HIGH SPEED IN PITMAN'S SHORTHAND

ITS ATTAINMENT AND POSSIBILITIES

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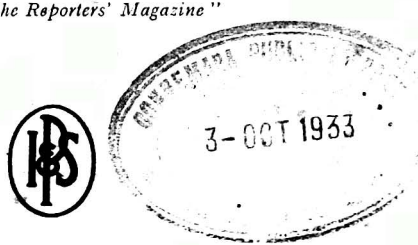

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writing, Mr. Reed was his faithful disciple and valued coadjutor for the best part of a lifetime, and the present progress, perfection and popularity of the art are in no slight degree due to his inspiration and genius.

It is hardly necessary to recount here in detail the many interesting incidents connected with Mr. Reed's early life and career, his participation in the romantic Phonographic crusade of the 'forties, and his association with various movements for the advancement of the interests of Phonographers. These have been chronicled by many writers, and by Mr. Reed himself with thrilling vividness, and, in his case, with a most refreshing modesty. I shall therefore confine myself to a brief appreciation of his work and worth as a Phonographer, and point out in broad outline some of those sterling qualities of head and heart which have won for Mr. Reed an almost world-wide reputation.

Born in 1826, at Watchet, in Somersetshire, Mr. Reed took up the study of Phonography when he was still a boy at school. By dint of assiduous and systematic practice he found himself, in a comparatively short space of time, able to take down at, what was then considered, a remarkably high speed. Impelled by a spirit of adventure which was working strongly within him, he offered his services as a shorthand lecturer and while still in his teens joined Mr. Joseph Pitman, one of the brothers of the Inventor, in a prolonged teaching and lecturing tour. After a three years' vigorous lecturing campaign and a short period of work as a reporter on a provincial newspaper, Mr. Reed came to London in 1889, and established a reporting practice. In the course of his distinguished professional career there was no variety of difficult reporting which was not undertaken by Mr. Reed and executed with characteristic ability and thoroughness. Though he had now taken to reporting as a profession, his interest in teaching and lecturing never abated. He was an examiner in

shorthand to several important organizations. As first the Vice-President of the Shorthand Society and later on its President, he read before it many valuable papers on the theory and practice of Phonography. Whenever he read a paper or delivered an address, he could always make himself interesting by drawing upon his unique experiences. For nearly thirty years he edited a monthly magazine called the "Phonographic Reporter," and many useful contributions from his pen appeared in it from time to time. In 1887 the first International Shorthand Congress was held in London, and Mr. Reed was appointed Chairman and Treasurer of the Committee. There were conflicting and mischievous elements at work designing to wreck the Congress. But for Mr. Reed's united tact, firmness and courtesy, it might not have been the success it was. He was one of the English representatives at two subsequent Shorthand Congresses held at Paris and Stockholm in 1889 and 1897 respectively. In 1892 Mr. Reed celebrated his Phonographic Jubilee, and on this occasion he was the recipient of an illuminated address, testifying to his great achievements as a Phonographer, his untiring labours for the cause of Phonography, and his solicitude for the welfare of Phonographers in all parts of the world.

In the great array of Phonographers, both living and departed, Mr. Reed occupies a position of commanding eminence by reason both of his natural abilities and his professional attainments. These were many-sided in their character, and undoubtedly of a very high order. Speaking of his professional skill, I would make prominent mention of his extraordinary speed powers. Their high watermark was probably reached when he reported that glib-tongued orator, the Rev. Philips Brooks, whose volubility was the terror of reporters. There is no authentic information as regards the maximum speed height to which the reverend gentleman soared, but Mr. Reed's speed on that occasion,

which averaged more than 213 words a minute over a fairly extended period, represents a record which has scarcely been outrivalled. Although Mr. Reed's speed capacity was very remarkable, I think the real secret of his success as a note-taker consisted in the imperturbable calmness and alertness of his brain which no speed, however high, and no other factor, however disconcerting, could ruffle for a moment—a characteristic which ought to be an invaluable asset to every ambitious Phonographer. His reporting was but another name for accuracy, a result in the attainment of which no pains were spared and no reference books left unransacked. His notes, even when written at the highest flights of speed, preserved accuracy and legibility to such an extent that they could be handed over to his staff at once for transcription with the insertion of a few vowel signs. His wide study, while it expanded the bounds of his knowledge, made him the master of a style of writing noted for considerable literary grace and charm. Whatever he wrote or spoke was always worth reading or listening to, and was absorbingly interesting. There is no phase of shorthand work of which he did not possess first-hand expert knowledge, and on which he could not speak with weight and authority. His ability and modesty went hand in hand, and he was ever ready to place his knowledge at the disposal of those seeking it. A man of conspicuous ability, he was always generous to appreciate ability wherever he found it. Possessed of a suave and level-headed temper, he could retain his self-possession even under conditions which would easily drive other men to fly into a rage. As a companion and friend, he was the soul of courtesy, at once genial and warm-hearted.

It is impossible to over-estimate Mr. Reed's services in the cause of Phonography and his energizing influence on successive generations of Phonographers. His labours were life-long and rendered in diverse capacities. By his

tongue and by his pen he served it as no other did. Phonography is indebted to him for many valuable improvements which contributed to its perfection. His successful speed performances in the early days, intended to demonstrate the wonderful speed potentialities of Phonography, were the real foundation on which its popularity was built up, and they had the effect of silencing many an envious critic. Their significance can be appreciated in its true perspective only when one attempts to envisage the great harm that would have resulted if Mr. Reed's powers had broken down when Phonography and a rival system were on their trial before a hypercritical audience. Fortunately, Mr. Reed invariably rose to the occasion. The ease with which he took down notes at astounding rates of speed and the spontaneity with which he read them out extorted admiration, created confidence in the public mind, and won hundreds of new votaries. This is only one instance, though striking, of Mr. Reed's many signal services to the Phonographic cause. The void left by his demise can never be adequately filled. In his passing away, Phonography lost one of its most brilliant exponents, while its practitioners all over the world lost a guide, philosopher and friend, to whom they could always look up for guidance and inspiration.

Some explanation is, perhaps, necessary for my venturing to incorporate in this series of studies a rather extended sketch of the life of a Phonographer who has passed away. In the first place, no account of the Phonographic movement could be complete which did not include an adequate reference to the work of Mr. Reed, who was its life and soul for the best part of half a century. In the second place, Mr. Reed's career and activities as a Phonographer are so unparalleled that his spirit and the influence of his useful life are still with us, to guide and teach us. His published works are a veritable legacy to the Phonographic world, embodying as they do the experiences of a lifetime

garnered from many lands. They cover the whole field of Phonographic acitivity, and appeal as much to the tyro as to the most accomplished reporter. My study of Mr. Reed's works has so much endeared him to me that from the start he has been an object of emulation for me. His example has been a never failing source of inspiration to me, serving to infuse into me an amount of stimulating energy which no theoretical study could have accomplished. An enthusiastic study of his writings dispelled effectively the thick cloud of mystery which once surrounded my conceptions of practical shorthand writing and reporting, and showed as in a mirror the right methods of work and the secrets of success in a most difficult profession. I have no doubt that this must be the experience of thousands of other Phonographers.

I believe that, whatever one's profession or occupation, a certain amount of hero-worship is essential not only to supply the necessary corrective to erroneous impressions, but also to hold up before the mind's eye a lofty ideal to strive up to. To commune with the master minds in any walk of life is at once a pleasurable and profitable occupation. To the huge army of Phonographers in all parts of the world, the personality of Mr. Reed stands for an ideal that both elevates and inspires. Every earnest Phonographer should, therefore, if he has not already done so, get a collection of Mr. Reed's works forthwith and study and digest them. My acquaintance with the younger generation of Pitmanites makes me think that they do not know and do not care to know as much about this famous Phonographer as they ought to know. The great majority of shorthand students never show an inclination to explore what is strictly beyond the beaten track of textbooks. This is very deplorable. There is no doubt that an intelligent appreciation of Mr. Reed's writings will prove a powerful incentive to every aspiring Phonographer, and infuse into him the kind of spirit that conduces to

success. At the same time, it is important that shorthand teachers should urge their pupils vigorously to read as much Phonographic literature as they can. I feel confident that, if this suggestion were carried out effectively, half the worries and trials of shorthand teachers and all the lethargy and despair of pupils would vanish for ever from Phonographic classrooms.

CHAPTER III

THE SYSTEM OF THE FUTURE

So long as the human mind is constituted as it is, diversities of sentiment and practice are bound to exist. This statement is particularly true in its application to shorthand writing. In England alone, during a period of 235 years preceding the invention of Phonography, no less than 201 systems were published, and since then nearly 300 more have been put on the market. These mushroom systems, the great majority of which have sunk into well-merited oblivion, and are now of purely historical interest, were produced with such levity and utter disregard to their practical utility that Lord Rosebery, who presided over the first International Shorthand Congress in London, declared that it was almost a relief to feel that one was absolutely ignorant of all these methods of shorthand writing!

That anyone should apply himself to the task of mastering these numberless systems, with a view to appraising each at its proper worth, is unthinkable. It would be a mad and futile undertaking, since it could only result in mental confusion and retard a clear comprehension of any one system.

It is hardly necessary to refer at great length to the many points of outstanding excellence in Pitman's Shorthand that go to make it the world's premier stenographic system. It may not, however, be out of place to emphasize a point which constitutes the fundamental difference between it and other systems. The knowledge so hastily acquired of certain non-Pitmanic systems can hardly be perfect, and it is liable to collapse when put to test under rigorous conditions. It may be likened to huts improvised for a passing occasion, which can afford shelter under

fair weather conditions, but cannot withstand the onslaught of the first hurricane. Pitman's Shorthand on the other hand, is built up on a scientific basis, and is, therefore, a sound and enduring edifice that can brave any atmospheric violence.

There is, moreover, one overwhelming advantage in taking up the system invented by Sir Isaac Pitman, which it is impossible to over-estimate. Pitman's Shorthand is worth taking up if only because its votaries constitute the preponderating majority wherever shorthand is utilized on a large scale. As a result of the inconveniences which have arisen from the use of different systems of shorthand by their staff (e.g. the delay caused by a non-Phonographic scribe absenting himself suddenly when he has got notes to be transcribed) employers show a decided preference for Pitmanic writers. I have often pitied writers of other systems who work alongside Pitman writers. Being almost always in a minority, the non-Pitmanic writer is necessarily deprived of the kind of help his friends around might be able to give him in deciphering his notes and in other ways were he himself a "disciple of Old Isaac." He cannot also join his comrades, for instance, in reading magazines, participate in Phonographic functions as one of us and discuss from a common platform many matters of mutual interest. He therefore remains to the last a stranger among friends.

But the world generally values a thing in the light of its accomplished results and the verdict of experience. Judged by this unerring standard, the system evolved by Sir Isaac Pitman in 1837 is destined to hold an honoured place. The facts that more than 98 per cent of the world's shorthand clerks and over 95 per cent of the reporters are Pitmanic writers, that Pitman's Shorthand has effectively coped with the reporting of the English-speaking world for over three-quarters of a century under all possible difficult conditions, that it holds the world's record for

speed and accuracy, that it has carried off almost all the prizes offered in international speed contests, and that its practitioners are every day swelling in numbers in all parts of the globe are a few, among many, incontestable proofs of its inherent superiority.

At the same time, it would be perverse to deny all merit to any of the hundreds of other systems. A bad or indifferent system can be turned to good practical account by a gifted and persevering individual, while the best of systems may be of little avail in the hands of an incompetent person. Eliminating exceptional conditions on either side, the question may be put broadly: Is there a system, easy to learn, easy to write, and capable of being turned to practical advantage in a reasonable period of time by any man or woman of ordinary intelligence and capacity? There can be but one answer to such a question: Yes, Pitman's Shorthand.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEACHER

ABOUT forty years ago, the task of the ardent student of Phonography was a thoroughly uphill one. The textbooks, still undergoing modification, were by no means perfect. Learners were comparatively few and scattered, and anything in the nature of an organization for bringing them together was non-existent, and possibly out of the question. With whatever guidance they could get they struggled on, in many cases acquiring a sound knowledge of the system solely through self-exertion. Some of the ablest Phonographers in the early days were self-taught men.

Since then we have witnessed a remarkable development. Facilities for learning the art are now quite ample. The textbooks have been brought up to such a degree of perfection that any person of ordinary intelligence can acquire a good working knowledge of the system with very little external aid. Societies and organizations exist in sufficient numbers and the teachers' profession has acquired a remarkable accession of strength. The difficulties of the learner have therefore been materially lightened, and on payment of a moderate fee he can now join a well-conducted shorthand class within easy reach of his home or scene of work.

Despite these facilities many still acquire the art without the aid of a teacher. Possessed of sufficient industry, it ought not to be difficult for anyone to learn at home, getting doubtful points, if any, cleared by extraneous help.

It cannot be denied, however, that many teachers are, both by training and temperament, utterly unfitted for

their task. They lack the degree of education, the mental outlook and the wide knowledge of men and things that are usually expected in a preceptor and, above all, that indefinable something which at once inspires confidence and respect. At the bottom of many a case of defection from the ranks of shorthand students will be found an inefficient teacher, who has failed to present the subject attractively, and in a manner calculated to arouse sufficient interest in the students. While an enthusiastic teacher, possessed of the necessary confidence and mental equipment, will endeavour to make something of even unpromising material, a teacher who goes about his work in a half-hearted fashion will easily create disgust in the student, if he does not altogether drive him to despair. The mischief wrought by an incompetent teacher may often prove irreparable.

To the prospective student, therefore, the selection of a good teacher is an important consideration. Though something may be said for self-tuition and individual exertion, the influence of a capable teacher is a factor that cannot be ignored. A capable and enthusiastic teacher can certainly do a great deal to infuse energy into his students, find out where their talents lie and direct those talents to the best advantage. Moreover, in a class-room doubts are dispelled the moment they arise and the spirit of emulation that is fostered, when working in association, proves a valuable incentive to exertion and excellence and an antidote for feelings of depression and despair.

There is considerable truth in the statement that the successful teacher is born and not made. Many teachers have a good knowledge of the system but are, unfortunately, incapable of imparting that knowledge. But there is no reason why a certificated teacher who has undergone the necessary training and takes his profession seriously should not prove a success, though he may not come up to the ideal.

The would-be successful teacher should be *au fait* with

his subject, and should be able to give ready replies to all questions bearing on the rules of the textbook. He should know something about a great variety of other subjects, must have a good knowledge of grammar and keep himself well informed on all matters of current interest. He should always bear in mind that he must make his teaching not only instructive but also interesting, and to this end should be able to draw his illustrations and anecdotes from a wide range. A pleasant voice and a power of fluent expression ought to be to him assets of great value. A feeling of self-sufficiency is fatal to his advancement, and he must keep himself in touch with the latest developments in his special line of work. No student will have any confidence in or respect for a teacher who has been found out to be a shallow individual. A successful teacher should, in addition, be a fairly fast writer himself. He should have patience with, and never ridicule dull-witted students, and should by turns reprove, encourage and sympathize, but never offend. Where good work has been done, it must be appreciated publicly. Slovenly work should be censured without insinuating against, or creating resentment in the mind of, any student. He should not display too great a solicitude in regard to the clever students while treating the rest with indifference. Nor should he take up an attitude of conscious superiority. The clever teacher is one who adapts his methods to his pupils, and always encourages them to speak out their minds, and to have their doubts, if any, set at rest. This part of the teacher's duties obviously demands considerable tact. Above all, it is important that he should not lose his temper. He should treat all his pupils with uniform courtesy and consideration. Many students who show signs of early promise meet with the fate of the proverbial rocket, while those who appear dull and unpromising in the initial stages attain to the highest excellence in the art. In a word, the teacher should be a ministering angel, ever

ready to dispel doubts, fears and despair, and to inspire the student with enthusiasm, guiding him on the right road to progress. A teacher of this type is sure to make a name for himself, and an earnest student will have no difficulty in finding him, if he exists. If he does find such a teacher and come under his wholesome influence, his progress is assured.

CHAPTER V

EQUIPMENT AND METHODS OF WORK

It is obviously impossible to lay down a hard and fast rule as to any specific period of life when conditions are most favourable for acquiring a knowledge of shorthand. But there can be no doubt that the best results are accomplished in youth. In younger days one is able to command plenty of leisure and freedom from domestic cares and other worries of the world. The mind is fresh, cheerful and receptive. Health is vigorous, and permits of hard work. Memory is retentive, and ideas are easily grasped. Fingers are supple, and ready to work and bear strain. Surely this is the springtime of life when the seed of all lasting work must be sown, if you are to expect a rich harvest. With advancing age, life's many afflictions crowd round, paralyse all efforts at self-advancement and make it increasingly difficult to tear away from the old moorings and strike out new lines. Some of the most eminent Phonographers began the study very early in life. Thomas Allen Reed took it up when he was only eleven.

It should not, however, be understood that if, through no fault of his own, a man has not had the advantage of commencing the study in his younger days he cannot successfully do so later on. Far from it. There are innumerable instances in which the study has been taken up by men advanced in age, who have, nevertheless, turned it to profitable account. A very elderly man once inquired of Sir Isaac Pitman if he was too old to learn shorthand. The Inventor replied: "No one is ever too old to learn." In the case of those who take up the study late in life, the success sought to be achieved depends in no small degree upon the fixity of purpose and the capacity for industry

which they bring to their task. As a general proposition, it may be stated that the best and most lasting results are possible only when the subject is taken up and mastered comparatively early in life, when conditions are so favourable to the acquisition of knowledge.

Morning time certainly forms the best part of the day for practising shorthand. The mind is then in its full vigour, and the hand in excellent form. What is learnt then is retained effectively. Evenings and nights are by no means adapted to serious mental effort. This is especially so if you have returned home after a day's hard work in an office. Your brain is fagged, and the hand tired, and any serious study is out of the question. Many students who have no other subject to study except shorthand are apt to overdo it by working at it practically all day. This is neither necessary nor desirable. A few hours' concentrated effort is worth more than listless and tiresome writing extending over prolonged periods. Some students constantly inquire how long they should work at shorthand every day. A minimum of one to two hours' solid uninterrupted work is more than sufficient.

At the outset of your study, it is well to ask yourself whether you have a love of the subject. It is very difficult to make any headway without a spirit of enthusiasm which will survive and not vanish at the sight of the first obstacle. Take a passionate interest in your study, and half your battle is won. Without the element of pleasure, work loses its character of joyous activity. No great object was ever achieved without the driving force of earnestness. Unfortunately, many a student allows his zeal to be extinguished only too soon. If you aspire to take a place among the ranks of fast writers, you have every need of an abundance of enthusiasm which should always be kept at the glowing point.

