

ditary in his line, himself placed at its head, with powers so large, as to enable him to do all the good of his station, and so limited, as to restrain him from its abuse. This he would have faithfully administered, and more than this I do not believe he ever wished. But he had a Queen of absolute sway over his weak mind and timid virtue, and of a character the reverse of his in all points. This angel, as gaudily painted, in the rhapsodies of Burke, with some smartness of fancy, but no soundness of sense, was proud, disdainful of restraint, indignant at all obstacles to her will, eager in the pursuit of pleasure, and firm enough to hold to her desires, or perish in their wreck. Her inordinate gambling and dissipations, with those of the Count d'Artois, and others of the *clique*, had been a sensible item in the exhaustion of the treasury, which called into action the reforming hand of the nation: and her opposition to it, her inflexible perverseness and dauntless spirit, led herself to the guillotine, drew the King on with her, and plunged the world into crimes and calamities which will for ever stain the pages of modern history. I have ever believed, that had there been no Queen, there would have been no revolution. No force would have been provoked, nor exercised. The King would have gone hand in hand with the wisdom of his sounder counsellors, who, guided by the increased lights of the age, wished only, with the same pace, to advance the principles of their social constitution. The deed which closed the mortal course of these sovereigns, I shall neither approve nor condemn. I am not prepared to say, that the first magistrate of a nation cannot commit treason against his country, or is unamenable to its punishment: nor yet, that where there is no written law, no regulated tribunal, there is not a law in our hearts, and a power in our hands, given for righteous employment in maintaining right, and redressing wrong. Of those who judged the King, many thought him wilfully criminal; many, that his existence would keep the nation in perpetual conflict with the horde of kings, who would war against a regeneration which might come home to themselves, and that it were better that one should die than all. I should not have voted with this portion of the legislature. I should have shut up the Queen in a convent, putting harm out of her power, and placed the King in his station, investing him with limited powers, which, I verily believe, he would have honestly exercised, according to the measure of his understanding. In this way, no void would have been created, courting the usurpation of a military adventurer, nor occasion given for those enormities which demoralized the nations of the world, and destroyed, and is yet to destroy, millions and millions of its inhabitants. There are three epochs in history, signalized by the total extinction of national morality. The first was of the successors of Alexander, not omitting himself. The next, the successors of the first Cæsar. The third, our own age. This was begun by the partition of Poland, followed by that of the treaty of Pilnitz; next, the confederation of Copenhagen; then the enormities of Bonaparte, partitioning the earth at his will, and devastating it with fire and sword; now the conspiracy of Kings, the successors of Bonaparte, blasphemously calling themselves the Holy Alliance, and treading in the footsteps of their incarcerated leader; not yet, indeed, usurping the government of other nations, avowedly and in detail, but controlling by their armies the forms in which they will permit them to be governed; and reserving, *in petto*, the order and extent of the usurpations further meditated.

Every man who desires information upon the science of politics should possess himself as speedily as he can of these inestimable volumes.

*Composition and Punctuation familiarly explained, for those who have neglected the Study of Grammar. By Justin Brenan. London, 1829.*

WHILE great advances have been made in composition, there is yet much to be learned. The majority are taught by that which sounds well, in preference to that which contains a purpose. If we trace English prose from its earliest date, we find gradual changes—not merely in phraseology, and the fashion of words, but in the modes of expression—working a silent revolution in our literature. What a piece of slender prettiness is the *Arcadia*, deeked out in its trim and pleasant flowers—what a mass of conceits and half-developed philosophy are the essays of COWLEY—how allegorical and quaint is SPENCER—and how stiff and ungraceful is DRYDEN. These were the faults of the times; the public mind had not made progress in the art of communicating ideas; and the first efforts of prose were naturally impregnated with ill-measured cadences and the metaphorical tone of poetry. With the growth of the speculative and demonstrative sciences, the cultivation of prose became an object of necessity; and as our necessities increase with our knowledge, it still remains for us to reduce the important medium by which thought is conveyed from man to man, and from generation to generation, to the simplest and most practical principles.

