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PUNCTUATION.

PUNCTUATION as a part of written composition is of comparatively recent use, being almost unknown to the ancients. It is, indeed, said to have been invented by Aristophanes an Alexandrian grammarian, and to have been forgotten afterwards until revived by Alcuin at the request of Charlemagne, but this punctuation was more of a rhetorical nature than grammatical, as the present system is.

The system at present in use was introduced by Manutius, a Venetian printer, toward the close of the fifteenth century, and was found so useful that it immediately came into general use, and has not been much varied since.

At present it is an art almost confined to printers and may be looked upon as part of the esoteric mysteries of this craft.

Punctuation is a part, and by no means an unimportant part, of written speech. These little auxiliaries, appearing in single or double files at intervals throughout a sentence, act as guides or scouts to the phalanx of mighty words which surround them. They are modestly insignificant in appearance but they perform a very useful work, in assigning the more important elements of discourse to their proper place and function.

Written speech is at best but an inferior medium of communication compared with the spoken word. As a method of painting to the eye the invisible words of the mouth it is one of the greatest inventions evolved by the ingenuity of man, but it is not perfect. The written words are after all only a poor symbol of the skeleton of what once were living words, warm with the breath of life, appealing to the heart with all the riches of tones, accent, modulation, and inflections. But all these have departed from the written word, or lie hidden until exorcised into life by the magic of the reader's voice. These are the spirits that animate the spoken word and must be supplied to the written word before it can convey its message from mind to mind. Much of the meaning of oral speech depends on the mode of utterance, which printed speech does not attempt to portray but which must be reproduced when the words are repeated by a reader, if the author's full meaning is to be conveyed,

and as this can be ascertained only in part and by guessing, the defects of written speech become apparent.

But written speech has taken in a few aids to assist the mere words in their work, such as capital letters, punctuation marks and the use of different types in printing. It is only in the more complicated and artificially arranged sentences that punctuation assumes an importance that raises it to an art. Short, simple expressions arranged in the natural order of the ideas are readily understood without the aid of stops, but when the sentences become involved and their various elements are shifted out of their natural order, then the use of the guides becomes necessary to keep each element distinct and to show its rank. If every word had a right place and were always put in that place, or if every word were labelled by inflection or some other means so that its duty and relation could at once be known, punctuation would be unnecessary, but in modern languages we have dropped the old labels or inflections from our words and cannot exercise the same freedom in arranging them as the ancients did, and when we do remove a word or a phrase out of its usual order, or separate it from its most closely related terms we must carefully guard it by placing a sentinel before and after it in the shape of a comma.

This was the origin of punctuation. The so-called stops were not intended to indicate pauses, and have now no reference to pauses to be made in reading. They may, indeed, coincide with such pauses, but that is a mere accident; they are used for the purpose of aiding the arrangement of words in conveying thought.

Of the stops used at present the comma, the semi-colon and the colon are the only ones that give any difficulty to the student. The colon is not often used, however, and the chief difficulty in the art of punctuation thus is to ascertain the proper use of the comma and the semi-colon. As a rule the comma is used to separate words and phrases from each other, and the semi-colon to separate the different clauses of a compound sentence; but if one of these clauses is of greater importance than the others, or if its relation is different from that of the others, it is separated from the others by a colon. These are of course only the general duties of each of these parts of punctuation, but they very often encroach on one another's

domain, still, however, always maintaining their relative position in the scale of importance, the comma marking the smallest break in connection or sense, the semi-colon the next in order, and the colon the greatest break allowable in a sentence.

Of these three stops the comma is most frequently used and presents the greatest difficulty. When to use it and when not to use it are questions often puzzling, and most important. A misplaced comma gives an entirely different meaning to a sentence from that intended.

We purpose referring to this important subject in a subsequent issue, when we will investigate the particular rules that apply to each of the stops, and discuss the best method of imparting skill in punctuation to pupils.

BOOK REVIEW.

Madam How and Lady Why; or, First Lessons in Earth Lore for Children; by Charles Kingsley. Illustrated. New York: Macmillan & Co., 1885. 321 pp. 50 cents. From Williamson & Co., Toronto.

This book forms number two of the Messrs. Macmillan's new series of Globe Readings for Children. The price is so low that no one need miss having it; and to read it understandingly will make an epoch in a boy's life. In a series of delightful talks the great laws of world-building, species development, and persistence of the strongest, are explained and illustrated, and their reasonableness set forth. The reader, (who, though supposed to be young, need not necessarily be so,) is helped to use his eyes, his common sense, his judgment. His experience is drawn upon, and he is made to see that upon it alone is he to build for himself his theory of nature. Scientific knowledge is shown to be nothing but one's own experience and observation enlarged and verified.

There is nothing so wonderful as the tales of earth-lore; nothing more fascinating than the study of the history of world changes and developments. Those scientific men who have the gift of teaching, and who love to see pure and wholesome knowledge filling the minds of children, do the world incalculable benefit when they reveal the wonders of nature to them, and lead them to love her and study her laws. Of such Charles Kingsley is among the first, both in time and in honor. His style is so chaste, his mind so pure, his purpose so exalted, his tone so reverent, that he is a veritable high-priest in the temple he would have us all worship in.

The teacher who will take this book, and master it, and then lead his pupils to read it, explaining it, and illustrating it where the author supposes a power of observation and a range of experience but little prevalent among our as yet unscientific people, will largely increase his own intellectual attainment, and will perhaps develop tastes and aptitudes in his pupils which will minister to their enjoyment and add to their knowledge all through their lives. Should he require other books to