Work methodically. If you have taken up other subjects in addition to shorthand, set apart a portion of the

day exclusively for shorthand. Do not work at random or at untimely hours. It is difficult to make up for lost time in shorthand, if you have neglected it for extended periods, by overworking afterwards. Unless prevented by sickness or other unavoidable circumstances, nothing should be allowed to interfere with the even tenor of your work. If you are attending a school, be punctual and try to keep pace with your class fellows.

Rivet your attention on the subject in hand. Do not work mechanically, and do not allow your thoughts to wander. To focus your energy is to bring all your mental powers to the achievement of the object in hand. If your thoughts are diverted to your evening shopping or the arrangements for the half-holiday picnic, you can only go through your work in a perfunctory fashion. It requires considerable will-power to concentrate all your energy on the work immediately before you, and you should therefore train yourself to this end.

Be patient. If you encounter difficulties, do not lose hope. Impatience arises from imperfect understanding. If you find that any portion of your study taxes your powers of comprehension a little too much, the best plan is to put it aside for some time or till the next day and, if necessary, to ask for help.

If you lack the power of quick grasp, your duty is to persevere. Nothing is more conducive to success in any study than an indomitable spirit of determination that will never acknowledge defeat. Toil hard, and your labours will in time be rewarded. What your hasty friend has achieved in a month easily, you may have to fight for laboriously for perhaps double that period. What genius does for others, perseverance and patience will certainly accomplish for you, if only you work with a will. Nature bestows her gifts in varying degrees, and the best way to make up for natural deficiencies is to work hard. Perseverance conquers all.

Knowledge is power. The edifice of Pitman's Shorthand is so built up that you cannot safely ignore any part of it, however insignificant it may appear. Do not therefore underrate the value of any side of the subject. Find out for yourself the reason for every rule, but do not allow your mind to be obsessed with too many doubts. Do not worry yourself about difficulties, where in fact none exists. Some pupils develop into perfect bores and harass their friends and teachers with the why and wherefore of everything, as though the measure of their progress depends on the number of doubtful points their intellect is capable of evolving. A few minutes' calm and patient reflection will, in the great majority of cases, convince you that what appeared to you at first sight an insuperable difficulty was after all the easiest thing to understand.

Your watchword must always be the quality of your work. When writing from dictation you have to be specially wary. It is no use writing at the rate of speed you do, unless you can read off the notes as fluently as from print. It is extraordinary how some individuals attempt all sorts of impossible rates, sacrificing quality in their craze for speed. Those who force up their speed with unnatural haste will sooner or later get stuck. Some imprudent teachers who ought to know better promise abnormal speeds in a short time. Do not entertain any illusions on this subject. You cannot increase speed by leaps and bounds.

See that all your work is done tidily. It is refreshing to the eye to see the note-book of a neat writer. Do not *draw* your outlines, but dash them off with one sweep. Cultivate a neat, sprightly and graceful style of writing, and this will have a marked effect on your transcription work.

Never delude yourself into thinking that in order to attain high speed you must go beyond the canons of the textbook. It has been demonstrated that it is absolutely

possible to go up to the highest rates of speed by a strict adherence to the textbooks. Do not therefore depart from orthodoxy, despite all temptation to the contrary. There will come a time when you can make departures from the path of orthodoxy safely on your own responsibility.

Even if your notes are transcribed on the typewriter, you cannot afford to neglect your longhand. A graceful and fluent style of longhand writing has a distinct bearing on your shorthand, and will be of great service to you if you are taking up newspaper reporting as a profession. While a neat and fast longhand writer may be depended upon to achieve high speed in shorthand with comparative ease, the same cannot always be said of one whose longhand is halting and indifferent.

The great majority of students are never tired of asking in season and out of season how long they will have to go on practising to acquire a definite speed. They are not satisfied when told not to care about speed, but to go on with their work. They want some sort of assurance. If you have studied methodically and on the right lines from the beginning, it should be possible for you to achieve a speed of over 100 words at the end of the first year. Speaking generally, you should be able to add about ten words to your net speed in the earlier stages as the result of a month's methodical practice. To scale the speed ladder beyond 160 requires plenty of hard work and tenacity. I know several cases where a reliable speed of 200 was attained after two years' strenuous work. It must not, however, be forgotten that the success you desire is limited only by the amount of intelligence and industry that you bring to your task.

There are no short cuts to the goal of high speed. Nor is the path leading up to it strewn with roses. Much hard work must necessarily be gone through, and it is no use trying to make light of your work. Strive to achieve the highest of which you are capable. There is constant danger

in resting content with a mediocre speed. The career of a shorthand writer is full of vicissitudes. A writer who is satisfied with a speed of, say, 100 words a minute, because his chief does not dictate beyond that rate, is incurring a serious risk. The moment that chief is succeeded by another who is a rapid dictator, the lot of that writer is bound to become an unenviable one. He will have to struggle painfully to get through his work and he may even wake up one fine morning to find that his post has been given to a more competent colleague. High speed is worth striving for, not only on account of its pecuniary possibilities, but also because it enables you to keep up your confidence and get through your work quickly and satisfactorily under all possible conditions. None need despair of acquiring a tolerably high speed. There is nothing that well-directed industry cannot accomplish. What others have done before you can also achieve, if only you strive to profit by their experiences and avoid their pitfalls.

A word as to your equipment. You will, of course, require ruled note-books. Those which open at the bottom and are four to five inches wide and about eight inches long are in almost universal use. The beginner need not worry himself very much about the quality of the paper, provided it is not rough. The lines should preferably be about one-third of an inch apart, with about fifteen to twenty lines to the page. It is sheer waste of money for learners to go in for costly note-books made of high-class paper. Though some experts advise starting with a pen, I should prefer a good pencil. It is no doubt desirable to get oneself accustomed to a pen right from the beginning, but no learner at shorthand can, when embarking on his study, form a fair idea of his future style of writing or of the kind of nib that will suit him. Further, a nib that is good enough for the slow and neat writing of a beginner may be utterly unsuitable for high speed purposes. It is also a good plan to start with a suitable steel pen in

preference to a pencil. As regards textbooks, get the latest edition of the *Instructor* and *Key*, the *Shorthand Dictionary* and *Pitman's Shorthand Writing Exercises.* It is hardly necessary at the outset to go in for more. When you are engaged in mastering the theory, do not divert your attention to advanced treatises. One frequently finds students, who cannot write 80 words satisfactorily, copying phrases which even advanced writers will hesitate to adopt. Teachers should warn students sternly against taking up books beyond their standard. Any violation of this advice will soon bring home to the student the pernicious results of his action.

In the shorthand profession, perhaps in a greater degree than in others, the possession of *mens sana in corpore sano* is one of the essentials of success. It is impossible to exaggerate the value of good health and a robust constitution to the shorthand writer. It is not, of course, suggested that none should take up the profession of shorthand writing, who does not possess extraordinary physical strength. But it is very necessary that every shorthand writer should be possessed of sufficient powers of endurance to enable him to discharge his duties without physical breakdown. Occasions are bound to arise frequently when he will be called upon to turn out work at exceptionally high pressure and, what is worse, at untimely hours. Shorthand clerks in busy mercantile offices will realize how they have literally to dash through their work on a mail day. To a reporter in the full practice of his profession, occasions of this kind turn up only too frequently, and often when least expected. Continuous note-taking, for example, till a late hour at a prolonged public meeting or court trial, and the strenuous night work involved in getting the report ready for the next morning imposes a serious strain which demands considerable stamina and even an iron constitution on the part of the reporter. Sometimes he may be actually disturbed from his sweet rest, and asked to proceed

with all expedition to a distant place under most unfavourable conditions, climatic and otherwise, and furnish a report of some disaster or heartrending occurrence. This, in turn, may involve the witnessing of harrowing scenes of sorrow and calamity, which no constitution but an intrepid one can put up with or withstand.

Good eyesight and a quick sense of hearing are also valuable assets. Reporting work has sometimes to be done under peculiarly difficult conditions—in the dark, without a chair and table, in inclement weather in the case of open-air meetings, and so on. Though it is very rarely that one has to encounter such difficulties, the alert pressman should, nevertheless, be prepared for any emergency. If the young aspirant cultivates regular habits and leads a sober life, he can certainly manage to show a clean bill of health —a matter which will conduce not a little to his own satisfaction and that of his employers.

CHAPTER VI

THE THEORY

No aspiring student, who wishes to progress on sound lines can afford to ignore the vital importance of a thorough grasp of the principles on which the system has been built up. The subject naturally presents some difficulties, both real and apparent, to learners. It would be impossible within the limited space available to attempt an elaborate exposition of each and every rule. The few running comments and hints offered in this chapter will, I trust, help students towards a correct understanding and mastery of the ground work of the system.

In the *Instructor* the whole scheme of Pitman's Shorthand has been unfolded to the student in an orderly and rational way. At the outset, it is necessary to warn the student that in writing Pitman's Shorthand he has to *write by sound*, and must altogether ignore the vagaries of the ordinary spelling of words. In longhand writing, many letters are put down although they are not sounded at all. This is not the case in the Pitman system. Silent letters in a word have no place in the shorthand outline which represents it. For example, in the word *often* the letter *t* is ignored. Again, the sound of a consonant in one word is not the same as in another. This is especially true of the letter *g*. In Pitmanic Shorthand such inconsistencies are avoided, and words are put down as they are pronounced, whatever their spelling. Again, note the variety of sounds served by one and the same vowel in the ordinary pronunciation of words. Take the words *put*, *tub* and *muse*, and note how differently *u* is sounded in each case. In the phonetic method of writing, these absurdities are done away with and sound is made the

only, because it is the never failing, criterion for the Phonographic representation of a word. This basic principle of Pitman's Shorthand is its most precious feature, and contributes to remarkable simplicity and uniformity. The adoption of the phonetic principle thus enables the rejection of three consonants, *c*, *q* and *x*. *C* is served by *k* or *s*, according to its pronunciation. *Cape*, for example, is really *kape*, and *cell* is *sell*. Similarly, *q* and *x* are served by *k* or *kw* and *ks* respectively, as in *piquant* and *Cox*, which are really *pekant* and *Coks*.

Leaving the five vowels and the consonants *c*, *q* and *x*, which are not separately represented, we have eighteen letters left out of the twenty-six which form the common alphabet. These eighteen consonants are represented by twenty-four different Phonographic characters, as the student will see from the table of consonants given in the textbook. The six additional symbols stand for the double consonants *ch* (chay), *th* (ith), *zh* (zhee) and *ng* (ing). These have been provided with separate characters on account of the distinct sounds they represent and the frequency with which they are met with. The letters *r* and *h* have been provided with one additional character each, purely for the sake of convenience. One form or the other is adopted, whichever conduces more to facile writing and distinctness.

Now, look again at the table of consonants. You will see them classified under six groups. Has it ever struck you why the characters are classified in this way and why they are put down in the order in which they appear, and have you cared to find out the reason? If not, take a mirror and watch the movements of your vocal organs as you pronounce the names of the characters. Keep your lips closed and try to pronounce *p* and *b*. You cannot but open the lips and force the air out. Now, pronounce the pair *t* and *d*. You will find that this time the air stream is liberated not at the lips but a little further back—somewhere about the teeth. As you go on pronouncing the

succeeding pairs of letters, you will find that at each stage the sounds are liberated from slowly receding chambers of the mouth. It will thus be seen that the pairing of the consonants and the order in which they appear are not the outcome of a mere freak of the inventor's brain, but proceed throughout on a correct appreciation of the laws of human speech. The broad vowel sounds of the language have been similarly classified, and each distinct sound is represented by a distinct symbol. It has been observed that the Pitmanic alphabet does not provide for all the possible variations of sound met with in the speaking of the language in various parts of the world. These variations, it must be observed, are so minute and the standards of pronunciation obtaining in different countries so divergent that it would not conduce to practical efficiency if each of them were sought to be separately represented. It has, however, been demonstrated that the classification made by Sir Isaac Pitman is sufficient for all practical purposes.

The consonants being the frame work of the system, their characters should be neatly and extensively copied until they can be struck with absolute freedom and accuracy, as the student's future style of writing will depend entirely on the foundation laid by his initial efforts. It is especially desirable to preserve uniformity in the length of the strokes, about one-sixth of an inch, as later on they will be halved and doubled, and the student should be able to distinguish easily the three strokes by their lengths. It looks neater to copy the characters with some space between, as crowded writing has a depressing appearance. It is well to repeat aloud the Phonographic names of the characters as they are traced. Beginners invariably mistake *chay* for *ray*. There is also a tendency to make downward *h* look like *ray*, circle *s*, and upward *h* like *chay*, circle *s*. With a little care, the student will be able to trace them with the proper slope. It would be well to remind the student that thick strokes are invariably written downwards.

The important point to bear in mind about joined consonants is to write the strokes without lifting the pen. The combinations should be formed with one clear and dashing sweep, and not in a lazy and painful manner. In joining consonants, the angles, where they occur, should be sharp. There are cases where angles cannot be shown clearly. In illustration of this, compare the angles made in writing the words *buck* and *mare*. Do not over write. When you have made a thick stroke thin or vice versa or have committed other mistakes, strike out the whole outline and write anew. Beginners may find it difficult to draw accurately outlines consisting of repeated strokes, one of which is thin and the other thick. Careful practice will remove this difficulty. It should be remembered that the position and motion of the strokes are the same as when each stands alone, with the exception of *sh* and *l*. (The student should at this stage realize and appreciate the aesthetic value of the many delightful joinings in which the Pitman system abounds, characterized by geometric simplicity and unmistakable legibility.)

The vowels are fully dealt with in Chapters II and III. The rules for position writing should be carefully studied. These are fully dealt with in a following chapter.

Chapter V introduces the student to four new vowel sounds, or rather combinations of sounds, pronounced as one syllable. They are called diphthongs and are in addition to the twelve simple long and short vowels already dealt with. Though they bear close resemblance to each other, they represent distinctly separate sounds, which cannot be mistaken. There is a tendency to confuse diphthong *ow* with long vowel *o*, and similarly diphthong *u* with long vowel *oo*. A moment's reflection will show the student that each of these represents a sound which can hardly be mistaken for any other. In the same chapter a convenient method of representing a diphthong followed by a vowel

(triphone) has been provided, as well as an abbreviated form of *w*.

In Chapter VI the student is allowed a modest glimpse into an aspect of the subject, which is one of its most fascinating features and pregnant with wonderful possibilities, if its spirit is grasped rightly, and mischief too if it is abused. (At this stage the components of phrases are wholly limited to grammalogues or oft-recurring little words which are represented by short and compact signs capable of being easily written and distinguished. The provision of such signs for a great number of frequently occurring little words is one of the valuable features of Phonography. Grammalogues, if not thoroughly mastered, will prove troublesome. It is necessary to remember that in writing phrases, the position of the whole stroke is determined by that of the initial stroke. Never overdo phrases. The temptation, amounting almost to mania, to join all sorts of words and in all manner of ways cannot be easily got over by some students. At this stage of your progress, you should not depart from orthodoxy. Remember that too many words should never be joined. Legibility and ease in writing should be the main considerations in all phrase making.)

Pages 31 to 47 deal with circles and loops. The circle *s* (or *z*) is one of the most frequently occurring signs in Pitman's Shorthand, and an examination of a couple of sentences taken at random will show to what extent this letter enters into the composition of words. The proper formation of the circle is a matter of considerable importance, as it is easily liable to get misshaped. The motion of the circle *s* is a bugbear to many students. Another thing that they cannot easily bring themselves to do is the placing of the circle outside the angle in the case of straight strokes forming an angle and inside the curves when *s* occurs medially between two curves. Beginners have a tendency to put this in the wrong place. A slight difficulty

which at first sight perplexes the student is whether to place circle *s* or stroke *s* in words where *s* occurs initially. I have frequently seen *science* written like *signs*. The rules on the subject are clearly explained in Chapter VIII, and should be carefully digested. The *sw* circle is written only initially, and should not be confounded with circle *ses* which occurs only medially and finally. It follows the same rules as circle *s* as regards its motion and position with respect to the angle. It requires careful training of the hand to trace loop *st* accurately. In the beginning, it has always a tendency to shape itself like circle *s*. Likewise, *str* loop is made to look like circle *ses*. Slow and repeated practice is the only remedy. Many students forget the existence of these two useful loops and write circle *s* and stroke *t*, or circle *s* and *tr* hook, where loops *st* and *str* would serve admirably. The subject should be thoroughly grasped, and not hurried over, and it would be a good thing to spend a few weeks over these four chapters.

Chapters XI and XVII may be considered together. The six sets of forms, ordinary and alternative, given on page 53, should be carefully studied. The whole idea is to secure a free motion of the hand, lineality and precision of outlines, by employing whichever form conduces to this end. In the word *throb*, if the ordinary form is used, legibility is bound to suffer and in rapid writing the outline may present the appearance of *fr* doubled and lead to confusion. On the other hand, it is well to observe how distinct and clear the outline is if the alternative form of *thr* is used. Circles added to hooks, initial or final, are never clearly written by beginners. A word like *sinner* requires to be carefully written. The order in which the strokes and vowels should be read in cases where circles and loops are joined to initial hooks is likely to present a slight confusion. Another point which should be impressed on students is that it is very inconvenient to put perfect circles inside hooks. It is, moreover, unnecessary to do

this, as the circle, even if it gets flattened, as it does, can hardly be mistaken for a loop. I have noticed a clumsy method of writing *skr* and *sgr* occurring after straight down strokes. In a word like *disagree*, I have seen the circle written with right motion. This wasteful practice should be guarded against.

The chapter on *shun* hook is probably the easiest. Though the rules in this case are quite clear, it is not uncommon to see the hook put in the wrong place. The main object to be kept in mind is to secure the straightness of the stroke, under the stress of rapid writing. In the word *Prussian*, if the *shun* hook is put on the *n* hook side, the outline may easily take the shape of duplicate *fr* and *shun* hook and prove troublesome at the time of transcription. The position of the hook often helps the writer to find out the position of the preceding vowel and should be carefully adhered to. A rule applying to one word need not necessarily apply to another. For example, *situation* is written with *sh* and *n* hook, while *fluctuation* is written with a *shun* hook. The idea is to avoid awkward joinings and prevent clashings with words of similar consonantal structure.