It is a great mistake to suppose that any man can lay down rules for composition. Some of our great-grandfathers, good souls, published books for the use of schools, in which they gave us formal laws for the various branches of writing; but unfortunately, as these laws were not adapted in kind or degree to the capacity of schoolboys, they only had the effect of confirming the youthful scholar in the notion that composition was a mystery beyond his reach, so that he gave it up in despair. The attempt to analyse the elements of writing must always be vague and useless. There are no elements in writing, but one, and that is—if people could persuade themselves to put faith in it—*intelligibility*. That is the beginning and the termination of all controversy on the subject. It admits of no denial or qualification. He who succeeds in conveying to his readers the object he has in view, attains unquestionably the great end of writing. MURRAY, and the wordy tribe who have cut grammar, and rhetoric, and logic, into divisions and subdivisions, and who have endeavoured to classify, and arrange, and separate into all possible heads of distribution the mere forms and order of composition, are gone out of date. Not one man in a thousand, even of the generally uninformed multitude, would now refer to MURRAY as an authority. Those who have outlived the folly of the grammar scheme ask who constituted MURRAY, or any body else, an arbitrary judge of the use of language? The answer is plain—he availed himself of the unsettled fashions of the day, and by ingeniously combining the floating opinions of clever men upon abstract points, contrived to make a sort of statutory digest of what he considered the primary laws. But these laws contain so much that is unnecessary, and so much that, if necessary, is so interwoven with idle theory as to obscure its utility, that they never have contributed to the formation of an elegant or a correct writer. The fabric of grammar, arising naturally out of the materials of language, should be considered subservient to, and not subversive of, language. It was the latter radical

error that led our publishing grammarians into their countless mistakes. They erected grammar into a critical institute, instead of adapting it to the genius and wants of the English. Is there one certain rule of analogy or deduction in English?—Not one. Yet grammar affects to enumerate exceptions, and establish regulations. Usages have changed with every age. We have modified, altered, and enlarged, our language insensibly, from the broken Norman and Saxon to the present Frenchified English. Could any empiric in one of its phases pretend to fix its fleeting character? A MURRAY in SHAKESPEARE'S time would have made sad work of the *Tempest*; at the dissolution of the Heptarchy, he would have blown his trump from a second Tower of Babel.

But our present business lies with composition, to which the little treatise before us has called our attention. Perspicuity may be esteemed the primary rule—it involves and supersedes all others. Method, and the corresponding unity of parts, are embraced in the one maxim. Write clearly and simply, never attempt to pass the obvious boundary of your subject, always keep your design distinctly before you, be not satisfied that you have done well until you have transferred to paper the exact impressions that are in your mind, and you cannot write ill. Mr. BRENNAN, who holds the plain manly pen of a COBBETT, but never dips it in acid, assigns three or four detailed reasons for popular failure in composition. People fail, he says, from three causes.

First. Their over anxiety to express themselves clearly, and to include all possible exceptions, before they finish a sentence.

Secondly. Their fear of repetitions of the same word.

Thirdly. Their not duly considering the previous part of a sentence, which often produces ludicrous errors, such as making a horse or a house appear to do the business of a man.

To these I might add a fourth—their terror of punctuation, which seems to present insurmountable difficulties.

These reasons are so true and just that they scarcely require illustration. To avoid obscurity, some writers become prolix, and to escape the possibility of not giving the whole of a subject, they run it into unintelligible embarrassments. These errors give occasion to the frequent use of the parenthesis, which Mr. BRENNAN properly reprobates as the last resource of your maker of long sentences. Expletives, and inevitable confusion, follow a passage relieved only by the eternal *ands, howevers, therefores, whichs, and thats*. The use of sentences of moderate length is, consequently, recommended to the student of composition. Whatever can be abridged in expression, without the sacrifice of its meaning, will be improved by abridgment; and whatever can be condensed into a complete sentence without dependence upon foregoing or following passages, should never be blended with any other portion. However, there is a pit-fall to be avoided on the side of simplicity also. The inflated, or cumbrous style, is not the only dangerous or erroneous one to be avoided. Too much simplicity, or brevity, or plainness, will at last produce feebleness. ADDISON may be cited as an example of a superior mind sunk to weakness of expression by the desire to appear chaste and easy. A certain degree of versatility, by which relief and contrast are attained at very little trouble, will rescue a writer from the charge of monotony or commonplace.

