.

Book-length manuscripts may be submitted to book publishers in exactly the same way that shorter manuscripts are sent to magazines. You have no need to write long letters, for the book, like the short story, will be accepted purely on its merits. If the book is acceptable a reputable publisher will usually offer payment on a royalty basis; that is, he will offer you a percentage on the published selling price of all copies of the book that are sold. Sometimes a cash offer may be made outright; but it is not the usual practice.

Beware of the publisher who offers to publish your work if you will pay him for such publication; or if you will pay part of the cost of publication; or if you will purchase a number of your own books when published.

There are several publishing houses which are no more than printers in disguise, and which make their profits from unfortunate authors who are willing to pay for the privilege of seeing their name on the cover of a book.

If you are willing to pay for that privilege then such publishers give you all you can expect. *If you wish to make money by your work, or to build a reputation, have nothing to do with these so-called publishers.*

The publisher who can really be of service to the author is always willing to back his own judgment and accept the reasonable risks of his own business. If he likes a story he will make the author an offer of payment in one form or another. No reputable publisher will take payment from you as a condition of publishing your book.

A word of warning here may save the beginner some disappointment. Very few first novels bring their authors an adequate *financial* return for the time and effort spent on them. Occasionally a miracle happens, and even a first novel may bring some profit to the author.

It is probably true, however, that the average compensation for all first novels published on a royalty basis is not more than £50, the price of two or three short stories sold to ordinary magazines. This fact, however, need not discourage the would-be novelist. The second, third, or tenth novel, may be a "best seller" that will bring the author fame and fortune.

Even without writing a "best seller" any author may expect his public to increase with each published novel and, for this reason, he may reasonably look forward to a gradually growing income from such work.

The Commercial Side of Authorship.

There are many young writers who are inclined to adopt an uncompromising attitude towards the

commercial side of authorship. They regard their writings as "art," and refuse to "pander" to the "lower" tastes in literature.

This is commendable. Ideals in writing are always to be encouraged. Nor do I even suggest that real ideals should be sacrificed. But it *is* necessary to be practical in a practical world.

The writer without an audience is a singer in a sound-proof room. To get into sympathetic touch with those to whom you would appeal, you must consider *their* needs; to "educate" them up to your own high standard of literature may mean a long and sorry experience.

Art is long and life is short; you first of all owe it to yourself as a writer *to make a living at your profession* and, if you cannot do that, it is because you have failed to appeal to the public, your masters.

And that, in effect, means that you are not a good artist and that you have not learned your trade.

It is true, of course, that your work may appeal only to the more intelligent and more cultured reader. In that event you will gain kudos, but, because your public must be a limited one, your chances of financial success are restricted. If you want to spell your "Art" with a capital "A," you must be prepared to sacrifice popular success.

I do *not* mean by this that you should go to the other extreme and write the cheapest kind of literature. There is a sort of market even for shoddy work, but no writer worthy of the name will aim so low.

Between the two extremes there is a mean worthy of your highest powers—and a vast reading public

which wants to read bright, common-sense literature that it can enjoy and understand. To appeal to this public you must realize that the keynote of modern writing is *clearness and simplicity.*

No thought can be so profound that it cannot be put into simple language that the average man can read and understand. *If you are not understood the fault is with your power of expression. Don't, at any rate, attribute it to the ignorance of the public.*

Let me emphasize it so that you may remember it when writing. *Whatever you have to say, set it down as simply and as clearly as you can.*

When you are able to say what you wish to say in simple, temperate, language, the public will pay more to you for the privilege of reading what you have written. Furthermore, you have become a true artist.

This does not mean that you should " write down " to your public. There is no reason why the loftiest thoughts should not be so expressed that the " man in the street " may understand them.

The " complete " author does not overlook the business side of his or her profession. Naturally one should get the largest possible financial return for one's work. If you would do this, study the literary market as carefully as though you were a shopkeeper who had a book to sell because, when once your work is finished, this is exactly the position in which you find yourself.