The aspirate, with its four methods of representation, should receive careful consideration. Doubts sometimes arise in the minds of beginners whether to use dot *h*, the tick, the upward or the downward form of *h*. I have seen even advanced writers deviating from the rules and putting in whatever outline suggests itself at the moment. Careful and repeated copying of the exercises on the subject will in due course remove all doubts.

In Chapter XIX, the important point to remember is that upward *l* is almost invariably used after *m*, and downward *l* after *n*.

In the succeeding chapter the student is introduced to a set of eight new characters added to the Phonographic alphabet. These are compound consonants, and are

useful as curtailing the length of what would otherwise be cumbrously shaped and longwinded outlines.

In the halving principle we get a taste of the wonderful time-saving devices in which Phonography abounds. Is it not a matter for wonderment that half the length of a stroke should represent more than the full length, and that the outline for a two-syllabled word like *rooted* should be briefer and capable of being as quickly, if not more, written than that for its derivative word *root*, in spite of the fact that the former has actually two additional letters to be represented? Some students are apt to forget that *ray* when standing alone is never halved, lest it should clash with the logogram for *and* or *should*. In monosyllabic words, a light stroke is invariably halved to indicate the addition of a light stroke and a heavy stroke to indicate the addition of a heavy stroke. I have long thought that the real genius of the Pitman system consists in the halving device, which is of extensive application and decidedly makes for brevity and neatness of outlines. The utilization of the halving principle in phrasing effects remarkable economy of effort. A phrase like *if it is not* is written with marked ease.

The doubling principle is the natural counterpart of the halving. While the latter secures brevity, the former conduces to ease and promotes the freedom of the hand. Who has not felt a peculiar delight when writing the word *matter* as it occurs in the course of dictation? The outline is dashed off at one bound, and the hand feels some strange relief. In fact, the double length principle by dispensing with the *r* hooks in *tr*, *dr* and *thr*, which are the terminations of a great number of words, contributes to boldness of outlines and promotes legibility.

Chapter XII introduces a change which may appear to be in conflict with the rules already explained, i.e. the vocalization of initially hooked forms even when a vowel separates *l* or *r* from the stroke consonant. The reason

for this device lies in the fact that lengthy or awkward outlines are avoided. This method, while securing compact outlines, does in no way impair legibility.

Many students hurry through the chapters on diphonic vowel signs and medial semicircle. Even some advanced writers cannot put these down with accuracy. Of course, in rapid writing these are seldom inserted, but this is no reason why the rules should not be thoroughly mastered.

In dealing with prefixes and suffixes, the Inventor has wisely taken note of what is one of the peculiar features of the language. The devices provided for some of their commoner forms effect a decided economy in writing. Many students do not clearly understand where to use the dot for *ing* and where the stroke, and similarly where to use the dash for *ings* and where the stroke *ing* and circle *s*. The stroke or stroke and circle *s* should be used in all cases where a sharp joining can be secured, and the use of the dot and dash should be confined to cases where descending strokes precede the suffix or clear joinings cannot be secured.

Although Phonographic signs have been provided for all the punctuation marks, the only one that it is possible to use in rapid note-taking is the period. It is needless to say that full stops should be put down with the utmost care. In the case of involved sentences especially, failure in this respect will land the writer in absurd blunders. In fact, quite the opposite of what a speaker intended might be conveyed by the erroneous breaking up of a sentence. Many a student by failing to insert the mark in the proper place racks his brain to find out where a sentence ends and the succeeding one begins. In this perplexing attempt, he is, against his own promptings, led to alter the structure of words with a view to fit it with his own arrangement of sentences. One sentence is merged into another, resulting in a perversion of the sense.

If the student is careful, he will have no difficulty in

finding out where the periods occur. The intonation of the speaker, the duration of the pause when a sentence is finished and the deliberate tone which usually marks the beginning of a new sentence, will help the writer to find out where the pauses occur. He should at the same time follow the sense of the passage as well.

There is a divergence of practice in the manner of indicating the period. Some use a small cross, as recommended by the textbook; while others draw a fairly long line from right to left across the line, having the appearance of *chay* doubled. This mark, however, is widely used in reporting questions and answers, where it is very important that these should be kept distinctly separate. Some prefer to leave a fairly wide blank space between sentences, while some drop down to the next line when a fresh sentence is begun. Of course, much depends on individual caprice and notions of convenience. The great majority of writers use the small cross recommended by the textbook. I have found it the most convenient, though in my way of writing it has the appearance of *p* halved, circle *s* and *chay* halved. This avoids the lift of the pen involved in making a cross mark as indicated in the textbook.

The insertion of two light dashes below proper names is a valuable help.

Figures enter largely into the daily work of many shorthand clerks. Ingenious and over-elaborate attempts have been made from time to time to express figures in all manner of ways by means of phonographic signs or other devices. It seems a waste of effort to attempt to deal with figures in this way. Unless they are quoted, figures are rarely delivered rapidly and there is a strong body of opinion among shorthand writers, who deal extensively with figures in the course of their daily professional work, that figures are best represented by the Arabic numerals, which, though, as alleged by some, they take more time to write (which I doubt) are certainly unmistakable and more legible than

shorthand signs. As regards the representation of *hundred*, *thousand*, *million*, etc., the instructions in the textbook leave nothing to be desired, but as regards fractions I have found the following device very facile and useful—

$3\frac{1}{4}$ . . . . 3'

$3\frac{1}{2}$ . . . . 3—

$3\frac{3}{4}$ 3

As regards the other fractions, I believe it would be safer to write them in the ordinary way as suggested by Mr. Reed in his *Technical Reporting*.

It should not be forgotten that imperfect knowledge is bound to give rise to difficulties; and no part of the subject should be skipped over because of its fancied difficulty or under the erroneous impression that it can be neglected with impunity. There is nothing in the system which any persevering person cannot comprehend, and if he develops in addition a love for the subject and goes about his work with enthusiasm, he is bound to make rapid and substantial headway.

CHAPTER VII

THE WRITING INSTRUMENT

ALTHOUGH the learner of shorthand has been advised earlier in these pages to begin with a good pencil or a steel nib in preference to a pen, the question of pen versus pencil is bound to assume vital importance when he has mastered the theory and commenced speed practice in earnest, especially at the higher rates. The advantages of the pen over the pencil and vice versa have been discussed exhaustively by many writers on Phonographic topics, and the verdict of the great majority is in favour of the pen.

In the earlier days, the writing instrument was either a pencil or an ordinary holder fitted with a gold nib, which necessitated the carrying about of an inkstand. The gold pen appears to have been widely patronized by many well-known reporters of a previous generation and can still be seen, though rarely, at the reporter's table. The inconveniences attaching to the use of a pen and inkstand are the difficulty of carrying the latter about, and the more or less frequent dipping of the pen involved. When the writing has to be done standing as at open-air meetings, it is manifest that the inkstand can be of little use. In fast reporting even the second or two taken up in allowing the pen to " drink " may occasion the loss of a number of words. With the advent, however, of reliable fountain pens, capable of holding sufficient ink to keep them going for several hours at a stretch, the gold pen and the inkstand may be said to have outlived their usefulness, and they will doubtless rapidly vanish from the scene.

In spite of the overwhelming body of opinion in favour of the pen, it is the pencil that does the work of a great number of shorthand writers. One reason for this is

probably that a pencil is a much cheaper and handier instrument in comparison with a fountain pen, which, although it is an investment for life when carefully preserved, involves a decent initial expenditure which many are either unable or unwilling to incur. Some writers like the pencil from long standing habit or because it stands pressure better than a nib. There are no doubt cases where a pencil is preferable to a pen, for example, when taking notes in open air when it is drizzling, when writing in semi-dark rooms or in the midst of a surging crowd But it must be remembered that such cases are of rare occurrence.

The advantages of the pencil are, however, seriously outweighed by its disadvantages. Prominent among these are the frequent wearing off of the lead, the chances of a treacherous breaking of the pencil point at a most inconvenient moment, the necessity of sharpening or changing for ready-sharpened pencils (of which a good assortment has perforce to be kept in readiness in the case of heavy reporting), the muscular exhaustion of the fingers which extended note-taking with a pencil brings about quickly, the comparative faintness and even illegibility of pencil notes with the resultant strain on the eyes, especially when working at night, the possibility of the strokes fading and becoming undecipherable with the lapse of time and writer's cramp, which is brought about by too prolonged a use of the pencil.

Speaking from my own experience, I may state it as my deliberate opinion that, barring exceptional cases, there can be no better writing instrument for shorthand purposes than a reliable fountain pen. In the initial stages my writing instrument was, of course, a pencil, but soon after I reached the 100 words stage I gladly discarded it for a pen which appreciably facilitated my further efforts at speed.

The case for the pen is certainly a very strong one. Briefly, the advantages of a pen are that it secures legibility

and lightness of touch, minimizes muscular fatigue and conduces to neatness of outlines. I consider it absolutely essential that a pen should be used for all difficult and prolonged note-taking. The man who has got himself habituated to a pen will naturally find it very irksome to handle a pencil even for a few minutes, should circumstances render this necessary. It would, therefore, be a good thing to be prepared to use a pencil, should you be compelled to do so owing to unforeseen circumstances.

Much care should naturally be bestowed on the selection of a pen that satisfies the individual needs of the writer. Several varieties of pens—good, bad and indifferent—are offered for sale. Whatever their value for non-shorthand purposes, nothing gives greater cause for annoyance and indignation to a shorthand writer than a bad pen which proves obstructive at the psychological moment or requires periodical and prolonged shaking and coaxing before it can be induced to do its appointed work. A pen of a proved and reliable make should be obtained, and pains should be taken to get one entirely suitable. The trouble taken in the selection of such a pen will be well repaid. Nibs are now made in all gradations, from the fine pointed nib, which almost sticks in the paper, to the broad nib, which conduces to bold and heavy writing. The selection of a nib will depend a good deal on the writer's individual style of penmanship. Some like a fine nib and some a broad, but a good pen once selected with care must be stuck to and religiously safeguarded. It is generally agreed that the pen best adapted to rapid reporting is that which has a short, strong and flexible nib that will stand pressure and neither gape not stick in the paper. Care should be taken not to use anything but fountain-pen ink, and to clean the pen periodically. A pen intended for shorthand should never be put to other uses, nor should it be lent to others, especially for non-shorthand purposes. A pen which has served faithfully and well for a long series of years acquires

all the attributes of a dearly-loved companion, and in many a case I have seen it preserved with a tenderness and affection almost parental. A good pen bears, as it were, a charmed life and ought to prove an invaluable asset and a source of pride to every shorthand writer.

CHAPTER VIII

POSITION WRITING

ONE of the many valuable helps that contribute to building up high speed is the device of writing words, or rather their shorthand symbols, in position, i.e. either *above, on* or *through* the line, known as the first, second and third positions, respectively. (It is impossible to exaggerate its importance as an aid to fast writing. In the first place, it almost dispenses with the necessity for vocalization in high-speed work, and in the second place, it materially accelerates speed without sacrificing legibility.)

The cultivation of the art of position writing is a piece of valuable discipline. It is a feast for the eye to see a fast writer adhering to it faithfully even at top speed. To be able to jot down with alertness words and phrases which leap instantaneously and with unerring precision to their ordained positions (above, on or through the line) is a feat which cannot fail to have a highly stimulating effect on any observant student; a feat which can only be accomplished by careful and systematic practice. Many of the pitfalls into which speed aspirants fall in their attempt to scale the heights of the speed ladder, and the obstacles they encounter in transcribing are, in many cases, directly due to neglect of the position rules. Indeed, even expert writers err in this respect. The possession of a good knowledge of the language and long experience, however, help them a good deal. But even in their case occasions are bound to arise when violation of the position rules will give rise to doubts and difficulties from which it would be difficult to disentangle themselves.

The rules for position writing are very clearly stated in the textbook. The writer takes the initial vowel in all

cases as the guiding factor. It is desirable to insert the final vowel in the case of words ending with vowels. Though this may be irksome, there are compensating advantages. Double-length downstrokes cannot be shown in any of the three positions, while horizontal strokes, half-sized strokes or half-sized strokes accompanied by horizontal strokes do not admit of being conveniently written in the third position. Many students are in the habit of inserting vowels where they are not wanted, and omitting them where their presence would be really helpful. From the beginning, the student should have a watchful eye on this weakness. By careful attention he will be able to acquire the correct style in due course.

Some writers consider that attention to position writing, though helpful to beginners, is a waste of energy and a "bugbear" in the case of advanced writers, as it involves a "perpetual bobbing up and down the line." In the first place, the statement is in a sense self-contradictory. If it is useful in the case of a student, and if he has faithfully adhered to the rule from the beginning, it would be impossible for him, in the nature of things, to ignore it later on, since he has gone through a certain amount of discipline and its effects cannot be shaken off easily. The appearance of the shorthand notes of an expert, except for difference in lineality of outlines, due to stress of rapid writing, and the use of advanced phraseography and contractions, is, in all essentials, the same as that of a tyro. In the second place, nothing can be more untrue than to say that position writing is irksome to fast writers. Such a statement runs counter to the experience of the great majority of shorthand writers whose notes display a wonderful adherence to the rules under all conditions of fast writing. It is, moreover, a demonstrated fact that strict observance of the position rules is in no way a hindrance to or incompatible with high speed, but that the one naturally leads up to the other and is, in fact, an essential

forerunner, and it is the opinion of a well-known examiner that the failure of a great number of shorthand students is traceable directly to its neglect, which lands shorthand writers, especially the more unwary among them, in all kinds of ridiculous mistakes.)

CHAPTER IX

REPETITION PRACTICE

AMONG the many remedies prescribed to the Phonographic patient who is struggling to get up his speed and seeking short cuts to the goal of fast writing is one that favours the adoption of what is generally and rather quaintly known as "repetition practice." The absence of any authoritative statement in regard to this practice has given rise to many hazy notions as what it exactly signifies, and how far it could be adopted with advantage. Repetition practice may, however, be explained briefly as taking down a particular passage several times over, till in due course the writer is able to "do" it at a rate substantially higher than his normal rate. Supposing the student can ordinarily write at a rate of 80 words, what the advocates of repetition practice say is this: "Write the passage at 80 words first, read it out, mark all the difficult words and phrases which you have either wrongly written or have not been able to decipher; then have the same passage dictated to you over and over again at rates increasing every time, until finally you are able to take down that passage at a substantially higher rate of speed." Some well-known writers advocate this practice, and believe in its efficacy as a means of increasing speed. It is claimed for repetition practice that it rapidly and materially increases speed and familiarizes the student in the writing of strange and difficult words. But this view has been contested by many expert teachers and writers who do not believe in it, but concede that, if resorted to within limits, it may enable the writer to acquire a certain amount of manual dexterity.

Let us examine a little more closely what repetition

practice in effect means. After the student has written a passage for the first time at his normal rate of speed, he reads it out, marking the outlines of words and phrases which have given him trouble while writing or have been deciphered, if at all, with difficulty. These he notes down and copies a certain number of times and he makes himself quite able to write them with ease, when they occur again. He now takes down the same passage a second time at a rate slightly higher than the previous one. As he has already heard the passage once and read it over, he has become fairly familiar with the trend of it and experiences very little difficulty in taking it down, notwithstanding the increase of speed. As the reading proceeds he is, perhaps, able to anticipate some of the words and write them even before actually delivered. His reading out of the passage this time is accomplished with marked ease and in shorter time, being considerably assisted in the process by memory. Again he notes outlines which have presented difficulty and masters them. A third time he takes down the same matter at a still faster rate. By this time his ears have become more or less thoroughly acquainted with the trend of the passage, and he is probably even able to remember the structure of whole sentences. In this way he goes on a fourth time and a fifth time.

Now there can be little doubt that any person of average intelligence when he hears a passage (not very long) a second time, will be able to recollect with substantial accuracy how a sentence runs on or what a succeeding word is likely to be. In the case of a clever shorthand student, with a stenographic record of the passage before him, this work must be easier still. During the second and third stages of the dictation the passage is bound to get so much impressed on the mind of the writer that, with a tolerably good memory, he can easily repeat whole sentences without much aid from the shorthand note. In these circumstances, any conclusion drawn from the quickness

with which the passage is read out must be erroneous and deceptive. The writer is always confident of being able to appeal to his memory in case there is any trouble with the notes, which may be and are allowed with impunity to suffer in legibility. A feeling of false confidence is naturally aroused, and the writer is emboldened to increase his speed at the cost of legibility, which obviously is bound to suffer, when a passage which can only be taken down by the writer normally at, say, 80 words a minute is written at a decidedly higher rate after a short time. I therefore consider that repetition practice is a direct incentive to slovenly work and careless formation of outlines. The claim that the hand is trained to move faster is true only in so far as it does so with a certain amount of *apparent* freedom, which is, in my opinion, an unhealthy and hot-house type of development, achieved at the cost of legibility. The writer, in the meantime, entertains a wholly illusory and demoralizing idea of his speed capabilities, which is sure to receive a rude shock at the first encounter with a fresh passage, the result being an inevitable depression of spirits.

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to analyse the situation further, but it is apparent that while the benefits of repetition practice are in my opinion problematic, its mischievous effects, *especially when carried to excess*, are undoubted. The principle which underlies it runs counter to the well-known theory about educational efficiency, namely, that prolonged attention to any one topic does not conduce to concentration of effort and, if continued long enough, creates disgust and results in slovenly work. Apart from the difficulty of securing readers prepared to undertake cheerfully the depressing task of reading a passage several times over, writing the same matter repeatedly must, indeed, be an insipid and nauseating operation as the freshness of the passage is lost; and it decidedly tends to narrow the outlook of a writer by confining his attention unduly to a particular set of phraseology. Even admitting

that the movement of the hand is to a certain extent quickened, any advantage in this direction is, I think, seriously offset by the mechanical nature of the practice. High-speed work depends as much upon the alertness of the brain to comprehend the outlines with almost lightning rapidity as upon the suppleness of the hand to give them instantaneous visual expression, and repetition practice, by restricting the scope for the exercise of the higher and, so to say, creative faculties of the brain, tends, in my opinion, to atrophy rather than to stimulate them. As a less harmful method, I would favour the student rapidly glancing over the passage he is about to take down. This will enable him, if the passage is a difficult one, to get an insight into the peculiarities of the style, and when writing to grasp and appreciate the sense. It will also help him to remember and put down correctly the outlines of strange and difficult words occurring in the passage, and find out beforehand how far there is scope for phrasing, and devising facile outlines for long and oft-recurring combinations of words. Even this practice should not long be continued.