The second cause of failure is shortly and energetically dismissed by Mr. BRENNAN, who says that the fear of repeating a word destroys all chance of good writing, and that it is much better to use the same words an hundred times than to leave the sense weak or doubtful. "Seek not," he observes, "for different words, where strength or clearness are, manifestly, in danger." Experience will always establish this principle in the mind; it is only young or poor writers that shrink from occasional unavoidable verbal repetitions.

The third cause of failure is considered in the first, and amply reprov'd in the exhortation to consider your subject well before you attempt to communicate it to others; and to make your composition a close transcript from your thoughts.

The fourth source of the writer's difficulties occupies a large portion of Mr. BRENNAN'S book, under the title of punctuation, and is elaborately, although we do not think always judiciously, treated.

The main peculiarity of our author's opinions is, that he recommends the substitution of the colon and dash for the colon and semi-colon, against both which he pronounces decided anathemas. Hear one of his judgments.

One of the greatest improvements in punctuation is, the rejection of the eternal semi-colons of our ancestors. In the preceding article I observed, that high pointing relieved us from this embarrassment, and I think that I am sustained in the assertion. In latter times, the semi-colon has been gradually disappearing, not only from the newspapers, but from books—inasmuch that I believe instances could now be produced, of entire pages without a single semi-colon.

This must be considered as an improvement. It has rendered punctuation much simpler, and none but interested quacks, or wretched cavillers at straws, can delight in mysteries. What a quantity of useless controversial stuff has been written upon the "proper" use of the semi-colon and colon! But I am wrong in saying that it was useless. For, at last, seeing such interminable contests amongst the doughty disputants, common sense prevailed, and the public settled the business by throwing their two favourite stops overboard. The schoolmasters, however, picked them up, and are still striving to keep them afloat, but all will not do. They have, indeed, contrived to maintain the semi-colon above water, and though the colon has nearly sunk into oblivion, they continue to pester the pupil, about what he now, comparatively, but rarely finds in modern books—while, at the same time, they teach him to use the dash, as another kind of colon, and semi-colon too!

It is very true that the semi-colon is not now very commonly used, and that the colon is still less used—but there is no occasion for this triumph at their departure. They were quite as significant and valuable as any other modes of pointing. For all purposes of separation and distinction we cannot see the difference between the colon and the dash. The whole affair is quite a question of taste, and not worth the attention of a sensible writer. In one respect, indeed, the colon and semi-colon presented advantages for the loss of which we find no compensation in Mr. BRENNAN'S theory. They marked shades of segregation in sentences, which the dash, long or short, cannot discriminate. The colon was understood to be to a certain degree a definitive point—the semi-colon still less so—and the comma the least of all, just separating the parts that belonged to, but were

not blended with, each other. The dash, our author takes into high and rather credulous favour.

The introduction of this stop is a most important accession. It completes the system of punctuation, removes all its doubts and difficulties, and leaves its study unembarrassed by subtleties. It puts simplicity in the place of mystery, gives decision in lieu of hesitation, divests ignorance of its imposing mask, and strips artifice of its deceptive solemnities.

This is saying a good deal, but I hope to substantiate it all, before I shall have done. The dash, though sometimes elliptically used in ancient books, may be said to have come in about the time of Sterne, who used it to satiety, for the purpose of giving to his writings that sudden transitive singularity of which he was not a little vain. After being tried by others, in the same manner, without success, the undefined and dissatisfactory nature of the colon suggested a different use, and it soon assumed the character of a regular stop. As the colon retreated, its half-brother declined so much in importance, that we are now independent of both one and the other.

It seems an exaggeration of the properties of the dash to say that it furnishes simplicity and decision. We are rather disposed to think that a constant appeal to the dash invests it with an undefined and unsettled character. It possesses no limits or understood privilege, and, although it confers force and contrast on energetic or passionate passages, it must not be assumed as a general or admissible substitute for any other point. We perfectly agree with Mr. COBBETT that it is "a cover for ignorance as to the use of points," although we cannot agree with him that "it can answer no other purpose." Of its questionable nature we cannot be furnished with better evidence than that of its ardent advocate.