As an artist you have produced a saleable commodity ; as a business man or woman it is your duty to yourself to sell that product in the best market and to the best advantage possible.

Copyright.

Actual writing, then, is only the first part of the writer's trade. The commercial side being equally important, the new writer will do well to acquaint himself as early as possible with all the rights he possesses in his own work.

Happily English law now gives any author full copyright in his own original writings without any formality whatever. For instance, an editor cannot dispose of work in another form without your express permission if he has only made you a payment for first publication

If it is your intention, after first publication in Great Britain, to make further use of your work, say in book form or in another country, you should in the first instance be careful to offer nothing more than "First British Serial Rights Only.'

Since the copyright laws of other countries are usually neither so just nor so generous as our own, it will pay the new writer to make a thorough study of American and European law relating to copyrights, in order to protect his work for foreign publication. The story that to-day has a nominal value of a dozen guineas may, at some time in the future, be worth many times this sum for the various rights held by the author in his own work.

American and English Rights.

These rights are generally divided as follows for literary property—

(*a*) First British Serial Rights and First American Serial Rights: the right to first publication in either

England or America for which payment is made outright.

(*b*) Foreign Rights or Right of Translation are usually sold outright for the whole of Europe, because conflicting copyright laws make it difficult for the comparatively unknown writer to enter into any kind of royalty agreement with foreign publishers.

(*c*) Second Serial Rights, all countries: that is, the right of second publication in provincial or other less well-known journals.

(*d*) Syndicate Rights, sold outright: that is the simple right to publish, secondarily, sold to a syndicate which disposes of such rights to a large number of provincial or other journals.

(*e*) Stage Rights: representing the right to adapt published work to the uses of the stage.

(*f*) Film Rights: which represent the right to adapt published work to the uses of the cinema.

Each of the above mentioned rights has a distinct and separate monetary value, and the author should in every case know just what he is selling before the sale is made.

Prices.

There is absolutely no standard of price prevailing for literary work. Even the unknown author should, however, be unwilling to accept less than one guinea per thousand words, even for manuscripts of somewhat undistinguished quality.

In the American market, where prices are usually about twice as high as those prevailing in the British market, one cent a word (about ½d.) should be the

minimum. It is considered very poor pay, for short work especially, if less than this price is offered, although for long work something less may occasionally be accepted.

Three guineas per thousand words is a fair average price in the English market, with American prices increased in proportion to represent a fair equivalent. Prices greatly in excess of this amount are often paid for work of well-known authors, whose names bring about competition for the privilege of publication.

Generally speaking a book should not be sold outright for less than £100, and even then it may prove to be a bad bargain on the part of the author. The publisher making such an offer expects to make a very substantial profit from the publication and, despite the fact that the royalties from a first novel are usually much less than this, the author can afford to take the risk with the publisher. Therefore, as I have said, a royalty contract is nearly always the most satisfactory basis of publication.

Foreign rights, when saleable, should be sold outright for the highest price the author can obtain, but in making such a sale the right of reproduction should be limited to a certain space of time or to publication in a given form.

The same is true for both dramatic and cinema rights in any manuscript. Briefly, no contract should be made with any publisher or producer without securing the advice of somebody thoroughly conversant with such contracts, say a reputable literary agent, or the secretary of the Incorporated Society of Authors, who is a fully qualified solicitor. I

should advise all readers qualified to do so to join this society.

Proof Correcting.

Although proofs are not usually sent in the case of newspaper articles, the author of any story or book which has been accepted may expect to receive a proof of his work in order that he may make any necessary corrections before the work is passed for printing.

The reception of a proof must *not* be considered an invitation to rewrite one's work. The author should simply make such corrections as are strictly necessary. For this purpose certain conventional signs and marks are used. These marks or correction symbols are absolutely standardized.

