

THE YOUTHFUL JOB COMPOSITOR.

IT is distressing to see boys learning the printing business who day after day receive no help, no instruction, no guidance from those for whom they work. There are many boys in this predicament, who, with plenty of desire on their part to advance, are kept at the plainest of work, reprint ads., etc. For such the following hints on job composition, though few in number, may be of some service. If they would only imbibe the ideas of their predecessors in the business, as laid down in technical text books, they might learn something of benefit to them. As it is, they too often rely upon what they pick up, for of instruction they receive little or nothing. Therefore, in this article the compositor, usually termed the apprentice, will be taken under advisement.

The young printer should remember that, in these times particularly, the demand is for the best in quality, workmanship, finish, appearance, the best in every sense, and he should set out with the determination to supply the want. Paraphrasing the old axiom that "a man is judged by the company he keeps," he must bear in mind that the modern job compositor is judged by the work he produces, and that the standard is being raised each year under the influence of competition and of new methods.

The youthful job compositor usually has a hard road to travel, dependent as he is in the majority of cases upon his individual exertions as to whether he will become an expert on fancy work or an ordinary workman. The jobbing branch of the business is crowded with workmen who may fairly be placed in the latter category; their pretensions as to ability have not foundation sufficient to enable them to claim to rank in the higher classification, and this state of affairs is too often their own fault. Yet it is the higher rank the young compositor should aim for; there is no harm done in aiming high, for those who are content with rut and routine will never become anything except commonplace workmen.

Without doubt many a young printer has fervently wished for more help than that which is unwillingly or half heartedly afforded him by his associates or his foreman. If we were sent to school and allowed to do what we liked there, in the matter of study, without any assistance or guidance from teachers, we would be a sorry lot, yet something, similar is what frequently, almost commonly, happens in printing offices of late years, as far as apprentices are concerned.

Presuming that the individual in question is possessed of some little knowledge of the "art and mystery," and wishes to improve his ideas with regard to "tasty" work, what should he first do? The writer is not speaking of the boy who is unfitted by nature for the acquirement of taste; he has special reference to the youth with education and intelligence enough to understand that taste in printing is a pure development of culture on his part.

A high degree of taste in composition is not easily acquired, but one great factor towards its attainment is good literature, and another is careful study of the methods and ideas of good printers. A cultivation of taste for good books, good pictures, illustrations, etc., is bound to have a healthy influence on the mind of the typographic tyro. Plenty of material may also be found in the high-class trade periodicals, and great advance may be made if friendship is formed with a man respected for

his ability; in other words, "get on the right side of him." Careful study of examples of good work will be of material benefit towards the formation of style, which is too often a rare quality in job compositors—far rarer than should, in the nature of circumstances, be the case.

Bearing all these points in mind, the youthful compositor should first consider, when a piece of work is given to him, the question of appropriateness, not only the nature or class of the job, but of display. This is where the law of perspective comes in, where the relative prominence of facts and ideas contained in the job must receive proper consideration. The central or controlling idea must be seized and given its proper place; that done, the others may be ranged according to their relative value. This is where the compositor makes a success or a failure, for the correct treatment of relative values shows that a workman has a true idea of the sense of perspective. This property, if not inherent, may be acquired, though it takes many men long years to gain a true idea of it; for perfect illustrations in printing of the value of perspective are not common.

Principles do not change; methods do. Violations of perspective should be carefully guarded against, such as giving undue prominence to subordinate lines or making insignificant the matter that should be prominent. The value of forethought in laying out a job—paper and pencil are useful adjuncts in this work—cannot be sufficiently dwelt upon; the best jobber known to the writer, a shining light in his business, always lays out his ideas on paper. Be sure you are right; then go ahead.

Legibility, a vital principle in job work, should always be borne in mind; over-ornamentation and over-use of fancy type are repulsive, and are generally considered signs of poor workmanship. Ornaments should never be allowed to interfere with the readability of work; repress the tendency to use ornaments, a tendency which sometimes takes hold with renewed vigor of men when a supply of new ones is put into an office. It is considered a safe rule to use few ornaments; simplicity always pleases.

Proportion and contrast should be well understood. With a proper understanding of these principles much fine work can be done and when understood they must be thoughtfully observed. The man who masters properly the law of contrast will surely be good at display. Of course it is hard sometimes to do anything decent with a job, particularly when crowded, but this is not so frequently the case as in former years. Ideas as to the effect of words when in print have been subjected to the clarifying process for years, with the result that there is not near so much crowding as formerly obtained in advertisements and jobs. There is a general effort on the part of advertisement writers to so draw up their matter that the printer may be helped largely in his effort to secure good contrasting lines. They, in common with the printer, want something that will attract attention.

Good contrasts or effects "do not always exist in the difference between dark and light lines, nor in large and small lines, but frequently by long and short lines, and again by liberal spacing between groups of lines, and often again by all these features combined." The individual taste of a workman may make it easy for him to obtain pleasing contrast with heavy and light lines, with the aid of judicious spacing, the latter being a very important factor in many cases. Spacing should be thought of with an eye to good effect; it is well to remember this. In all kinds of work there should be liberal margins and free spac-