

More Flaws in the Ontario Readers Punctuation in a State of Chaos

A Second Letter by J. P. T.—No Consistent Method of Punctuation Followed and Established Rules Disregarded—Numerous Examples to Prove Errors.

Letter II.
Although punctuation is comparatively a modern practice, and was at first more or less conventional, it has become something more settled than a subject purely tentative. Certain marks are invariably used to indicate the similarly recurring breaks and turns in discourse; and that man that innovates on this established practice makes himself, to say the least, very singular. Mr. Bigelow, in his *Handbook of Punctuation*, says, "It has become a recognized principle, that punctuation is as much a matter of taste and judgment as of rigid rule; and to be followed absolutely, much is left to the discretion of the author." A written article may be pointed strictly or lightly, according to the character of the subject; but, in either case, relativity should be carefully observed.

The punctuation in the new Readers is sometimes rigid, sometimes light, often wrong, and a consistent system is used at all. The boy that might try to learn the art of punctuation from the new Readers would soon be nonplussed.

It is a standing rule in punctuation, that, when more than one adjective precedes a noun, a comma should be put after every one except the last. In the Readers, this rule is sometimes adhered to; just as often is not.

"First R., p. 19.
"With a thin little twisted knee."

Second R., p. 21.
Sometimes the co-ordinate members of a sentence, when united by a conjunction, have a comma or a semicolon before the conjunction; very often the sentence gets along finely without either mark.

"This made the bell ring, and the king came to see who needed help."—First R., p. 44.
"Come with me and I will show you how to battle dogs."—First R., p. 40.

The latter of these might do for a letter, a newspaper, or even a high-class serial; but for school books, especially school books, whose matter of every kind should be models for imitation, it is altogether too careless.

Should an adverbial clause, when it begins a sentence, be set off by a comma? No one can tell from the Readers.

"If you sing, she sings back to you. If you shout, she shouts to you again. If you cry, she cries, too."—Second R., p. 20.

On page 34, Second Reader, there are, "As she put upon the floor pot one of them, and upon the floor close to a straw." "If I had been thrust into the pot with my fellows I should have been boiled," and "If I had not escaped when she cut the band, I should not have been here."

Dozens of examples of each kind can be found in the Books. How, in the face of such contradictory work, can teachers teach punctuation?

"His father found his daughter, and she was in the lower part of the room."—First R., pp. 79-80.
"He is taught reading, writing, and a little arithmetic."—First R., p. 32.

In the Readers, constructions of this kind generally have a comma before the conjunction, as in the first example; but a good many cases, in which the comma is omitted, are found. Which is the better practice? Wilson, in his *Treatise on Punctuation*, says, "Some punctuators omit the comma between the last two particulars, when united by either the conjunction and, or, nor. But the propriety of using the comma will perhaps be obvious to anyone who examined the nature of such sentences, for the last two words of the series are not more closely connected in actual construction with each other than with the preceding words; as, infancy, childhood, youth, manhood, and age are different stages in human life."

This is sustained by the fact, that, as soon as it was agreed, Alexander went to the horse," etc.—Second R., p. 173.
This is the same sentence as the one, already cited, that begins with "Sirrah Locksley"; but the punctuation is ridiculous. A semicolon should be after "this."

"Round went the pony so unceremoniously that, with a little ceremony, Jackanapes clung to his neck," etc.—Second R., pp. 190-91. It would be

at a glance, but if the dependent clause has only one comma at either of its ends, the reader is more perplexed than helped. If, in the third sentence, a comma were used for the semicolon, the pointing might do for instructive writing; but, for books intended for children, such free pointing is a mistake.

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are one hundred and thirty-five such cases; and, in the Public School Grammar, there are sixty-five such cases.

"There are two doors—one at the front, the other at the back of the house."—Primer, p. 85. Here, as in some country newspapers and third-rate serials, simple apposition is indicated by a dash. And, in the new Readers, the same slowly error appears again and again. Every elementary grammar that speaks of punctuation says that the mark for ordinary apposition is a comma. Professor Bain, in his *Grammar*, gives models of such punctuation.