I scarcely know where to begin to show the numerous uses of the dash. It might suffice to say, that wherever there is any doubt it may be introduced, for no one can be at a loss with respect to the comma. Now, is not this a great advantage?

Certainly not—since, if it may be used whenever we are in doubt, it will become the convenient resource of indolent or inexperienced writers, and at last creep into a monopoly that will reduce our language to one barbarous table of lines and words. This dash, if taken on Mr. BRENNAN'S authority, would soon swallow up the functions of all other points. To do him justice, however, he sums up his uses of the favourite with modesty and discretion.

Having now relieved you from all the vexations, difficulties, and perplexities, arising from the semi-colon and colon, you must take care not to abuse the dash. Go on with your commas, until you find that there is an evident insufficiency in the stop—then, and then only, bring in the dash. Might I venture upon any thing like a general direction, I would say, that you are to use it where you were accustomed to think a colon necessary, for, having shown you that the comma now, in most instances, replaces the semi-colon, perhaps it were best to keep that out of your mind entirely.

Avoid, most particularly, the use of the dash, after the fashion of Sterne, Richardson, or such writers, whose talents may excuse, though not justify, the wildest deviations and fantasies. Consider the dash as what it really is—a stop or point of the most useful and comprehensive nature. If you make it serve every foolish conceit, or if you force it to mark every rhapsodical division that has no real existence, you lose its advantage as a stop. You will, then, be compelled to resort to the whole and half-colon, which, like Phaeton and the sun-horses, you will find too unmanageable for your feeble hand, and your composition will only draw laughter from the judicious.

A very good general direction [might] be, to confine yourself, except in details, to one dash in a sentence. If you see occasion for more, always suspect long-windedness in the composition. Read over again what you have written, and you will generally discover, that you have either a redundancy of expression, or that you are forcing, into one sentence, the matter that should form another.

We give Mr. BRENNAN full credit for the desire to simplify the art of punctuation by reducing the number and properties of points—nor are we disposed to refuse our assent to his arguments against the use of colons and semi-colons if we were assured that those who adopted them would also adopt his hints on composition. It is necessary to take both together. His mode of stopping is unsuited to the ordinary style of writing. There are very few, even of our best writers, who can so completely command their language as to fine-draw their writings to sentences marked only by commas; nor is it desirable that they should, since one of the chief beauties, next to brevity and clearness, is that species of comprehensiveness which can rarely be so powerfully attained as by the consecutive aid of the stops he rejects. Marks of any kind are but the signs of connection or disjunction, and it appears quite immaterial how they are formed so long as their offices are understood. We apprehend that Mr. BRENNAN'S repugnance was originally generated by the absurd distinctions attached to the offending points by the grammarians. They said that at a colon you should count three, and at a semi-colon two, as if the strength of expression were to be measured by a scale of units. If he had denounced the fictitious characteristics set up by the schoolmaster, we should concur heartily with him; but we cannot consent to place the points under ban for the offences against common sense committed by their commentators. With respect to the dash, we acknowledge the force it implies; but it must be used sparingly to be truly effective. If it become subject to a common or vulgar application it will lose all its efficacy. For this reason, we object to its introduction as a general substitute for other points. Composition would then be left to the single assistance of the comma, which, for the ever-changing and various necessities of language, would be obviously insufficient. The consequence is, that we cannot entirely get rid of the colon and semi-colon; that we may bring the dash into more frequent practice than formerly, since it may be now esteemed, what formerly it was not, a legitimate and useful point; and that, by the close study of perspicuity, punctuation may be brought to an easy standard, which will dispense with the laborious doctrines of division and semi-connection laid down by these venerable patriarchs who mystified the science they affected to teach.

Having given so much space to a very small volume, it is almost needless to add, that the work deserves consideration. The plain, straight-forward manner in which Mr. BRENNAN explains his views, is highly to be commended, and we are satisfied that the best-informed scholars will find something in his book to merit perusal. There are some other branches of the subject which we should willingly notice, if our space permitted; but, as we have touched the most important, we leave the rest in the hands of the readers. We recommend