My remarks in regard to the dangers of repetition are confined entirely to the principle of repetition as applied to taking down from dictation the same matter several times over at increasing rates of speed, and have nothing whatever to do with copying practice or even with the writing of a particular piece of matter over again at the writer's *normal* speed. Nobody could possibly have anything to say against extensive copying of word signs and phrases. In fact, without intensive practice of this kind, it is impossible to attain that mastery over outlines and that manual dexterity which are the vital factors in building up speed. Repetition, in relation to dictation, is sought to be justified mainly on two grounds: that it conduces to accuracy of forms and promotes manual dexterity. These two objects can be attained easily and successfully by neat copying practice and writing memorized passages.

My conclusion, therefore, is that the would-be successful shorthand writer can ill-afford to indulge in what is known as repetition practice. His endeavour should be to go on extending his knowledge of the vocabulary, by making his dictation matter cover a wide range with a view to familiarizing himself as much as possible with the inexhaustible terminology met with in different walks of life. After all, the student must bear in mind the stern fact that in the practical work-a-day world, which he must sooner or later enter, he will have to face unexpected difficulties, and that from the start his aim should be so to equip himself as to be able to meet them manfully, by making his early training an adequate preparation for, and conform as strictly as possible to, the conditions under which he will be called upon to work in professional life.

CHAPTER X

WRITING BEHIND THE SPEAKER

WRITING several words behind the speaker when engaged in note-taking is a practice that appears to have possessed considerable fascination for Phonographers of the older school, and has many advocates at the present day. (It is urged that the shorthand writer should endeavour to keep from fifteen to twenty words behind the speaker in his note-taking, and that this practice has a highly stimulating effect, and ensures calm and unruffled note-taking.)

(The idea of receiving into and retaining in the brain a long and unbroken series of words, and giving them visual expression many seconds after they were delivered is certainly a delightful one.) Hearing about it for the first time several years ago, it struck me as an intellectual accomplishment of no mean order. It signifies, in effect, that you have to listen to one set of words, while simultaneously your hand is recording a second set, and the brain is retaining a third to be recorded in due succession. A feat involving some rapid and complicated processes of the brain, it is bound to impress the novice as something more or less in the nature of a visionary ideal. It is not, however, impossible of achievement, as there are authenticated instances of men of remarkably retentive memory who can write as many as forty words behind, while some time ago I came across the following rather astounding, and to me incredible, statement about a late reporter to the House of Representatives, "That he could maintain a speed of 300 words a minute is beyond question and perhaps he was the only man ever heard of who could fall behind a speaker a couple of hundred words and then catch up without the least difficulty." Instances of this kind, even if true, are

very rare, and the matter must be considered essentially from the point of view of the rank and file, and not from that of a gifted few.

Two important questions suggest themselves in connection with this practice: firstly, whether its utility and the necessity for its adoption are established beyond question and, secondly, whether it is capable of successful adoption under all conditions. These two questions must be answered satisfactorily before one can be persuaded to undergo a course of training involving an arduous and rather exacting type of discipline. (My experience of note-taking extending over fifteen years has not convinced me either of the necessity, or of the utility, of writing a great number of words behind a speaker. It is claimed that this practice will be of especial use in the case of fast or jerky speakers.) When a writer's speed does not make a reasonable approach to the average speed maintained by a rapid speaker, it is difficult to see how merely writing a dozen or fifteen words behind will help him in securing a verbatim record, especially if one jerky period is quickly followed by another, and possibly yet another. If the speaker is very jerky, and the speed of the writer is in the neighbourhood of the speaker's average rate of delivery, all that will be necessary is to take a few more seconds to record words which are now and then delivered at a bound, and this can be easily done during the momentary pause which is almost certain to follow a blurt.

The task imposed on the brain of retaining one set of words while the hand is recording another implies a twofold operation carried on simultaneously, and therefore calls for the exercise of a high degree of mental alertness which few will be found to possess, or will succeed in acquiring even after prolonged training. In many cases, the effective performance of this feat under all conditions may be quite unattainable. Though it is possible to keep as many as ten or even fifteen words behind a slow and deliberate

speaker, or when taking down a regulated dictation under favourable conditions, e.g. familiar surroundings, a calm atmosphere, etc., there are positive difficulties in attempting it in professional reporting. If the speeches are of a highly technical nature, bristling with scientific terms and phrases, heard, perhaps, for the first time, and passages abounding in figures, keeping many words behind will be found to be positively dangerous. The occurrence of a strange word, mishearing an important word or series of words, ejaculations and uproar from one or more of the audience, repeated outbursts of applause, hisses and other disturbing conditions, more or less incidental to public gatherings, especially if the subjects dealt with are of an exciting and controversial character, will all contribute to throw the reporter off his train of thought. In the case of an orator of the emotional and tempestuous type, the caprices of whose delivery cannot be prejudged, keeping many words behind may prove to be a risky practice, and result in the repeated loss of groups of words. When, in reporting debates and small committees, half a dozen or more speakers cut in in rapid succession with a regular fusillade of questions and interjections, and prompt replies are made to these, there is little doubt that the writer will, in his mental confusion jot the words down in the wrong order, if he does not record the proceedings almost instantaneously. A similar result is bound to ensue if speeches are short and delivered rapidly, and a number of speakers follow each other in quick succession. If the object of keeping behind is to enable the writer to follow a speaker who frequently goes beyond his powers, it is obvious that keeping behind will not by itself be of much help to the writer if his maximum speed is appreciably below the average of the speaker during the whole delivery. To put the case briefly, either the speed of the writer is high enough to catch up the speaker, even in his most rapid delivery, or it is not. In the one case, it is unnecessary; and in the other, unsafe and impossible to keep behind the

speaker, consistently with securing a really verbatim record. Further, I believe it is one of the conditions of high-speed contests that the examinees should stop note-taking immediately the last word has been uttered, as otherwise the contest would become unequal from a purely speed point of view.

A view that is generally held is that the writer should always keep as close to the speaker as possible, but that he should train himself to be able to keep behind, should the speaker warm up suddenly. It seems hardly worth while training oneself to keep behind if that accomplishment is to be put only to occasional use. Quite a satisfactory way to cope with such an emergency is to cultivate the habit of mentally repeating the words poured forth at a bound. This helps you, so to say, to pin the words in the memory, and put them down calmly, and ensures a verbatim record. An effective method of acquiring this skill is to have systematic copying practice, by getting into your head each time a fairly long group of words, and then writing them rapidly in shorthand from memory. Continued training of this kind will be found to have a highly stimulating effect.

While, therefore, it is unsafe and undesirable to keep many words behind, it is by no means intended that the writer should follow absolutely on the speaker's heels, though this is done successfully by many writers whose lifting of the pen from the note-book almost synchronizes with the delivery of the last word taken down. There are obvious disadvantages in this. In keeping too close to the speaker, there is a pretty frequent possibility of your writing parts of words in advance before they are delivered fully. As instances, it may be mentioned that it is not uncommon to write "four men of the jury," and "four castes," where the correct expressions are "foreman of the jury," and "forecasts" respectively. I remember a curious case where a student wrote "two fat idiots" for "too fastidious." Similar instances will no doubt readily

occur to every shorthand writer. Even if such mistakes are not noticed at the time of writing, the correct word or set of words is sure to suggest itself to the writer when transcribing. The possibility of confusion, nevertheless, exists, and it is well to avoid it. Another important objection to keeping too near the heels of the speaker is that it is not possible to utilize to the fullest extent the many useful and facile joinings for which there is abundant scope in Phonographic writing. It is rarely that more than half a dozen words are written without a lift of the pen. Keeping about four or five words behind at the utmost is therefore a happy compromise, and would do well for practical purposes. This will enable the writer to catch up at a bound a speaker who warms up suddenly into rapid flights of emotional oratory. On the whole, it may be safely said the "down with it at once" policy of note-taking is the safest and most effective, and this view is, I believe, held by many well-known professional reporters.

CHAPTER XI

MISHEARINGS

AMONG the many hindrances that beset the path of the professional shorthand writer, not the least annoying is the mishearing of words, and even entire sentences, which proves a fertile source of amusing and sometimes serious errors in transcription. Mishearing important words has, moreover, the effect of paralysing the hand, though temporarily, and proves a menace to unruffled note-taking. However much one is endowed with a quick sense of hearing (which is, by the way, one of the indispensable qualifications of a shorthand writer), mistakes arising from difficulties of hearing cannot altogether be eliminated so long as inaudible delivery continues to exist, for after all a shorthand writer, however clever, can only put down what reaches his ears, and can hardly be fastened with blame when he is unable to catch the exact words uttered, despite all possible precaution.

Mishearings are essentially due to lack of distinctness in utterance, always provided, of course, that the shorthand writer's powers of hearing are not defective. With the great increase in and the resultant pressure of the volume of business to be got through in modern times, it may be said that the quality of speaking has undergone an all-round and material change. There is, nowadays, very limited scope for the ornate and turgid styles of oratory, which found so much favour with speakers of a bygone generation. People now concern themselves more with what a man says than how he says it, and the conversational mode of delivery which has developed in consequence, and the volubility which is its natural concomitant are, I think, mainly responsible for mishearings. When a man

talks softly and rapidly, it is obvious that the demands on his lung powers are far less than would otherwise be the case, and where the audience is limited, as in the case of small committees, the necessity for talking in an uplifted voice is altogether obviated. It is not, of course, suggested that it is impossible to speak fast, and at the same time distinctly, but the invariable tendency is to jabber, and the strain on the shorthand writer is rendered on that account doubly severe.

In the case of public speakers who have necessarily to tune their voice to a pitch that can reach the utmost recesses of the hall, if they at all desire to command a huge audience effectively, the chances of mishearing are reduced to a minimum, though it must be added that mishearings are not non-existent even in cases of loud delivery, and, paradoxical though it may seem, often arise from the very fact of loudness. As is well known, many a loud-voiced orator is compelled to drop his voice, especially when concluding a sentence, if only to take breath and give relief to his exhausted lungs. But the mishearings, if any, are not likely to be material, and, where only condensed reports are required, do not matter at all, provided the drift of the subject has been intelligently grasped. They, however, prove very troublesome when the very words that are essential to the completion of an important trend of ideas are lost. Now and again, curious and absurd mistakes are made, which evoke public disclaimers from the speakers themselves. If a speaker, who has to be frequently reported, is a persistent sinner in the matter of inaudible delivery, nothing less than a concerted refusal on the part of the reporters as a body to have anything to do with him will suffice to mend matters.

Reporting in courts of law differs materially from other forms of reporting work, inasmuch as the former is rendered peculiarly difficult not only on account of the extremely rapid talking in which lawyers and witnesses indulge

habitually, but also by reason of the defective acoustics of court chambers, and the notorious tendency among judges to lounge luxuriously on their chairs and mumble their *obiter dicta*, as though to speak with deliberation were incompatible with judicial decorum. Official reporting under such conditions is a task not to be lightly undertaken. The necessity for extreme verbal accuracy is paramount, especially in regard to those portions of the evidence which have a material bearing on the question in dispute.

Shorthand clerks are perhaps the persons who suffer most on account of mishearings. They certainly cannot claim the professional standing of, or the latitude generally extended to, gentlemen of the press. Nor can they ordinarily hope to measure their strength as against that of an employer as reporters can, and indeed often do, as against speakers. In the course of their career, moreover, shorthand clerks are brought into personal contact with employers accustomed to dictate in all manner of ways—slowly and clearly, rapidly and indistinctly, calmly or hurriedly, seated or moving about the room, standing at the farthest end of it with the face turned away from the stenographer, or what is worse with a pipe in the mouth. The poor shorthand writer gets on as best as he can; he dare not interrupt his relentless employer too often, lest the latter's ire should descend on him with the not improbable result of compromising his own reputation.

Besides, the nature of the duties of a shorthand amanuensis does not permit of his taking liberties with the language of his chief. The matter dictated consists almost entirely of comparatively short pieces of work, such as letters, notes, memoranda, etc., with the diction of which the shorthand writer can hardly tamper, and hence any errors, either of commission or omission, will only be too easily detected.

A word of warning must, however, be uttered here in respect of a body of slovenly shorthand writers who

commit the most atrocious mistakes in their transcription, and try to feather off their blame by the plea of mishearing. As a matter of fact, the words have probably been heard distinctly, and taken down correctly at the time of delivery, and mistranscribed through the choice of wrong outlines, sheer slovenliness, or out of the abundance of their crass stupidity. Where, for example, a shorthand writer renders "illuminated address" into "lamented address," it is high time that he were advised seriously to try his luck at some other profession.

What then are the remedies of mishearing? The first and the most obvious and potent would, of course, be to get the dictator to be a little more merciful in the matter of clear speaking, which while saving him the annoyance of having his ideas perverted would relieve the shorthand writer from the distressing racking of the brain involved in trying to divine what a particular word might or should have been. Failing any good results in this direction, the other best plans are to get a proximate and convenient seat, to cultivate sedulously a quick sense of hearing, to concentrate attention on the subject in hand, to accustom oneself to the peculiarities of the dictator's intonations, to put down exactly what reaches the ear, however absurd it may appear, and not to reject it for something conjectured at the moment, to be vigilantly on the watch to see if the words misheard are repeated, and, if they are not, to retain as correctly as possible, such a recollection of the impression made on his ear as would enable him to make a satisfactory conjecture at the time of transcription, to follow to the best of one's ability the sense of what is taken down, to stop the speaker when any material omission has been occasioned, and when interruption is unavoidable, and finally when transcribing, to get the help of a fellow stenographer or other outside help.

Familiarity with the subject dealt with and the parlance peculiar to it, a close and calm study of the context, a

knowledge of words of similar sounds, an alert intelligence and, above all, a wide and up-to-date knowledge of men and things in general, will go a long way to help the shorthand writer to extricate himself from many an ugly *contretemps*. Not infrequently, after a spell of intensive thinking, the correct word flashes across the brain of the writer, as if by a strange inspiration. It is, however, desirable that in all heavy and responsible reporting a check note should invariably be taken, and there can be no doubt that this conduces to accuracy in a remarkable degree, as what has been misheard by one writer may have been correctly recorded by another.

In spite of all caution and alertness, it must be confessed that mistakes arising from mishearing cannot altogether be eliminated, and it can only be hoped that those who are primarily responsible for them will realize how much the errors committed by shorthand writers are either directly or indirectly due to their own indistinct delivery, and that in any case they will be sensible enough to make due allowance for the shortcomings of the unfortunate scribes, who, we may take it, try to exert their very best to give satisfaction to their employers, and to maintain their own professional prestige.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHORTHAND NOTE

As the face is the index of the mind, the size and shape of the notes of a shorthand writer are the surest token both of their worth and of the writer's capability. I do not mean to suggest that notes written in a particular style, and that alone will conduce to success. As a matter of fact, the shorthand notes of each writer bear the hall-mark of his individuality, even as is the case with longhand writing—a fact which is borne out amply by the *facsimile* notes of high-speed writers. The universal adoption of one style must therefore always remain a matter of practical impossibility. At the same time, it must be admitted that, with due regard to individual proclivities, the best notes are those which conform as strictly as possible to the rules of the textbook, are capable of being written for long spells with the least fatigue, and transcribed with the utmost ease and rapidity.

It may be contended with some plausibility that the end and aim of all shorthand writing is to enable the writer to render a correct transcript, and that so long as this work is accomplished satisfactorily, the quality of the notes matters very little. There is no doubt considerable truth in this statement, for it is common knowledge that many writers scribble their outlines badly, and yet manage to read them off without much ado, while the onlooking tyro, accustomed to geometrical precision of outlines is lost in amazement at such hieroglyphics lending themselves to be easily deciphered. But at the same time it must be remembered that for every case of that kind there are scores of others where the writers painfully fumble about with their notes, even when written with apparent clearness and legibility.

The argument, " Write anyhow, provided you transcribe all right," may apply to a few brilliant and possibly erratic men blessed with a good memory, in whose opinion shorthand notes are after all mere aids to recollection. Even they cannot easily disentangle themselves from risks arising from slovenly note-taking, especially when notes have to be transcribed some time after they were taken down, and the subject is no longer fresh in their minds. The fact, therefore, deserves to be strongly emphasized that any neglect to preserve the distinctive proportions of shorthand outlines, which are so essential to quick and accurate decipherment, is certain to land the writer frequently in serious doubts. By stronger reasoning, the great generality of shorthand writers need to follow a safe and uniform standard of writing, if they are to avoid the pitfalls consequent on any serious deviation from the prescribed and accepted canons of the textbook. In the first place, whatever is worth doing is worth doing well, and in the manner which the experience of successive generations of able phonographers has demonstrated to be useful and thoroughly reliable. Secondly, neat notes are deciphered with greater promptitude than ill-written ones, and in the third place, it is perfectly possible to preserve considerable accuracy of form even in rapid shorthand work. Finally, the ideal shorthand note is one which can be read with reasonable rapidity by other shorthand writers, and when it is remembered that nowadays the work of transcription is often done not by the reporters themselves but by their trained juniors, the necessity of taking down clear notes on the part of the former will be all the more appreciated.

Allowing for individual idiosyncracies and tastes (and due allowance must be made for these), the question is: " What is the best style to adopt? " There is no doubt a considerable divergence of opinion on the subject. While some authorities favour what is called " a neat and small

style," others of a more exuberant temperament prefer a "bold and dashing style." There is danger in both if carried to extremes. It is conceivable that by an unconscious process the former may degenerate into a cramped and crowded style, checking the free movement of the hand, and causing confusion in transcription; and the latter into a wild and sprawling style, necessitating tiresome and frantic jumping from line to line. As in many other human affairs, it is safe to steer a middle course, and admittedly the most suitable style to adopt is the one about half as much bigger as the printed Phonographic characters. Personally I have found both styles useful. When the speed is well under command a fairly small and steady style is particularly helpful, but in cases of fast work or sudden acceleration of speed, I have found a forward motion of the hand and slightly distended outlines giving me material relief.

The quality of the notes naturally depends a good deal on the speed at which they are taken down, and the subject of the progressive variation in appearance of outlines written at increasing rates of speed is an interesting one. With each advance in speed, the outlines undergo a corresponding evolution in form. In the case of those who try to build up speed hastily, the tendency is for the outlines to deteriorate with successive increases of speed, though one now and again comes across some over-punctilious scribes who religiously try to preserve the perfect symmetry of their outlines even at high speed. Both these tendencies should be vigorously curbed. Provided the practice in the earlier stages has been steady and methodical, and the progress has been laid on a solid foundation, it can be said unhesitatingly that up to a speed of 150 or 160, it is not impossible to write almost like print in the advanced Reporting Style. Many accomplished reporters can maintain a perfectly legible style at even higher rates to an extent that will permit of their notes being immediately

handed over to experienced assistants for transcription. Much undoubtedly depends upon the amount of patient and well-directed effort expended in the initial stages. Shorthand writers who build up their speed in haste seldom acquire a steady and beautiful style of outlines. Their writing has no artistic merit in it, and, while the intrinsic worth of their notes is problematical, the appearance of such notes is positively repulsive. Though taken down at comparatively low rates, the fantastic and disproportionate dimensions of their outlines naturally lead one to suppose that they must have been written at a breakneck speed.