Any printer, any book on printing, and many dictionaries will give you a list of the proof marks that are necessary to use. The writer should make it a point to become thoroughly conversant with the approved methods of making such proof corrections, as it is only by doing so that he can be sure his work will finally appear in the exact form intended.

It is important to remember that printers are supposed to "follow copy." That is to say, they must print exactly what the author has written.

An author may freely correct any mistake in spelling or type-setting (such mistakes are known as "literals"); and also any mistake of text, which has been made because his copy was not accurately followed.

If, however, an author marks a proof with additions

to, or alterations of, the text of his original manuscript he is making "author's corrections."

The usual arrangement between author and publisher is that such corrections above 10 per cent must be paid for by the author himself and, if they are extensive, they may cost a great deal.

Let every beginner save himself money by making sure that his manuscript is completely finished and revised BEFORE it is accepted.

Letters to the Editor.

The preliminary reading of most manuscripts coming into an editorial or publishing office is done by professional readers, who choose, from among the many hopeless manuscripts submitted, the small percentage of real stories that will finally be passed on for final consideration.

It is therefore usually a mistake to write a personal or private letter to the editor or publisher in an attempt to catch the editorial eye and influence him to look upon your work favourably. If the manuscript does not speak for itself, no letter you can write will sell that manuscript.

Let your manuscript be neatly typewritten and put together with that professional touch which shows your own pride and your own interest in your work, and the appearance of the manuscript alone will generally do more for you than any letter.

It is useless and unnecessary to describe the nature of any manuscript submitted in a letter accompanying the manuscript.

When once a magazine has published some of your

work, the condition becomes somewhat different. A letter such as this is then sometimes permissible—

"Dear Sir,

"Since you liked 'Monk's Head' well enough to publish it, I enclose another story, 'The Wandering Book,' for your consideration. An early decision would be appreciated."

Such a letter has just this effect; it is an immediate indication to the reader opening the envelope that this story is not the work of an amateur and is worth special editorial consideration.

Later when your personal relations with editors become more intimate, you may write such friendly letters as you like and you will find that editors, almost without exception, are men and women intensely interested in their work, and *in your work* inasmuch as you are of mutual help.

Literary Agents.

No contract is necessary when the first publication right of any short story is sold. But with books it is different. Then dramatic rights and cinema rights should be the subject of contract between the author and the publisher or producer.

When a literary agent is employed, he is generally held responsible for acceptance or modification of contracts.

It has previously been pointed out that for the author who makes a careful study of his market, the literary agent is a convenience rather than a necessity. It is only owing to the agent's more thorough

knowledge of the literary market and market conditions that he can sometimes sell manuscripts which the author might fail to do. But even the best agent can't sell a bad story. Indeed, a good agent is too wise to accept one.

A good agent is of real service to writers who do not know the literary market, and to writers who wish to be saved the trouble and worry of the business side of authorship. The agent is often particularly helpful in the disposal of American and foreign rights, and in the arranging of contracts to the author's greatest advantage.

Remember my admonitions that the new writer should have nothing to do with the agent who charges a registration fee, a reading fee, or any other fee except a direct commission upon the sale of the author's work. *Agents who charge such fees are too likely to count upon them for their profits, and to neglect the one thing that really matters—selling the manuscripts.*

A Word in Farewell.

I realize that, in a book of this length it is impossible to discuss all the difficulties which readers may encounter in their early literary endeavours. I have tried, however, to pass on to you the benefit of my own experience; to point out the many pitfalls in the path of success; and to give you all the practical hints I know, which may make the climbing of that path easier for you.

This book has been designed to serve as a general guide, and I believe that it does contain all the

information essential to the beginner. The rest is mainly a question of actual practice and hard work.

Ultimate success must depend more upon your own efforts than upon any theoretical instruction. If I have been able to show you what to avoid in writing; what are the essential characteristics of successful work; and how to secure desired effects, I am well satisfied.

Now "get busy" and Good Luck to you all.

INDEX

PART 1

FREE-LANCE JOURNALISM

PART 2
SHORT STORY WRITING