

Correct English in the Lower Grades.—IV.

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As soon as they begin to write, children must learn the use of full stops and question marks. This has already been directed in the second article of this series.

With one or two exceptions, *rules* for other punctuation marks ought not, and indeed cannot, properly, be taught until children have a fair knowledge of grammatical constructions. The exceptions are: I. The use of the comma to mark off words of address: As, "Come, Jack, I am in a hurry." "Please, Miss Brown, may I change my seat?" II. The use of the comma to separate words in a series; as, "For lunch, we had biscuits, cake, oranges, bananas, and milk." "We had a long, hot, tiresome walk."

As soon as such sentences as these are met with in the reading lesson, call the children's attention to them, (taking one form at a time, of course,) and let them pick out other examples in the reading book. Give them practice in putting in the commas in sentences written on the board and in dictated sentences. Then let them learn the rules.

The simpler uses of quotation marks can be learned at an early stage. Make the children pick out conversations in their readers and tell you where the quotation marks are placed, and why. Good examples to study from the N. B. Reader, Bk. III, are to be found in, "Black Beauty," "Self-Denial," and "The Little Post-Boy." For home work let them copy a short conversation from a story book. Put on the board a conversation, punctuated, but without quotation marks, and let them dictate the latter to you.

The next step is to write short conversations from dictation, but before this is done, a separate lesson must be given on the commoner contractions used in ordinary conversation. Put on the board the following contractions: "Aren't, can't, couldn't, didn't, hasn't, I'll, I'm, I've, etc." Get the children to tell you what letters are omitted and then let them write out the full form of each. For the next exercise, reverse this, giving the full form, and requiring the contractions.

They may now go on to writing short original conversations on given subjects. [As they advance, variety should be expected in the words of *saying*. Draw their attention to different words of this sort in their reading. In "Self-Denial," and "Black Beauty," the word "said," is used again and again. In "The Little Post-Boy," we find, "asked," "answered," "cried," "exclaimed." In "The Doll's Dressmaker," a still greater variety is used. The children may make a list of these words, adding others if they can, then use them in original conversations.]

The correct use of punctuation marks, however, is to be learned chiefly, not by set lessons, but by practice in writing. The following exercises are most useful: *a.* Putting in the stops in an unpunctuated passage written on the board. This must be done not by rule, but by attention to sound and sense. *b.* Dictation. *c.* Transcription.* *d.* Learning poetry and writing it out from memory with absolute correctness as to stops.

The value of this last exercise can hardly be too highly estimated. Any teacher who will try it for a year, setting two such lessons a week, or even one, will probably be amazed at the improvement it brings about. Some poems that are useful for this purpose are: "Lady Clare;" Longfellow's "Daybreak;" passages from "Hiawatha," *e. g.* "The Building of the Canoe;" "Wynken, Blynken and Nod."

There is a great temptation to digress here, and to dwell in detail upon other and more important uses of poetry in school, but lack of space forbids. It may be possible to treat of this subject by itself at some future time. Meanwhile, I will say, in passing that learning plenty of good poetry by heart is the best way that I know of overcoming that great difficulty in the way of writing good English, namely, poverty of vocabulary.

There will rise in the mind of every hard-worked teacher the question "How and when are all these exercises to be corrected?" It will not do to say, with the pedagogue of tradition, "Let us look the difficulty boldly in the face, and pass on." It is a difficulty that must be grappled with, for uncorrected written work is practically useless. Hard work, these corrections, but hard work that tells. A few suggestions may make it a little easier and more effective.

First, as to work that can be corrected by the children themselves, such as dictation or written out poetry. The objections to this plan of correcting are that it encourages, *a.* confusion, *b.* carelessness, and *c.* unfairness.

The first may be avoided by strict adherence to certain rules of method. Have the papers exchanged in such a way that no child has a near neighbour's paper. Allow a short time before papers are given back, when the correctors may

* The exercise of copying a passage out of a book, though it should not supersede dictation, is occasionally a useful substitute for it. It is quieter, and more expeditious. It is apt, in the case of a careless child, to reveal exactly the same mistakes which would have been made in a dictation lesson, since the words are not looked at one by one, but dictated to himself two or three at a time. And in the case of more careful learners, who look at the words and try to avoid mistakes it is evident that this form of exercise is not less effective.