I may here draw attention to a practice which prevails among a considerable number of fast writers—that of writing, say, ten words in the first line of a page, eight in the second, six in the third and about three or four in each of the succeeding lines. The result of this is that if a line be drawn from the top left-hand corner of the leaf diagonally across the page, the left half will be found not to have been utilized at all. This habit is, in the great majority of cases, an indication of the incapacity of the writer to cope with the speed, and it entails a severe strain on the muscular powers. The practice of writing full pages should be acquired from the earliest stages. Teachers seldom pay attention to the subject, or take the trouble to check defaulting students. Many writers on whom this practice has unshakeably fastened itself have confessed that, despite all efforts, their hands refuse to move straight across to the left-hand margin of a new line. This is certainly due to a habit which has been indulged in, and allowed to take firm root. It is highly important that students should from the beginning be on their guard against this undesirable practice. Apart from the tremendous waste of stationery involved (a writer addicted to this habit takes about eight pages for a piece of matter which another writer could easily bring into three), the irksome transition from line to line, and frequent turning over of

the leaves fatigue the writer too quickly and, whatever their legibility, the outlines present a scared appearance, and are by no means pleasant to the eyes. Only persistent practice along right lines will help to remedy this defect.

The question as to how far it is necessary to maintain the distinction between thin and thick strokes is one that exercises the minds of many students. The preservation of this distinction is of decided help to inexperienced writers, though sooner or later they will be able to discard it, or, at least, not pay it that scrupulous attention which is so essential in the case of novices. It is, however, my opinion that expert writers neither attach any great importance to it, nor make any serious effort to preserve the thin and thick character of the strokes in fast writing. In almost every case the context will give the writer the necessary clue.

Whatever style of writing be adopted, it is desirable to see that the outlines are not written too close to each other. Allow them sufficient room between, and let them, so to say, breathe freely. About fifteen words a line on an average in a note-book, five inches wide, may be taken as a fair standard of the number of words that can be conveniently got in. It is unsafe to violate this limit too much either way.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that well-written and legible notes have a vital bearing on all successful shorthand work. Their value will come home to the writer whenever the transcription has to be done accurately, and with the greatest possible expedition. The best test of the legibility and trustworthiness of a shorthand note is to find out whether it is capable of being read off spontaneously from any point indicated. Many shorthand writers cannot do this quickly, and will endeavour to find out where the sentence in question begins. Of course, sense and context help a good deal, but the ideal note is one that is capable of being read off fluently from any point selected at random.

During note-taking, therefore, it is well to feel as though your very existence depended on the correct rendering of every dot, dash and stroke put down in the note-book. If you bear this in mind all the time, you will soon develop an absolutely reliable and luminous style of writing—a style which has all the elements of grace and animation in it, and which will be as much a source of pride to you as it will be of delight to every enthusiastic lover of the beautiful in Phonographic penmanship.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MOVEMENT OF THE HAND

THERE is a general misconception among laymen and learners that every writer whose fingers rush along the paper at a terrific pace, and turn over page after page with a bustle and a flutter, is performing a marvellous feat. But those " in the know " of things are not deceived.

For a successful performance, especially in the higher flights of speed, the cultivation of a steady and, at the same time, an agile movement of the hand is a paramount necessity, and this depends largely on the brain. Whenever the brain hesitates in the course of fast note-taking, the hand gets paralysed. But where the brain is alert and supplies the hand spontaneously with an unbroken stream of signs for spoken sounds, it clearly becomes the function of the hand to give them expression with the greatest possible swiftness, and with a minimum of muscular effort. In the case of a nervous and panicky writer, the hand does not fulfil properly this, its all important duty. A competent observer will have no difficulty in finding out that a writer of the type alluded to is trying to perform what to him is an impossible or difficult feat, in spite of the misleading impression he may create on the minds of unsuspecting on-lookers. A careful examination of his writing as it proceeds will reveal that the outlines are wild and sprawling, that the pages are turned over with unnecessary frequency, and in too showy a fashion, that undue strain is imposed on the muscles, and that despite this waste, both of material and energy, a good deal of what is spoken is not being recorded. Even what has been got down may possibly necessitate severe mental effort for its decipherment.

While no doubt long experience, and a wide range of

knowledge inspire a man with the necessary confidence, in fast verbatim reporting nothing contributes so much to the attainment of a facile and unruffled movement of the hand as the possession of a fund of reserve speed. A writer who is not possessed of this ability cannot but perform perfunctorily work demanding a speed capacity higher than that he is possessed of. No writer should, therefore, try his hand, even for fun, at work which is admittedly far beyond his powers. If he does, the feeling of nervousness and sense of failure engendered may have a very depressing reaction.

Professional shorthand writing, especially for prolonged periods at a stretch, is an arduous type of combined physical and intellectual exertion. Only that writer is able to perform an exacting piece of work successfully, who can husband his energy and has the necessary stamina to postpone to the farthest possible limit the stage at which the thorough exhaustion of his muscles warns him that he cannot afford to tax his energies further. There are instances of note-taking for as long as eight hours at a stretch, with barely a few minutes' interval. Work of this type demands, firstly, ample speed capacity; secondly, confidence born of long experience and an intelligent appreciation of what is being taken down; and, thirdly, the economizing of your muscular powers by training the hand to move without undue strain or expenditure of energy.

With a view to cultivate this calm and steady movement of the hand, it ought to be the endeavour of the student to keep his hand as close to the note-book as possible, not to lift it more than is necessary, and in particular to avoid what is called "bouncing." Many shorthand writers are in the habit of flourishing their hands in a rather ludicrous fashion, both before commencing to write, and whenever there is any pause, while the writing continues. This dissipates energy, and is not conducive to fast writing.

Closely connected with the subject of the movement

of the hand is that of holding the pen. Some writers have attempted to give rather over-elaborate instructions regarding the precise manner of holding the pen, but I doubt whether that need differ materially from the way one holds the pen for longhand writing. The notes of expert shorthand writers reveal a wide divergence both as regards their appearance and manner of execution. Some are light and graceful, others heavy and sprawling, if not clumsy. Much depends on habit, and the temperament of the writer, but for fast reporting work, the cultivation of a light touch is highly essential, as it appreciably lessens fatigue and muscular strain. To this end, the pen should be held lightly, and in a slanting posture, and should glide along the paper, the strokes being dashed off gracefully and without conscious effort. Some hold the pen tightly, as though it were in imminent danger of being snatched off. A heavy hand leads to a dawdling style, and brings about quick exhaustion of the muscles. Many writers are in the habit of exerting pressure on the pen when the speed mounts up suddenly. But this strikes one as punishing the pen for a state of things for which it is not to blame. But it will probably be agreed that slight pressure on a flexible gold nib gives the pleasant feeling of imparting to the pen a springing movement and helping it to gallop along.

On the contrary, holding the pen too lightly does not conduce either to fast writing or to accurate formation of outlines. The most satisfactory way is to grip the pen firmly and at the same time lightly. This method of handling the pen should be cultivated from the very beginning, as it may be difficult to acquire the habit later.

While the right hand is busy recording, the fingers of the left hand must be equally ready for the important work of turning over the leaves. To turn over a page at the nick of time, and to begin a fresh page without losing words is not such a difficult task as is generally imagined. Many postpone the turning over of the leaf so long as to allow

their notes to reach the very edge of the sheet, thereby jumbling them together and rendering them undecipherable; while it not infrequently happens that several words are missed out altogether in the process of commencing a fresh page. The best and the most widely adopted method for turning over the leaves is that advocated by Mr. Reed:

"While writing on the upper half of the leaf, introduce the second finger of the left hand between it and the next leaf, keeping the leaf on which you are writing steady by the first finger and thumb; while writing on the lower part of the page shift the leaf by degrees till it is about half-way up the book; when it is convenient, lift up the thumb and the leaf will turn over almost by itself. The finger should be introduced at the first pause the speaker makes, or at any other convenient opportunity that presents itself."

Another good plan has been suggested by the late Mr. D. W. Brown, who writes:

"Another excellent method is, while writing on the upper half of the page, to take the lower left-hand corner between the thumb and the fore-finger of the left hand and then push the page upward, a little at a time, selecting for this purpose those intervals when the speaker pauses, while the pen is shifting from line to line. The effect of thus pushing the page upward is to curl it, thus giving an opening for the introduction of the finger. This curling of the page will not interfere with the writing if one or two fingers of the left hand are used to press down the part of the page on which the writing is being done, thus keeping it flat and firm. This pushing of the page upward is not only a preparation for turning the leaf, but it makes writing on the lower part of the page much more convenient, as the supporting fingers of the right hand are not thrown entirely off the book."

The whole subject is so important to the student that it would be well for him to watch a high-speed writer at

work, and see for himself how the thing is done. A few minutes' careful observation will teach him more than any amount of theoretical advice. It is a lesson and an inspiration to watch the movement of the hand of the veteran writer—how the pen glides along the paper softly, albeit swiftly, how the shorthand forms spring as it were from the tip of the pen neatly, gracefully and without apparent effort, how the torrential effusions as well as the deliberate periods of the speaker are alike received by the brain with perfect nonchalance, and transmitted to the note-book with unruffled calmness and celerity, and how gently and deftly the leaves are turned over, as if by legerdemain. The spectacle may produce deceptive impressions on the mind of a novice at shorthand. In all probability, he may be led to believe that the expert writer whose feat he has witnessed must have missed out a lot, and in any case could not have been equal to the task, and it will possibly take him some little time before he can be brought to realize that what he has observed represents the acme of perfection in a most difficult art, is the result of years of patient work, and the harmonious operation of a variety of physical and mental processes of a high order.

CHAPTER XIV

HINTS ON SPEED PRACTICE

(1) How to Dictate

When the student has thoroughly mastered the theory, and has, by means of extensive copying and graded dictation practice, got rid of mental hesitancy in the formation of outlines, it is time for him to begin a systematic course of high-speed practice by taking down general passages from dictation. If he has laid a good foundation, he will probably be able to begin with a speed of not less than 80 words. His endeavour at this stage, unless he is attending a speed class, should be to get a suitable dictator. This is an important consideration, as dictating is an art by itself, and not all can do it successfully. The *modus operandi* is simple. You select a passage from a book or newspaper, mark it off into so many portions (each portion being read out in a quarter of a minute or such other period as may be fixed upon), and then have it read with due regard to the number of words you want to get down in a minute. The whole thing may appear simple and plain sailing, and it is not until one actually enters on the task that one realizes its inherent difficulties.

A person with little or no education will make a very poor dictator. Indeed, even persons with a good knowledge of English have been known to fail. I once found a friend reading to himself a fine speech at a fairly uniform rate of 180 words. I told him the speed at which he was reading, and asked him to dictate the passage at that rate. He seemed to think lightly of the task and undertook it with alacrity, but ere long he broke down. Although a man of education and good literary capacity, the mere consciousness of the responsibility resting on him disturbed his

equanimity, and his attempt proved a miserable failure. His reading was full of jerks and halts, and when he emerged out of the ordeal, for to him it was nothing less, he was literally gasping for breath, and gave out a sigh of relief. Again, a person whose English is weak can hardly be expected to read with due regard to punctuation and correct pronunciation. To do his work well, it is essential that the dictator should possess a good knowledge of English, especially of the construction of sentences, and should be able to grasp the sense of the passage he is dictating. Otherwise the task of the writer will be rendered doubly difficult.

A man of good education, but unused to dictating, will make a mess of his work just the same, whether the speed be high or low. The sight of the watch in his hand, and the passage to be read out at a uniform speed, and the sense of a responsible duty to be discharged, all work upon his mind so much that before long he gets into a tangle. Very soon he stops referring to the watch at all, and either goes careering at a headlong rate which drives the writer to despair, or else crawls on at snail's pace. Obeying the impulses of the moment, and having no idea of the rate of speed at which he has been asked to dictate, his reading at times is, to quote an extreme case, decidedly slow for even the dullest of penmen, while at others he pours forth a regular cataract of words. On the other hand, some men repeat passages, and are even known to pause now and then to inquire of the writer if he had got down all that was dictated. It must, indeed, be a piece of ill-luck for any student to be at the mercy of such capricious and incompetent readers.

Another important point to remember is that a person who has no knowledge of shorthand, and has not trained himself in dictating before he actually attempts it, is not likely to make a good dictator. The advantages, on the other hand, of getting a man who knows shorthand are

obvious: he will have a correct idea of the speed at which he is dictating, can regulate it to the capacity of the student, and read the passage in such a manner as to suggest to the writer facile Phonographic joinings, wherever these can and ought to be availed of. It would be a good plan for the dictator, if he is new to his task, to read over the passage he is about to dictate, and assure himself of the correct pronunciation and meaning of any unfamiliar words, phrases and quotations that may occur in it, as when these are encountered all of a sudden, he is liable to get off his track, misread them, and even lose a few lines. It is important to change dictators as frequently as possible, with a view to accustoming oneself to a variety of voices.

The ideal dictator then is one who does not depart appreciably from the speed he sets himself to dictate, reads distinctly, energetically and at a level pace, and does not obscure the sense of the passage. He should not exhibit the slightest hesitancy. Nor should he indulge in declamation or gesticulation, which are out of place in a speed room. In short, the matter dictated should run like an even current without any conscious effort on the part of the reader, and from first to last there should be one continuous flow of utterance.

(2) What to Dictate

Having secured a capable dictator, the shorthand student's next concern is the kind of matter with which he should start dictation practice. A judicious selection of matter has an important bearing on his early progress. Every speed student can recollect how, one day, he is able to "do" to his surprise much more than his usual rate, and, another day, perhaps to his annoyance and despair, finds it irksome to tackle even his normal speed. He has no doubt on both occasions written with the same writing instrument, in the same note-book, to the dictation of the same reader, and in familiar surroundings, and he wonders

what the reason could be. It is quite possible that if he has been able to go beyond his usual rate, he was either in a particularly enthusiastic mood, or his hand was in unusually good "form." But the real cause will probably be found in the nature of the passages selected on the different occasions. A plain running piece of matter, allowing the freest possible scope for facile joinings, and dictated at a uniform rate, is capable of being written at a rate faster than that one can command normally. In the same way, a stiff passage, abounding in unfamiliar words, retards speed. It is, however, well known that a passage containing many long words, for which facile contracted outlines are provided in the textbook, is written more easily than one which is composed wholly of monosyllabic words. Small words following each other in quick succession afford no appreciable scope for the use of phraseography, and impose a severe strain both while writing and deciphering. A well-known shorthand teacher has pointed out that he has known writers of 200 words a minute, and even some holders of official certificates at that rate, to fail in a speed test at 80 on a strict 2 per cent standard. He therefore laid stress on the desirability of selecting easy passages at the outset, in view of the material help they afford in the building up of speed, especially in the earlier stages of the student's progress.

It has been observed that in the selection of matter a student should be guided by the object for which he is acquiring the art. To my mind, this view seems like putting the cart before the horse. Very few students can say precisely what line of work they are likely to take up. The securing of a position, while it undoubtedly depends on one's aptitude and training for it, is in a great number of instances determined by more or less fortuitous conditions. A man may have qualified himself all along for a journalistic career, but through sheer force of circumstances, may fail to get a suitable footing on the press.

In the meantime, rather than let his time slip by, he may accept a position in some other capacity, and his whole future may thus be altered. In fact, he may even sooner or later find himself in a situation which requires no knowledge of shorthand at all. Except in exceptional cases, it is very difficult to prejudge what one's special line of work is going to be, and to be guided accordingly.

With the infinitely varied supply of literature, which is one of the remarkable features of our times, no one need be apprehensive of not getting suitable matter for purposes of shorthand dictation. The types of matter available range from the novel, which delights the imagination, and provides healthy excitement to solid works on themes of enduring interest. Between these two broad classifications, there exists a mass of periodical literature—from the daily newspaper of only ephemeral interest to the innumerable monthly and quarterly magazines dealing with every variety of topic under the sun. Fiction is a marked feature of present-day literary production, and has always exercised a great influence on the affections of the reading public. But, as a general rule, novels are unsuitable from the point of view of shorthand writers, as they abound in dialogue replete with colloquial and even slang expressions, which, however interesting in themselves, tend to become positively repulsive when read solemnly at high rates of speed. But, in this connection, the experiences of an eminent shorthand writer must receive the attention they deserve. Writing in a reminiscent vein about his speed practice in the earlier days, the late Mr. Thomas Allen Reed has recorded that he regularly took down to dictation from, and completed three volumes of, an exceedingly interesting novel, and he ascribed to this much of the success that he afterwards achieved. I think what Mr. Reed wished to emphasize was the importance of selecting matter from all acceptable sources rather than the taking down of dictation from novels in particular. It may be

observed that the novel which Mr. Reed used for dictation purposes was a record of thrilling adventures, presenting scenes, actions and characters depictive of the most savage aspects of American-Indian life. One turns page after page to read of nothing but incidents where tomahawks and scalping knives play a sinister part. These are fictions in which even the most callous individuals may be expected to take an interest, and one advantage they possess is that they keep up the interest of both the student and the dictator in the matter dealt with. But, speaking generally, novels do not provide straight matter, and consequently are not suitable for dictation purposes.

While light literature may be considered to represent one extreme, books written on special subjects bristling with technical terms and phrases may be taken to constitute the other extreme. These are also undesirable from the young Phonographer's point of view. The unusual number of jaw-breakers that these contain, not to speak of their abstruse style, must be very trying to the beginner at speed. A passage from Huxley, for example, will be enough to make his hair stand on end, while a piece of Carlyle, rugged and unrhythmical in style and rhapsodic in sentiment, if delivered with anything like rapidity, might well drive the most experienced of reporters frantic. Such books, however, may advantageously be used for dictation if the students happen to be making a study of the subjects they treat of either for examination or other purposes.