On page 1, he has, "There are two kinds of articulate sounds,—vowels and consonants," and "The characters available for the vowel sounds are five,—a, e, i, o, u." On page 32, he has, "The vowels are divided into two classes,—vowels of a couple,—a dual form." The comma indicates the apposition, agreeably to the well-known rule; the dash, which may or may not be used, indicates a pause, and Noah being the sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth." See, also, II. Sam., II, 18, and I. John, v., 7. Once in a while though, the Readers have it as it should be. In the Second Reader, page 177, there is, "It was an oasis, a green spot in the barren desert." This will do. In the Third Reader, page 152, there is, "It was a pretty picture,—maternal love on one part, and happy trust on the other." "We have not all such constructions been pointed in the same way? But, when the enumerated parts are grouped by semicolons, the best practice is to use a colon instead of a comma and a dash. In the Second Reader, page 184, there is, "Its colours remind us of virtues on which our Empire rests—red signifying bravery; white, purity; and blue, truth." The dash should be taken out, and a colon put in its place.

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well to put a comma before "that." "In its hollow sides they hid the bravest of their warriors and, breaking up their camp, they sailed away as it returning home."—Second R., p. 215.

Put a comma after "warriors." "The inundation had swept away trees, crops, and cattle, and left, in their stead a waste of red sand and gray mud."—Third R., p. 92.

Either take out the comma after "left," or put one after "stead." "Most did not notice, or did not seem to notice, the child."—Third R., p. 74. This will do.

"Fine clothes may disguise, but silly words will reveal a fool."—Second R., p. 44. Put a comma after "reveal."

"What mischief could be foreseen, Jackanapes promised to guard against."—Second R., p. 192. Correct.

"How Jackanapes tumbled on to Lollo's back he never knew."—Second R., p. 196.

Put a comma after "back." "The Public School Grammar condemns 'on to.'"

"This journey of hardship, privation and exposure occupied from two to three months."—Fourth R., p. 172.

"There shone sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth," and, in this construction, there might be one after "exposure" to bunch the whole subject.

"The horns or antlers are branched," etc.—Third R., p. 101.

Put a comma after "horns," and another after "antlers."

Anyone can see where a comma should be inserted in each of the nine sentences. "We follow all such constructions been pointed in the same way? But, when the enumerated parts are grouped by semicolons, the best practice is to use a colon instead of a comma and a dash. In the Second Reader, page 184, there is, "Its colours remind us of virtues on which our Empire rests—red signifying bravery; white, purity; and blue, truth." The dash should be taken out, and a colon put in its place.

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■ Neatly packed in tins—always fresh and crisp.
■ Just the thing for dessert, afternoon teas, social functions, etc. We've made the flavor so delicious that we know you'll want more.
■ Sold by all good grocers.
■ Made by Paterson of Brantford

Hun, about in their sulphurous canopy."—Third R., p. 261.

"They like pew-rents, and baptismal fees, etc."—Fourth R., p. 92.

"The glory and the loveliness, are passed away from earth."—Fourth R., p. 134.

"The mustering squadron, and the clattering car, went pouring forward," etc.—Fourth R., pp. 312-13.

"... are Norfolk Island, and the Auckland Group," etc.—Fourth R., p. 362.

When a phrase or a sentence is enclosed in parentheses, and when a comma or other mark is necessary after the phrase or the sentence, should the necessary mark be before or after the last parenthesis? The answer is, it must be an indifferent matter; but, if it is nothing but a matter of taste, it is not a frivolous matter when school books are concerned.

"And that is how I came to know."—Second R., p. 98.

"(the other was glass)."—Second R., p. 194.

"(which I laugh at every time I think of it)."—Fourth R., p. 211.

"I have been struck out in great array."—Fourth R., p. 46.

In the Bible the necessary mark is always before the last parenthesis.

"... which were upon the face of the earth."—Fourth R., p. 134.

(the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with him in the vale of Siddim."—Gen. xiv, 8.

"I have not this day," etc.—Joshua, xlii, 52.

Mr. Bigelow says, "Oh! always requires the exclamation point immediately after it," unless it "commences a sentence, which requires the exclamation point at the end," in which case, "it is not usually necessary to put the point also after the interjection."

"Oh, no, I never felt down and broke my crown."—First R., p. 4.

"For a few minutes the French regulars stood their ground returning a sharp and not ineffectual fire."—Fourth R., p. 33.

GAL THREE new readers, etc.

"Squere started forth in a rage, and chaise intent upon discovery and vengeance."—Fourth R., p. 276.

As sentimental marks are omitted where they should be, so some are used where they should not be.

"On he ran and soon came back with a long strong rope, and a big drum."—Second R., p. 68.

"I never saw your camel, nor your jewels."—Second R., p. 100.

"... unless a man, or a lobster, has wit enough to make use of it."—Second R., p. 122.