

The Printer's Miscellany.

VOL. I.

ST. JOHN, N. B., CANADA, MAY, 1877.

No. 11.

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[From the Typo.]

How the Apprentice may Become a Rapid and Correct Compositor.

E. BURNS CAROL.

Do we wonder that only about one in every six printers (?) turned loose from the composing-rooms are even fair, not to say good compositors? Here is the reason: A boy is put into the composing room to learn the business; or, it is expected by his parents and friends that he will, at least, learn how to set type well. For some weeks or months he does little but errands and "chores." If he is enterprising he in the meantime occasionally gets at a case and learns it. Finally he is given by the busy foreman some dead matter and a "take" of reprint miscellany. The poor boy goes at it, and at last, with little counsel and less direct aid, he gets it together and takes a proof. There is, here and there, a boy or a young man, who, under such circumstances, will make a good report of himself, and will so continue to do, until he is a thoroughly good compositor, but nature did more than half towards making a printer of such a boy; and where there exists one such, there will be found scattered about the printing offices ninety and nine who will fail. If the boy's first proof, or his second proof, and mayhap his third proof, look bad about the margins after being read, he hears something like this from the foreman or his assistant:—"Here, you can't divide 'again,' nor any other word on a syllable of one letter; and you mustn't put spaces in at the end of your lines; and we don't capitalize 'city' and 'county,' but we *do* capitalize 'State';

and 'steamboat' is one word, but 'canal boat' is two words;" and so on. Of course the boy's brain soon begins to buzz. Out of twenty different items of advice, he perhaps recollects permanently three or four; and so his next proof is bad—and bad in many ways precisely where his first one failed. The rules are again rehearsed, with a seasoning of forcible but unwholesome adjectives. This is bad enough; but who often sees the busy foreman standing beside the raw apprentice, watching his every motion, holding him in check when he sees a tendency to run into "false motions," and crowding him to nervous, rapid movements when the right method is once struck? I believe such a spectacle is rare indeed, and, as a consequence, the trade is loaded with type-setters who find it impossible to do a fair day's work. I say as a consequence, and I think I am right. I believe that eight out of every ten intelligent boys who attempt to make of themselves compositors may go forth competent to be classed with the present few rapid workmen, and this almost entirely through their own efforts. This is how it must be done:—

The music teacher, who wishes to make players of pupils, says to them: "Play this scale correctly first, and rapidly afterwards." The boy must set type by the same rule. He may constantly strive for speed, but the instant that catches his hand trembling with a letter on the way to the stick, or hesitating while burrowing in a box, or failing to secure a letter at the very moment the fingers touch it, that instant he should for a moment or two utterly cease work. The nerves will calm down, he may review his ground of failure, and armed with a resolve to avoid the pitfall, renew his efforts. *No better practice*, with a view of attaining speed in type-setting, and ease in style, can be followed than that of, line by line, making each time a renewed effort to set a line in a minute (or other space of time requisite for rapid work at the compositor's present status of experience), and to do it without one "false motion," or once missing the first grasp of a letter. Follow this up for weeks, if necessary, never once trying to gain a further second in speed, until at that rate you are able to put up line after line with the simple, easy, graceful motion so rarely seen and more rarely acquired. When this is done reduce the time for each "straight" line by a few seconds, and again for a time *closely* adhere to the above, and all will go well.

Another element of speed is the ability to read copy without stopping the regular motion of the hand. Practice of the right kind will soon accomplish this, and nothing else. A "guide" to the trained eye is a nuisance. Practice the briefest, lightning-like glances at the copy, with the effort to catch as many words as possible; and do this only on two different kinds of occasions—at the instant of starting for a "space" (the nicks of which do not have to be noted), and while putting down the last space in a line and changing over the rule. Diligent practice in *close adherence* to this counsel will enable the intelligent workman to labor all day on fair copy without *once* stopping work to read.