Whether the shorthand student is preparing himself for an examination, or equipping himself for life's battle, he should bear in mind that in practising shorthand, he is not so much trying to increase his speed (though this, no doubt, is an important factor) as indirectly contributing *pari passu* to his education. It is here that one realizes the tremendous educative value of shorthand. Many a man whose English

was once shaky has affirmed that a course of shorthand study has, while widening the range of his information, added not a little to his powers of facile composition. To the student with literary tastes, shorthand constitutes an energizing force, serving to focus his attention, and enabling him to derive the greatest possible benefit from the work in hand.

Judged from this point of view, the books which commend themselves as the most desirable are those of a literary and historical nature, combining charm of style with solid instruction. The works and speeches of such masters of style as Addison and Johnson, Gibbon and Macaulay, Sheridan and Burke, Cobden and Bright, Gladstone and Disraeli, should be copied in shorthand, or taken down from dictation. Studied with enthusiasm, they will serve to create in the student a love of literature which will be of lasting value, and have a wholesome influence on his professional outlook.

Periodical literature is the more acceptable, as it concerns the " living present," and chronicles and comments upon all the stirring events of the day. It is the duty of every shorthand student to keep himself abreast of the movements of the times. To many the daily newspaper with its treatment of " live " subjects appeals strongly. To the diligent Phonographer, the editorial articles in the dailies, the speeches of public men, the descriptive articles, critical reviews and other special contributions appearing in them from time to time, afford an inexhaustible field for exploration. While supplying him with splendid matter from the shorthand point of view, they also keep him well informed of what is going on around him. Beginners will find the reports of Parliamentary Debates, and all political speeches generally, exceedingly useful, as their diction is simple and allows wide scope for facile joinings.

A shorthand writer, who has taken up a particular department of shorthand work, should, however, lose no

time in collecting all the literature he can, touching on the subject with which he has to deal in the course of his daily work, and familiarizing himself with its special phraseology. It may be law, insurance, banking or one or other of the numerous trades and industries, each of which has its own technical vocabulary. Those who cannot be sure beforehand of the nature of the work they will be called upon to do, should select matter for dictation from as wide a range as possible, taking care to see that the passages are comparatively easy in the earlier stages, and of increasing difficulty as they progress in speed.

In the case of those who have made up their minds for a press career, it is vital that the training should be of a varied character. The exigencies of a reporter's calling presuppose such a training. A professional reporter finds himself recording by turns the proceedings of highest assemblies in the land, attending political meetings of great national importance, taking notes of court trials involving many subtle points of law, and preparing reports of abstruse and technical lectures. Unless therefore he has properly qualified himself beforehand, and acquired the necessary mental equipment, he may feel considerable embarrassment in the effective discharge of his professional duties. It would, of course, be absurd to expect him to be thoroughly acquainted with the terminology of all the arts and sciences. Such a task would be superhuman, and life is too short for the attempt. But it is imperative that his general knowledge should be as extensive as possible, and he should be in a position to know where to look for information in cases of difficulty. In particular he should have a good working knowledge of such diverse subjects as Politics and Theology, Science and Art, History and Philosophy, Political Economy and Political Science, Literature and Law, Commerce and Industry. If the aspiring journalist gives himself this varied training, he can rest assured of his success in the profession, and he will also have earned the title of

"contemporary historian," which has justly been bestowed on the work-a-day reporter.

(3) How Long to Dictate

The question of how much dictation practice one should take every day is of considerable interest to students, and there is a rather sharp diversity of opinion on the subject. The extreme view I have seen put forward in this connection is that of an American reporter, who advises "writing up to and past the point of muscular fatigue," and that each day's dictation should be at the highest speed the writer can command, and last up to two hours; while another American reporter says: "Write from dictation until your arms are ready to fall off—until your friends (whom you have conscripted as your readers) fly at the sight of you." I have known many writers take speed practice from half an hour to an hour at a time. When asked what objects were sought to be achieved by this fatiguing practice, they inquire how they can ever hope to write for long periods when engaged in a professional capacity, unless they have previously trained themselves for it by strenuous practice at home.

Apart from the tiresome physical and mental strain (which is bound to have its reaction) involved in such prolonged note-taking, what seriously detracts from its usefulness is that, in the great majority of cases, the notes are never read out, still less transcribed—a neglect to be strongly deprecated. Nor is this laborious note-taking an indispensable training for the exigencies of professional life. The two main avenues of employment open to shorthand writers may be put down, broadly, as the profession of the shorthand clerk, and that of the reporter. In the former, work is generally far lighter than, and does not generally call for such a high degree of skill as in the latter, consisting mostly of letters, notes, etc., capable of being easily accomplished by any shorthand writer of tolerable

efficiency. The position is different in regard to journalism, and particularly in regard to official verbatim reporting. In verbatim note-taking, a shorthand writer, when work is heavy, has to summon to his task all the resources he can command, both physical and mental. He sometimes finds himself engaged a whole day in taking a full record of a sensational trial in a law court, or an important speech of which a verbatim report has to be prepared, extending probably over more than an hour, and delivered rapidly. He is called upon pretty frequently to report a voluble witness examined by a commission of inquiry, the evidence lasting for several hours at a stretch, when questions and answers are tossed to and fro with bewildering rapidity. At the present time, wherever heavy reporting has to be done, and the transcript has to be got out quickly, the corps or relay system of note-taking is adopted invariably. The division of work which is thus effected enables the work to be finished with remarkable ease, and in an astonishingly short time. Nevertheless, work of this and kindred nature has sometimes to be done single-handed, and calls for exceptional ability on the part of the reporter. A competent reporter goes through such ordeals almost every day of his life, serenely confident and unruffled—ordeals that might well terrify the uninitiated.

Now the interesting question is: How do such reporters keep themselves in fettle for long spells of work? It is seldom that a professional reporter of any standing takes speed practice after the manner of students. In fact, he takes none for years together, provided he is frequently engaged in reporting work. What, then, is the mysterious source of this ever-ready ability? The secret of sustained writing at high speeds seems to lie not so much in training oneself to write "past the point of muscular fatigue" or "until the arms are ready to fall off," as in the possession of a substantial speed capacity in reserve, in case the rate of delivery is increased with terrific suddenenss. A writer

who can hardly go beyond 160 words will find it irksome to continue writing at that rate for, say, half an hour, whereas a writer who can take a satisfactory note at 200 words a minute will have very little difficulty in following, even for several hours at a time, a speaker whose average during the whole period of the delivery is appreciably less than this rate. Where, however, a fairly uniform rate of speed is maintained, and the reporter has a higher speed at his command, the reporting can be done with great accuracy and very little fatigue. There is another invisible driving power that keeps a reporter going on unflaggingly, however high the speed, and that is the force of necessity—the moral obligation to execute an allotted piece of work to the best of his ability and resources, and the upholding of his professional prestige. Writing to dictation till the breaking point is by no means valuable by itself as a training for expert professional note-taking.

My advice therefore is that at the lower rates of speed the dictation may well extend from twenty to thirty minutes. From 100 to 160, it would be sufficient to take down twice a day from ten to fifteen minutes at a time. Above 160, and up to 200 it is unnecessary, and would, in some cases, be difficult to take more than ten minutes. Above 200 it need hardly go beyond five or seven minutes. These are more or less approximate limits, and may be varied at discretion.

At the same time it is clearly undesirable that anyone should feel the task beyond his powers when called upon to perform a piece of rapid note-taking that extends over a period to which he is not normally accustomed. The muscles of some writers get stiff too soon under strain, and their writing is consequently rendered absolutely ill-shaped and illegible. A useful corrective for this is extensive copying of neat and accurate shorthand. This is, of course, a practice which is not nearly so efficacious as writing from dictation, as in the one case the training is

through the eyes, and in the other through the ears For those who cannot get a suitable dictator, or consider it *infra dig.* to take down dictation, the practice of copying is the only means of giving the fingers the necessary training. This is probably the only kind of practice that many reporters get for keeping their hand in form, and this is also the practice recommended to students, as it undoubtedly helps them to keep up the rate of speed which has been attained after laborious practice and at any rate, does not allow it to drop materially. At the same time, if a little time is devoted to transcribing or reading a portion of the matter copied, it will give the student a valuable insight into the peculiarities of his strokes and joinings; for it is a well-known fact that it is sometimes more difficult to read a passage copied slowly than notes rapidly taken down.

CHAPTER XV

THE TRANSCRIPT

IT has been said that the transcript is to the shorthand notes what a finished article is to the raw material. The aim, in fact, the very *raison d'être* of all shorthand writing is to be able to jot down spoken words with the rapidity with which they find expression, and then to turn the notes into their longhand equivalent. A shorthand writer who cannot do this efficiently would be failing in his essential function, and consequently unworthy to be so designated. Whether in the examination room, or in the work-a-day world, the one factor that decides the success or failure of a shorthand writer is the transcript which is, after all, the only tangible proof of his ability. He may claim to be able to write at a terrific rate. But his employer has no concern whatever either with his speed, or the technique of his shorthand notes, and does not care for, as he cannot understand, his cryptic circles and loops, dots and dashes. To him it is the finished product that counts. Too many errors in the transcript presented to an examiner will only get you " ploughed " again and again, which you probably do not worry about ; but in professional life they will cost you your very situation and means of livelihood. Even if they do not, possibly through the kindness of an indulgent employer, your reputation is bound to suffer seriously in his estimation, and you are sure to be relegated to the lower rungs of the professional ladder, there to plod on wearily for many a long year.

The ability to transcribe his notes accurately and quickly is what is demanded of every professional shorthand writer, and it should therefore be cultivated from the earliest stages. Some take quite a good note, but cannot read it

with facility, though other writers can decipher the same note easily. This defect arises mainly from want of training in reading one's own notes, and ignorance of the subject dealt with. The practice of always reading out the notes without at least periodical transcription, often gives rise to deceptive impressions. Where, for example, two or three writers take down the same matter and read it out by turns, the difficulties of one are removed at once by another. When the reading is over the general impression is likely to be that all had done well, whereas if each of them had transcribed independently, and compared the transcript rigorously with the original, a startling number of mistakes would be found to have been committed. The fact is that in reading out the notes, one is not made fully aware of one's shortcomings, nay, is even led to entertain an erroneous idea of one's capability. Transcription is therefore the only safe method of judging one's ability. Students who take up shorthand along with their ordinary school studies, and professional men who are overworked in office, often try to shirk transcription work because they cannot command, or think they cannot command the requisite leisure to transcribe every day. No one who is genuinely anxious to improve will delude himself with such shallow excuses, and, even if his difficulties are real, he will still try his best to overcome them. Where there is a will there is a way, and at least once a week every shorthand student should gauge his progress by submitting himself to a severe transcription test.

If the notes are read out, the ability to read as fast as possible should be acquired. There is nothing impossible in reading notes, taken even at high rates, with the rapidity with which they are taken down. This is the experience of all fast writers. Shorthand clerks are frequently asked by their chiefs to read over portions of notes, and shorthand writers in courts of law have to read over portions of evidence in order to clear up doubtful points. Frequent

pauses and awkward flounderings in reading are clear manifestations of incompetence, and an indication that the progress has not been on sound lines. If you come across a difficult word, think and be sure of what you give out. Do not get flustered, and make all sorts of silly mistakes, especially if you are reading before your chief or if the errors are going to count against you. Read at a deliberate pace throughout, grasping the sense as you go along.

It is well known that illegible shorthand can be more easily read than illegible longhand; but to read shorthand notes with the ease with which ordinary print is read, it is necessary that they should be legible, and legibility can only be secured by careful attention to rules, especially those relating to position. In rapid note-taking full insertion of vowels is next to impossible, and position is the only safe guide. The importance of paying proper attention to position, especially when writing at high speed, has been dealt with already in these pages, and should be borne in mind. Constant reading of Phonographic literature will enable you to acquire the power of instantaneous recognition of outlines, and materially facilitate transcription. The student should also sedulously study the peculiarities of his own style of writing, its defects and deceptions. As in longhand, each writer develops his own individual shorthand style. Experience will teach the writer, if only he will profit by it, the shapes his outlines have a tendency to assume under the stress of rapid writing. When the transcript is finished, and has been compared with the original, all the mistakes committed, both in the shorthand notes and in the transcript, should be noted down, and an exhaustive inquiry made to find out what particular defect has contributed to the mistake in each case. You may find that a word was not heard at all, or misheard; that a circle was unconsciously turned into a loop; that a half-length stroke had been made into a full-length stroke; that you had failed to insert an initial vowel where its presence

would have helped; that a word had been written in the wrong position; that there was a bad choice of outlines owing to your ignorance of the rules governing that particular word; that the word in question was an unfamiliar one, or that your mental confusion as regards the correct outline, on account of the impossible speed you attempted, led to its bad shape, and consequent illegibility. Systematic and searching introspection of this sort will soon develop, what may be called, the transcribing faculty, and give the writer a valuable insight into the theoretical soundness or otherwise of his notes. After prolonged drilling of this sort, mistakes may be altogether eliminated, and a good transcript rendered even from ill-written notes.

All the mental resources of a shorthand writer will have to be requisitioned when he has to wrestle with, and decipher a troublesome outline, and it is here that his knowledge of words comes into play effectively. Unless it is extensive, he may be landed easily in difficulties. At the occurrence of an outline that cannot be deciphered quickly, an alert shorthand writer will, by a process of permutation, try one after another a series of words which that outline may possibly represent, and aided by the context, will sooner or later get at the correct word. If, in spite of all his struggles he cannot decipher the outline, his best plan will probably be to circle it, proceed with the transcription, and come to it later on, when that mysterious symbol may perhaps condescend to disclose its identity. Sometimes you come across strange words, and you put them down anyhow for the nonce, hoping to recollect them when transcribing, and find to your disgust that your memory fails you at the time of transcription. Sometimes the correct word suggests itself to the writer as though by inspiration, and the troubled Phonographer catches hold of it with a joy akin to that of a man who has discovered a lost treasure.

Unless you are satisfied to the contrary, you must take

it that your notes were taken down correctly. Cases occur frequently where outlines are, whether unconsciously or deliberately, misread and the structure of sentences is altered to suit the wrong transcription. By way of illustration, I may mention that a sentence as dictated ran as follows: "And yet these wretched little scraps of paper move great ships laden with cargo." The shorthand writer inadvertently turned "wretched" into "are the" (a mistake quite liable to escape notice) and finding the sentence incomplete put in the word "that" before "move" imagining that he must have omitted to write it. Mistakes of this kind should be carefully guarded against, as in some cases they may result in serious perversion of the sense. Your transcript must, therefore, follow your notes as faithfully as possible in all cases. If, however, an outline remains defiant in spite of all attempts, a word suitable to the context may be put in, or the shorthand writer may follow that excellent maxim:

"When in doubt, leave it out"

rather than put in a word which perverts the sense. Guesswork and "cooking up" should never be had recourse to, except as a last resort, and even then only when the writer is sure of his ground.

At the same time, no portion of the notes should be silently passed over because it presents difficulties. Some lazy and unscrupulous shorthand writers are only too ready to do so, if it can be managed without being detected. No conscientious shorthand writer ever resorts to this step unless absolutely compelled, but makes every effort to decipher the outlines. I remember an occasion when two or three pages of rapidly written notes were very obdurate, and absolutely refused to disclose their secret at the first effort, looking more like the erratic wanderings of a crazy spider than shorthand notes. Reading and re-reading of the notes preceding and following that illegible portion at last gave me a clue to the subject, and further "hammering"

at the notes revealed a few outlines here and there. These served as the key words, and were of sufficient help to enable me to unravel practically the whole portion in a very short time. It is only the shorthand writer who enters upon his transcription work in the right spirit, that can appreciate the amount of intellectual enjoyment to be derived from the work of overcoming a defiant word or group of words. If you triumph, the confidence that is begotten of your victory will prove a powerful incentive to progress. The indifferent writer who skips over every obstacle in a light-hearted fashion is deprived of that intense enthusiasm that would otherwise be imparted to his work. Blissfully unconscious of his errors, he will go on committing them and adding to them, and will sooner or later get himself hopelessly discredited in regard to his reliability and efficiency as a shorthand writer. No one should, therefore, get excited or worried at the sight of difficulties. If only he perseveres cheerfully and intelligently, no obstacle can stand in his way.

Common sense enters largely into the work of transcription. Whether in reading or writing out, the sense should be followed invariably. In transcribing mechanically there is a danger of your being betrayed into the most absurd blunders. When an outline looks something different from what it ought to be, do not hesitate to put in the word which suits the context and is approved by your judgment. If you vacillate, you may be induced to put in another word against your better judgment, and later on find to your disgust and horror that the word you thought of first was after all the correct one. This is a frequent occurrence. Before the transcript leaves your hands, read it over carefully; see that every sentence represents a complete idea, and every paragraph a complete trend of ideas. Facility in composition will help you a good deal in this endeavour. When the matter is dictated off-hand, repetitions and unconscious errors of grammar and syntax are likely to

occur, and it is obviously part of the duty of the shorthand writer to put them right. Otherwise the chances are that the mistakes will be put down to his account, and it will be futile on his part to plead that the notes were correctly taken down. Indeed, he will even be expected to correct obvious errors in statements of fact, committed by his employer in the course of a hurried dictation. Wherever you feel the slightest doubt, refer to the notes, or, what is better, ask some one to read out the transcript, and check it with your notes. Be careful of your spelling and punctuation. Half a dozen mistakes in a typewritten page will, if corrected with pen, disfigure it altogether, and reflect great discredit on you; while lack of vigilant attention to commas and full stops may alter the sense of the passage altogether, and, if passed on unnoticed, might result in serious loss to your employer, financial and otherwise. You should be particularly careful about the accuracy of figures. Pressmen and others who generally write out their notes should cultivate a legible, and at the same time, a fast hand. Some reporters have been known to write out their copy at a sustained rate of 50 words a minute. Where the notes are typewritten, the transcript can be turned out at a rate faster than when typing from ordinary print, provided, of course, that the shorthand notes do not give trouble. Some writers are in the habit of reading over the notes before the transcription is begun. This is a waste of time, if the time taken is likely to count against you, and if the matter has been taken down fairly correctly. Where, however, there are too many doubtful points, it may help to read over the notes beforehand.

The number of mistakes permissible in transcripts is a subject of some interest. No one should attempt, or can be deemed to have acquired, a speed which he cannot "do" without committing more than 2 per cent of errors in the transcript. If the passages are of a technical and obscure nature, or of difficult and involved diction, a

slightly higher percentage may have to be allowed. As much as 5 per cent of errors is allowed in certain examinations. These probably include errors of commission and omission, as well as spelling and punctuation mistakes. Trivial errors, such as writing " a " for " an," which do not affect the sense or would have been avoided if the candidate had exercised a little more care are generally overlooked by some lenient examiners. Speaking generally, it may be said that, in the case of ordinary matter, transcripts with more than 3 or 4 per cent of errors can hardly be considered satisfactory.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME SIDE HELPS

ALTHOUGH a sound knowledge of the system and the acquisition of a reliable high speed are the two main considerations which every student keeps in view when he commences the study of shorthand, it is essential that he should also endeavour to supplement his studies by extraneous pursuits calculated to quicken his interest in the subject, and bring him into contact with fellow-Pitmanites pursuing the study with vigour and enthusiasm.

At the outset, reference may be made to the literature on the subject. The peculiar and pleasing feature of Phonography, which distinguishes it from other systems of shorthand writing, is the wealth and variety of its literature. Whether you are in need of books printed in Phonographic characters, information regarding the theory and practice of the art itself, or instruction regarding the utilization of the art for different kinds of professional work, Phonography offers a rich field for exploration. A fairly large number of books has been printed in beautifully engraved shorthand in different styles to meet the requirements of students in all stages of progress. It is needless to say that works of this kind give one's studies a strong literary bias. Besides these, there is the constant stream of Phonographic periodicals, which, by reason of the opportunities they afford for constant exchange and discussion of views, are valuable assets to the aspiring shorthand writer.

The possession of a collection of useful and interesting Phonographic literature, both in shorthand and letterpress, ought to be a source of pride to every Phonographer who takes a lively interest in the art. It is deeply to be regretted that of the great number of students who take up the study

of Phonography, and attain to varying degrees of proficiency in it, only very few possess what may be deemed a decent collection of Phonographic books. I know many fast writers who have not seen or read shorthand literature beyond the *Instructor*, a phrase book or two, and a few magazines—in fact the irreducible minimum of study requisite for a shorthand writer's professional equipment. The lack of extraneous study, whether due to deliberate neglect or indifference, is the cause of a good deal of ignorance. I can recall easily instances of Phonographers of several years' standing who know nothing of even the most important events in the life and career of Sir Isaac Pitman.

The advantages to the aspiring student of the possession of a useful set of Phonographic works are as obvious as they are manifold. An intelligent study of them will stimulate and sustain his interest in the art, and give him a valuable insight into the conditions of professional shorthand writing. It will widen his horizon, and place him in a position to give useful advice to struggling young Phonographers. If you have got a good collection of books, the news invariably gets abroad. Ardent Phonographers come to you for books, and a feeling of *camaraderie* is bound to permeate. It is not, of course, intended that a great number of books should be collected all at once. A wise selection of books purchased with whatever money you can lay aside conveniently for the purpose from time to time, will find you in the course of a few years in the possession of a fine set of literature. Investment in such books as *The Shorthand Writer*, *Life of Sir Isaac Pitman*, *Acquisition of Speed in Shorthand*, *A Chapter in the Early History of Phonography*, to name only a few, is money well spent. They are a source alike of inspiration and intellectual enjoyment.

Though the foregoing remarks are intended primarily for the student, they apply with added force to the shorthand

teacher. Ignorance of the kind to which I have referred, though possibly excusable in the case of students and professional writers, is unpardonable in the case of a shorthand teacher who takes upon himself the duty of instructing. The successful teacher is one who has a fund of information at his command, which he can effectively utilize for the benefit of his pupils. To this end it is absolutely necessary that he should have made a thorough study of a wide range of Phonographic literature. This will enable him to impart great vivacity to his teaching, and foster enthusiasm in his pupils. A spirited discourse, for example, on the thrilling performances of eminent reporters will put more courage into a desponding student, and rouse him to exertion than any amount of insipid lecturing on the acquisition of speed. Every shorthand teacher should, therefore, not only possess a good collection of books, but should also be in a position to offer sound advice to students as to what to read and how to profit by the reading.

Another useful direction in which a shorthand writer might utilize his knowledge of the art is keeping a diary. To a person ignorant of shorthand, diary writing is rendered a task by reason of his being compelled to record his ideas in drawling longhand. But a competent Phonographer can by a few dashes of the pen accomplish the work of keeping up a diary in perhaps one-sixth of the time, with the added advantages of economy of space and secrecy.

It is, of course, true that there is very little in the happenings of the more or less prosaic lives of most of us that are of any momentous consequence, or of more than parochial interest, and the diaries of hundreds of people will be little more than a monotonous record of the banalities of their daily routine, of perhaps the changing conditions of the atmosphere, or of trifling incidents. Nevertheless, the continuous recording of casual events, however insignificant, and the unrestrained vent which a writer naturally gives to his feelings in his diary (which, by the way, is not intended

for other eyes), acquire a fascinating interest with the lapse of time. It has been observed that age puts the last and the most perfect touch to a diary, as it does to wine. The truth of this must be obvious to every diarist. An apparently insignificant or inscrutable occurrence of to-day may assume considerable importance in the light of subsequent events, and give the writer an insight into the mysterious sequence of a series of events, their cause and effect. I have kept diaries continuously for a great number of years, and when in my moments of leisure I glance over a few pages of one of the earlier diaries, events several years old at once crowd upon my mind with refreshing vividness, transporting into the living present, and enlivening what are really the dry bones of a dead and forgotten past. As a piece of steady Phonographic exercise, a trustworthy chronicle of the past, and a handy reference book, a diary is delectable and instructive.

Besides the daily record, I would advise every student to maintain two volumes. These should consist of ruled paper bound together in a convenient shape. One of these should be used as a scrap book, for keeping extracts in neat shorthand of all interesting passages relating to shorthand subjects that you meet with, and also any matter whether prose or poetry, which impresses you generally either on account of its literary merit, or the beauty of the thoughts it embodies. A perusal of this collection of *pot-pourri* in your leisure hours cannot fail to be a source of great enjoyment and instruction.

The other bound volume should be divided into two sections, one set apart for noting down shorthand outlines and the other shorthand phrases, etc. In recording the outlines of unfamiliar or difficult words occurring in the course of your practice, it would be well to divide the page into three columns and put down first the word, then its meaning as ascertained from the dictionary, and its correct stenographic outline. In a few years, this book will be of

great help in enabling you to remember, and retain permanently what you have been at some pains to learn. If you are not blessed with a retentive memory, this book should be referred to constantly, and the contents memorized systematically.

One other important direction in which you can utilize your knowledge of shorthand is your correspondence with other writers who have attained proficiency more or less on a level with yours. In this connection, Pitmanites will do well to take a lesson from the Inventor who conducted a stupendous amount of epistolary work in his neat and inimitable shorthand characters. An ill-written outline gives much annoyance to the reader, and may even lead to misunderstanding. Never, therefore, use an outline which is not authorized by the textbook, or which your friend cannot decipher. A neat and steady style of Phonographic writing will do a great deal to promote accuracy and legibility, which will help you appreciably in your transcription work.

CHAPTER XVII

WORKING IN ASSOCIATION

IT has been pointed out in one of the earlier chapters that the conditions under which the study of shorthand can be prosecuted at the present day differ materially from those that obtained about fifty or even twenty-five years ago. Facilities for the study of Phonography in the early days of its propagation are hardly worth speaking of. The text-books were not so elaborate and self-explanatory as they are to-day. Phonographers were few and scattered, and seldom met each other. Nor did there exist then so many excellent shorthand periodicals that we find to-day. Organized shorthand schools and competent teachers were few. To the aspiring student, there were practically no books affording the instruction necessary for equipping himself for any line of shorthand work which he might intend to pursue. The task of the learners must therefore have been a very trying one indeed. Nevertheless, the fact remains that some of the ablest writers were men who belonged to this period. In a sense, the difficult conditions of the earlier days were fruitful of good, because they were powerful incentives to perseverance. For better or worse, the conditions have in every way altered, and the innumerable ready-made helps provided at the present time have had the deplorable effect of restricting the exercise of some of the higher faculties of reasoning and imagination on the part of students, and producing a rather dull and stereotyped uniformity of thought and action.

The present-day student, therefore, has not got to encounter difficulties of the kind that his forerunners had to face. For a self-taught student, the existing facilities

are fairly ample. The textbooks are exceedingly clear, and several explanatory handbooks deal with the rules in a chatty and instructive way. If he so desires, the student may get lessons by post from those who offer them. He can clear his doubts by writing to one or other of the shorthand periodicals which answer queries. Working solitarily, however, he is hardly likely to acquire that wide outlook of the subject that he will undoubtedly do by working in association with fellow shorthand writers. In the old days, many splendid writers acquired the art solely through self-exertion, because circumstances denied them the advantages of an instructor. But with the growth of numerous shorthand schools, there is no reason why a shorthand student should not lighten his task by securing the services of a competent teacher. There is nothing which imparts so much zest to one's progress as working in companionship. Difficult points are cleared up, misconceptions removed the moment they occur, and correct ideas are instilled. The interchange of thoughts acts as a corrective of prejudices and immature views, while enthusiasm and a spirit of emulation are fostered; the progress is rapid and the mutual benefits obtained are lasting.

Every enthusiastic writer should discover and work in companionship with writers in his neighbourhood who pursue their study with vigour and enthusiasm. In the old days, shorthand writers' associations were the natural outcome of this desire for commingling of ideas. One of their most useful functions was the imparting of instruction in the theory, as good teachers were rare. It has been observed that with the great increase in the number of qualified expounders of the system, shorthand writers' associations should cease to exist, more especially as they trench on the province of the professional teacher. To a certain extent this may be true. But shorthand associations, if adapted to changing environments, have a distinct

function to fulfil, and ought to have a bright future before them.

In every shorthand writers' association there should be kept a good stock of shorthand and, if possible, of general literature also, which should be made the fullest use of. Regular speed classes for advanced writers should be conducted. Competitive tests should also be held at frequent intervals, as these impart animation to the pursuit of high speed. Periodical addresses should be delivered on shorthand and allied subjects and also on literary, historical and general topics. Moot lectures should be delivered by one or other of the members, and a few advanced students should take advantage of the opportunity to report them, and afterwards to compare notes. This will prove a valuable training ground for professional reporting. At the same time, the social side of the association should not be lost sight of. Excursions and picnic parties afford a pleasing diversion from the ordinary activities of a shorthand writers' association, and contribute to the fostering of a spirit of *esprit de corps*, and fraternity among the members.

As a medium of solid instruction, and a means of aiding one's powers of composition, evercirculators have exerted, and are exerting, a wonderful influence on Phonographers in England. From the days of their origination, they have been the means of bringing enthusiastic Phonographers together, and contributing to their improvement and intellectual recreation.

An evercirculator may be described as a manuscript magazine written in shorthand, and circulated among the members who band themselves together for the purpose of conducting it. The list of members is limited to a convenient number, and the person in general charge of the circulation is called a "conductor." The actual method of contributing articles varies in practice, but generally one of the members starts a discussion on a subject relating

to shorthand or any interesting topic, literary, historical, etc., avoiding of course, all controversial subjects which might give rise to unpleasant feelings. After expressing his views, he sends it on to the conductor, who after recording what he has to say passes it on to the other members who express their opinions, and circulate it among themselves in the order in which their names appear in the list appended to the magazine. Every member is allowed to peruse all that has been written by the other members, and finally the magazine is returned to the conductor, who will start a fresh discussion, and set the evercirculator on its round again. Each member pays a small sum per month to meet postage and other incidental charges. Both resident and non-resident members are admitted.

The many-sided advantages of the evercirculator are obvious. Written in neat shorthand, it gives the young aspiring shorthand writer an insight into many new outlines, besides increasing his knowledge of vocabulary. His powers of composition are stimulated, as every time a magazine comes into his hands, he is bound to contribute to the discussion, though his production need not necessarily be original. If he is a well-read man with a good range of information, he will ordinarily be able to write off-hand. If not, he will be compelled to consult books bearing on the subject under discussion. This practice must in a short time widen his knowledge. Besides, he gets the benefit of the superior knowledge of members abler than himself. Many valuable friendships can be formed through the medium of evercirculators. As an incentive to work and a source of enlightenment, evercirculators are hard to beat, and should have in the future an even more important sphere of usefulness than in the past. Every shorthand student who has made sufficient progress, and is in a position to profit by it should join one or other of the evercirculators conducted in his neighbourhood. If none exists, he should certainly try to bring about the creation of one.

The advantages of working in association with enthusiastic shorthand writers were brought home to me in a striking manner in connection with the reading of shorthand magazines. Many a student reads shorthand matter solitarily. Now and again he comes across outlines he is unable to decipher, despite his best efforts. If no key has been printed alongside, there is every possibility of his reading outlines incorrectly, and proceeding under the impression that they have been accurately deciphered. Where it is clearly impossible to make out the outline, the reader circles it and waits to consult another Pitmanite. Too many difficult outlines may perhaps depress him. In any case, he is not likely to go through his work with that degree of enthusiasm he would certainly possess if he were to read the magazines in company with a zealous fellow-writer. I can still remember the earnestness with which pages after pages of shorthand journals were read out in this way in my student days. The ambition was to read printed or lithographed shorthand with the rapidity with which ordinary print is read. What added animation to the study was the imposition of a small penalty for failure to decipher an outline, the amount being payable to whoever gives out the correct word first. The effect of this practice was highly stimulating. Enthusiasm was always kept at the glowing point, while the eagerness of everyone to decipher the outline before the rest was conducive to the development of a high degree of concentration of thought.

I would advise every shorthand student whose ambition is to utilize his knowledge of shorthand for professional purposes to divine, as far as he can, the particular line of work he intends to take up. In doing so, he should be guided by his own sincere conviction as to what he has got the necessary aptitude and taste for, and should not, yielding to outside pressure, choose a career for which he is not qualified, both physically and mentally. By a process of careful introspection, any intelligent man ought

to be able to form some idea of the line of work for which he is best fitted. If he is able to do this, and is willing to exert, he can hope to achieve tolerable success in his own sphere, however humble. Whatever the nature of the employment he desires to seek, he should secure the friendship of a sympathetic Phonographer who has already achieved some distinction in the particular line he has in view, and try to learn as much as he can about that particular department of work. This will enable him to work with a singleness of purpose.

If the student intends to pursue journalism, he should lose no time in getting into touch with a capable professional reporter. Without some previous training, he will fail to make a mark in the profession. He may be able to take down at more than 200 words a minute from private dictation, but nevertheless collapse in the attempt to report a speech delivered at 160. Mere ability to write at a tremendous rate does not by itself constitute a valuable asset. The story has been told of an amateur speed-writer who, when instructed to condense his report to about half the length of the verbatim report, innocently inquired which half he should condense! To the uninitiated, professional reporting is a sealed book. Like every trade, the reporting profession has also its own secrets, so to call them, and one has to probe into them to find out their mysteries. Nor would a theoretical study of instruction books by itself help much.

Perhaps a narration of my own experiences will help Phonographers to realize the sort of training I have in mind. When my speed was ample, I was anxious to try my hand at reporting, and incidentally earn something, if possible. I had the good fortune to get into touch with an able reporter on a daily newspaper, who had achieved a well-merited reputation. I requested to be allowed to accompany him whenever he was going out for important reporting work. Both of us took full notes, and the

report, whether verbatim or condensed, was dictated to me. I transcribed the dictated notes in due course, and got the report ready for the press. When I did this in about a dozen cases I gained a valuable insight into the secret of going about the work. When taking down the notes from dictation, I was all-observant. I was particularly so when condensed reports were dictated. Many passages which, I felt sure, would find a place in the report either because of the beauty of their diction, or their rhetorical effect, were ruthlessly brushed aside as irrelevant, or dismissed in a few words. It was not till I read the finished report that I perceived the wisdom of what at first struck me as merciless pruning. After a short time, I took notes on my own account, prepared reports independently, and compared them with those that appeared in print. This was a fresh revelation of my shortcomings, and a valuable piece of self-instruction. With the help and guidance of my friend, I had by this time tried my hand at several phases of reporting work. I was now looking forward eagerly to being entrusted with some independent piece of work. I can still remember the suspicion with which my reporting powers were viewed at the time. It was not till I inspired some confidence, and till an opportunity presented itself accidentally, that I was allowed to report a meeting single-handed. It was on a day when fortunately for me there were a number of engagements, and one of the reporters was not available. It was not without considerable misgiving that I was asked to furnish a condensed report of one of the meetings. The speaker was a well-known person, and I have every reason to be gratified with my first piece of work. What helped to restore confidence in me was the charge of misreporting levelled by the speaker at one or two of the reports which appeared in the other papers, and his graceful acknowledgment that the report I furnished was an accurate presentation of what was spoken. Since then I was entrusted with

highly responsible work as occasions offered themselves—work which benefited me intellectually and pecuniarily. The training I got was of priceless value. It served not only to give me an insight into the realities of everyday work, but also dispelled all nervousness and vague apprehensions, and fostered a feeling of stubborn self-confidence. I must add that, throughout, all my work as amanuensis was rendered cheerfully and gratuitously.

To those aspiring to take up reporting as a profession, my serious advice is to do likewise. There is no better way of learning to do a thing than actually doing it, for when all is said and done, nothing helps so much as the school of practical experience; and the old saying that an ounce of practice is worth more than a ton of theory is as true in the domain of shorthand writing as in other fields of human activity.

CHAPTER XVIII

MASTERY OF THE RULES

At some stage or other during his study, every enthusiastic student of shorthand develops an absorbing mania for speed. The ability to write at a high rate, and read back the notes with the rapidity with which they were taken down, is bound to make a profound impression on any ardent shorthand student. If he witnesses a demonstration of this ability, the sight haunts him. If he is an aspiring type of individual, he passionately looks forward to the day when he will himself be able to perform a similar feat. In his elated frame of mind, he may perhaps forget the amount of uphill work that a fast writer must have gone through before he could perform that dexterous feat. The apparent ease and freedom with which it is accomplished may possibly delude him into thinking "Surely nothing is easier." But his delusions are certain to be rudely shattered if he tries to enter the arena of high speed without having undergone what has been well called the "demnition grind," which all fast writers must necessarily have gone through.

The student's one insistent question is: When shall I commence high speed? This craving is dictated by impatience at what appears to him the slow progress he is making. This feeling of uneasiness prompts him to hurry through the theory, in order that he may commence speed at the earliest possible moment. With a knowledge of the rules, which can only be described as imperfect and ill-digested, such writers only go to swell the ranks of failures.

It is, therefore, well to emphasize at the outset the absolute necessity of a thorough grasp of the system. In

fact, next to the possession of a sound general education, nothing is fraught with greater consequences than a mastery of the rules. Many of the hindrances to speed are directly traceable either to an imperfect comprehension of the rules, or the incapacity to apply them to any particular word with spontaneous effect. Never underrate the value of, or skip over, any portion of the textbook, either because its application is not of frequent occurrence, or its importance not very obvious to you. In the economy of the grand edifice built up by the Architect of Bath, each tiny component has its own vital part to play, and cannot be safely ignored. Of course, the temptation to take up fresh chapters when the previous ones have not been thoroughly mastered, proves sometimes irresistible, but this impulse should be repressed sternly. It is not sufficient merely to have grasped the *rationale* of a principle. It is here that a shorthand exmination differs from a viva voce test or any ordinary school examination. The hand has also to be trained to move as fast as the brain can think, for unless they co-operate, high speed is impossible. Indeed, the facility to jot down the characters with ease and grace is the result of prolonged training of the hand. It is therefore essential that not only should a rule be mastered but that the exercises bearing upon it should be written numberless times over. The greater this number, the more lasting the benefit. When you have finished a particular exercise in the textbook, you should turn your attention to the corresponding portions in such books as the *Shorthand Writing Exercises*, which bear on the rule in question. This is a valuable publication which opens up to the student a wealth of words and well-arranged sentences. These should be written as many times as possible. See that your outlines do not deteriorate slowly, as the writing proceeds. The last copying should present the same appearance in point of neatness and geometrical accuracy as the first. If this is carefully borne in mind, the legibility

of the notes will not suffer, even where notes are taken at high rates.

Extensive copying of exercises and extraneous matter in accurate shorthand and slow dictation should be all that the student should aim at until he reaches the speed room. If he has done this, he should certainly be able to commence speed at the substantial rate of 80 words a minute.

No student should lose touch with the theory even after he has commenced high speed practice. Even fast writers feel some embarrassment when they have to put down words in full, for which shorter and more facile forms have been provided in the textbooks. This is the result of being long out of touch with the textbooks. The most effective remedy for this is to read the best Phonographic magazines. The advantages of this practice are well known. It serves to keep your knowledge of the theory alive. It furnishes you with the ideal forms for words and phrases. Hundreds of new words are added to your vocabulary. The very intensity of the mental images of forms produced by constant reading enables you to put them down without the slightest hesitancy whenever they occur; for the secret of fast writing consists chiefly among other things, in the power of instantaneous mental conception of the outline of any strange word, and this power can only be acquired as the result of a thorough grasp of each and every rule, which in its turn, presupposes a prolonged course of patient and intelligent practice, both in reading and writing.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW TO PREPARE FOR A SHORTHAND EXAMINATION

No one who frequently comes into contact with students undergoing speed training can fail to be struck with the fallacious and conceited notions entertained by the more simple-minded or boastful among them regarding their speed capability. The tendency is to overrate it, and in some cases grossly so. One very often comes across writers who have no idea of their real speed, but innocently give out that it is somewhere between 120 and 200. Many students affect not to know their speed. When asked, they simply say that they have never cared seriously to test their speed. Some fondly believe that their actual rate of speed is the one at which they pretend to write, and not the one at which they can take down and transcribe accurately. Not a few feel elated unduly at the freedom with which easy passages are taken down, and draw deceptive conclusions from short tests of a minute or two's duration. When applying for situations, candidates are generally tempted to over-state their speed. A careful employer will no doubt interview the candidate, and satisfy himself by a practical test whether he is getting his money's worth, but a shorthand writer who tries to mislead his would-be employer is sure to disgrace himself if, on trial, he is found not to be up to the standard he had indicated.

At the same time, it is remarkable the way these self-constituted high speed men fight shy of submitting their capacity to a proper test. At the mere mention of it, some excuse or other is sure to be put forward quickly. They will plead spiritedly that their usual writing instruments

are not in their possession at the particular moment, that they are not feeling well, or that for some days past they have had to suspend their practice owing to indifferent health, or other reasons, and that therefore they are not in their best form. Of course, cases are conceivable where a writer is prevented from exhibiting the degree of skill that he has really acquired, owing to genuine indisposition, or other satisfactory reasons. But in the great majority of cases, where a man, after ostentatiously laying claim to a certain degree of proficiency, turns tail when a test is proposed, he may without hesitation be put down for an idle vaunter.

Every student who takes speed practice regularly, and is honestly of opinion that he has attained a certain degree of skill should gauge his progress by submitting himself to a *bona fide* test, and there is no more satisfactory or conclusive test of one's capability than a public examination, for which ample facilities exist at the present time.

Every examination successfully gone through represents a milestone in the student's path of progress. Success at an examination is often a revelation of his capacity, and ought to prove an incentive to further exertion. Unfortunately, in the case of some persons, success only serves to lull all aspirations, and generate a false sense of self-satisfaction, and a disinclination to go beyond the bounds of mediocrity. On the other hand, some men never acknowledge defeat, and in their case failure acts only as a spur to work with renewed vigour. In some instances, however, failure has the opposite effect of driving a student away from the study altogether. No one should, therefore, feel unduly elated at success, or unduly depressed at failure. Success would be of little avail if it did not impel a person to conquer fresh woods and pastures new, and failure would have no significance, and, indeed, failed in its object if it did not serve as an eye-opener to your shortcomings, and warn you to proceed along right lines.

The overwhelming majority of students taking up the

study of shorthand go through the ordeal of the examination hall at some period or other. The possession of a certificate issued by a responsible examining body marks out its winner as an individual of some merit, and generally imparts to his capacity a definite market value. A reliable speed certificate is, moreover, a good corrective of nebulous or exaggerated notions of speed. A student, for example, who is never tired of bragging that he can do more than 160 words a minute, but fails to pass a genuine test at 100, will thenceforward cease to trumpet his speed powers. There can be no doubt that a hard won certificate, especially at the higher rates of speed, stamps its possessor as a person of untiring industry, good mental capacity and fairly all-round general ability. Though occasionally certificated speed writers have been known to fail in actual work, owing mainly to lack of experience, it can hardly be gainsaid that a high speed certificate is a hallmark of one's capabilities, and is, by itself, a strong recommendation in obtaining a situation.

There is therefore nothing surprising that the number of candidates who appear at public examinations is increasing every year. The failures at previous examinations are a not inconsiderable factor in contributing to this phenomenal rise in the total number of candidates, and the reports of examiners go to show that the causes of failure are manifold.

A shorthand examination is different from ordinary school examinations. In a written examination, the criterion is really one of memory—the capacity for absorbing and repeating the ideas of other men. You may, therefore, neglect your studies at school for the major part of the year, but work hard just for a month or two before the examination, and manage to secure a creditable pass. But this cannot be done in the case of a shorthand examination. You cannot idle away long periods in the hope of increasing your speed at a bound by working at high pressure for a few days. To get through a shorthand

examination successfully, necessarily pre-supposes a long course of patient, systematic and tenacious practice. Working in a happy-go-lucky fashion will not help. It is a good idea to enter for a speed at least twenty words lower than that you can ordinarily command. This will ensure a satisfactory transcript, and, if you succeed, prove a great incentive to further efforts. Some writers advise that speed practice should not be taken on the day of the examination. I do not attach any great importance to this suggestion. Be at the hall, and at your seat some time in advance of the examination hour. See that your seat is comfortable and of the proper elevation. Your writing materials should preferably be the same as those you are accustomed to. If you are using a pencil, keep a good stock of it on the table, and have the pencils pointed at both ends. Before the dictation commences, it would be a good thing to jot down rapidly a few sentences from memory, in order to prepare the hand for the start. You will do well to write the first few sentences in a bold style, and then in neat and smaller characters, or in your habitual style as you get settled down. When taking down, your ears should be alert, while the mind must be absolutely concentrated on the matter dictated. Never glance at your neighbours as the dictation proceeds. This is likely to work mischief in your case, and also embarrass the person looked at. The leaves should be turned over quickly and silently. Do not necessarily wait till the last line on the page is finished. Some students continue writing to the very bottom of the page. This is a very objectionable and risky practice, as the outlines written below the last line on the page get crowded together, and, not being written in position, present considerable difficulty in deciphering.

To many students who do quite well at home, the thought of going through an examination proves a bugbear. The reasons are obvious. At home your mind is at ease. You are alone or with friends. You are at your usual seat, and

an indulgent dictator probably accommodates himself to the necessities of your case, and allows you to pull him up as you like. On the contrary, the excitement inseparable from an examination room, especially to persons liable to neurotic affections, is detrimental to that calmness which is so essential to the performance of all difficult shorthand work. The heart probably beats faster. You feel that your reputation is on trial. There is the anxiety to get through the examination, on which may depend the chances of your getting a decent billet. You are in unfamiliar surroundings. You have to write to a voice with the intonations and eccentricities of which you are probably not familiar. The sight of a crowd of other examinees sitting around you, and possibly of a few spectators looking at your writing, may disconcert you, and add to your excitement.

Nervous breakdown is a malady which affects a great number of candidates in varying degrees of severity. Some are by temperament excitable, and the atmosphere of the examination hall serves to heighten the excitement. In many cases the nervousness is to be traced directly to lack of confidence. A writer who is sure of his speed seldom falters. But the student who comes ill-prepared gets shaky and collapses, either at the start, or as the dictation proceeds. If he mishears a group of words, or is disturbed by noise of any kind, he is thrown off his balance. Some scribble badly when commencing, but go on splendidly as soon as their hands get into the swing of it. Loss of words when turning over leaves is a frequent occurrence with inexperienced writers. Many a candidate emerges out of the ordeal in a bath of perspiration, with fagged muscles, and possibly panting breath. After this distressing experience, he thinks it better to go home and try again. Some roll up their note-books even as the dictation is proceeding. Some pretend to transcribe, but never hand in the transcript. They do not leave the hall, but prefer to

sit tight watching how their more fortunate comrades are getting on.

The crux of the whole matter is that the great majority of candidates who appear at examinations either do not equip themselves for their task properly, or, as is more probable, attempt an impossible speed. The candidate would therefore be well advised to go in for a speed at least twenty words below that he can confidently take down. It is better to pass a modest test creditably than fail ignominiously at a speed which you cannot tackle. Above all, satisfy yourself thoroughly as to your competence by undergoing beforehand tests at home under conditions similar to, or stiffer than, those you will have to face, and the examination hall will then hardly have any terrors for you. You should also at frequent intervals try your hand at a rate ten or twenty words in excess of your maximum speed limit, with a view to train the hand to move fast, and give you an idea of what your notes look like when you go beyond your normal speed.

It is well to sound a note of warning in regard to examinations, and their real significance. The mere fact of the possession of a high-speed certificate does not *ipso facto* connote that its holder has prepared himself for the trials of everyday work; nor should it lead him to entertain too flattering an estimate of his own capability. It is, of course, true that the ability to write at a high rate is ordinarily a strong recommendation in one's favour, but unless it is backed up by qualifications in other directions it will be of little avail in practical work. It is therefore eminently desirable that a shorthand candidate's knowledge of the language and its grammar, his powers of composition, and range of general information, should also be submitted to a severe test, and that the conferment of a speed certificate should be absolutely conditional on the candidate satisfying the examiners in regard to his general mental equipment. Those who are entrusted with the

duty of examining shorthand candidates will be doing a priceless service, not only to the students themselves, but also those who employ shorthand writers if they take up this suggestion, for it is a deplorable fact that many writers, despite their triumphant speed records, are utterly incompetent to give a good account of themselves in actual everyday work.

CHAPTER XX

THE BEDROCK OF HIGH SPEED

"I DESIRE to lay it down as an axiom which admits of no dispute that if success is to be attained not only must the art (of shorthand) be studied intelligently and diligently, but the same intelligence and diligence must be devoted to other subjects; that the general field of knowledge should be as widely cultivated as possible; that no opportunity should be lost of adding to the stores of information already possessed." It was in this forceful and unmistakable language that that veteran Phonographer, the late Mr. Thomas Allen Reed, sought to give a hint and a solemn warning to those who aspire to success in the profession of shorthand writing. It is a hint and a warning that, unfortunately, are only too often lost sight of, or lightly treated. There is no greater service that a shorthand teacher can render his pupil than that of bringing home to him that the highest stenographic skill in the world will be of little avail, unless it is accompanied by a taste for mental pursuits, and a desire for the constant expansion of the bounds of knowledge.

Among the many qualifications indispensable to a successful shorthand writer, the foremost place must be given unhesitatingly to the possession of a sound grasp of the language, and a good all-round knowledge of men and things. I have never yet known a shorthand writer who achieved any remarkable success in the profession who did not possess a tolerably good working knowledge of English and was not fairly well-informed, for there is no denying that those who have a good grounding in the language are the quickest to master Phonography, and turn it to the best advantage. Likewise, the poor progress made by

many students, and the absurd mistakes of spelling and grammar they commit in their transcription work, point unmistakably to the real source of weakness. When a student complains that in spite of sincere attempts, his speed shows no signs of increase and is inclined to put the blame either on the pen, the note-book, the dictator or the passage, my first suspicion turns on the adequacy of his knowledge of English, and this I have invariably found to be weak. While a good knowledge of grammar and the structure of sentences enables a writer to arrive at the correct word, even where the outline is obstructive or misleading, a student whose grammar is weak will fall readily into the most ridiculous errors, in spite of the words having been taken down correctly.

The question then arises: What degree of general knowledge should a student possess before he commences the study of shorthand? It has been rather gravely suggested in some quarters that nothing less than a university degree will suffice for the beginner at shorthand. However much this might be desirable, it altogether ignores the practical side of the question. The great majority of shorthand students begin their study very early in life, and a good many take up shorthand alongside their general education. It would therefore be impossible to expect them to bring with them the hall-mark of a university at so early an age. Nor is such a high degree of efficiency absolutely necessary. It ought to be quite sufficient for practical purposes if the student is possessed of a good knowledge of spelling, and a tolerable acquaintance with the fundamental principles of grammar, and the structure of sentences. This will help over many a pitfall in the early stages, though it will be found inadequate for professional purposes. After all, what one learns at school is infinitely smaller and of less value than what one learns for himself. What is self-taught is retained longer, and exercises a more stimulating influence.

Your aim should be the constant widening of your mental horizon. The habit of reading should therefore be cultivated very early in life. Take in your studies from as extensive a range as possible. Politics, especially the current politics of one's own country, historical works, ancient and modern, literary productions of the more important standard authors and the biographies of eminent men of all countries and of all time should, among other subjects, receive special attention. Be a regular reader of the newspaper, and keep yourself fully acquainted with everything that is taking place around you. Store up every little grain of knowledge, and occasions are bound to occur when it will help you wonderfully. Never meet a new word without finding out its correct pronunciation and meaning, and adding it to your stock of words. When you come across exceptionally well-written passages, read them over and over again, digest them, and make them part of your mental equipment. In this attempt shorthand will be of valuable help. It is a good plan to set apart a portion of each day for copying out in neat shorthand works of literary merit. This practice, while helping your shorthand, improves your knowledge of English indirectly. Besides, in the course of his daily work, the student comes across splendid specimens of English in the matter he takes up for reading and dictation practice, and, if he goes about his work in the right spirit, he will soon find his knowledge of English improving unconsciously and greatly.

It may appear that too much stress is sought to be laid on, what some may be inclined to consider, a more or less side issue. But it is imperative that the most solemn warning should be sounded that speed built upon inadequate knowledge can be no more relied on than a house built upon quicksands. No speed, however high, can supply the deficiencies arising from an imperfect comprehension of the language, and a dull brain which fails to appreciate the

sense of the passage taken down. The marked ease with which ill-shaped and troublesome Phonographic outlines surrender themselves, and reveal their identity to a cultured Phonographer strikingly illustrates the value of a brain well stored with useful knowledge—the bedrock without which no lasting speed edifice is possible, and which makes all the difference between success and failure.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PHYSICAL AND METAPHYSICAL ASPECTS OF HIGH SPEED

It has been remarked that, if the many elements which go to contribute to the successful performance of fast note-taking be analysed, a whole "phalanx of excellencies" will be found to have advanced together, such as a quick sense of hearing, freedom of hand movement, accuracy and neatness of outlines, good phrasing, adherence to the rules of the textbook, and so on. These are, no doubt, all of them valuable in their own way. But by themselves they do not count for much, and can only be likened to the rank and file of an army without a chief in supreme command to control and direct them. Such a commanding officer for our purposes is the brain. Many a writer, whenever he is oppressed with a feeling of despair at his own incompetence, is inclined to put the blame on his lack of manual dexterity, the unsuitability of the writing instrument, the difficult nature of the passage, or the incapacity of the dictator, while the real fault probably lies somewhere else —in the impotence of the brain to think and act with the requisite promptitude.

In the course of a scientific disquisition delivered several years ago on the subject of the relation of the human brain to the ear, special attention was drawn to the many intricate processes going on unconsciously in the brain of the reporter while he is engaged on his task. It was observed that very few realize "the many mechanical processes which intervene between the bit of flat steel sheeting and the finished pen. Fewer still have any notion of the cerebral processes, many and complex, silent and swift, which take place in the brief moment of time between the entrance of

spoken sounds into our ears, and the emergence from our fingers of the symbols into which the heard sounds have been transformed. The subject involves one of the most difficult and intricate problems of brain physiology." The fact of the matter is that if the ears fail to catch the words accurately, or the brain is unable to comprehend the outlines with alertness, the hand, which after all can only be the agent of the brain, is deprived of its motive power, and in consequence fidgets and falters, like a man out of his wits. It is the brain that supplies the hand with a steady and spontaneous stream of signs for spoken words. It is, in fact, the repository of Phonographic outlines and can invent symbols at lightning speed for any outlandish words hurled down from the speaker's lips. If therefore a strange word is suddenly encountered in the course of rapid speed work, and the writer cannot quickly conceive the correct outline for it, the instantaneous effect is that the mind is thrown off its track, and gets confused. The reflex of this is at once visible in the hand, which gets shaky and rendered unable to move with alertness and confidence. Not only is that particular word lost or ill-written, but a number of subsequent words are either missed out also, or scribbled hopelessly. In some cases, the hesitancy may be due to attempting an impossible speed, or to the passage being an unusually difficult one. But where the rate is one that the writer can ordinarily tackle, the trouble may be traced to defective knowledge, and the feeling of nervousness arising therefrom. The celerity of the brain which is so indispensable to fast writing is the natural outcome of a wide knowledge of the vocabulary ordinarily met with, and the cultivated instinct of spontaneous mental perception of the outlines of unfamiliar words. In many cases the difficulty experienced in putting them down quickly will be found to arise from the fact that they obviously admit of being represented in more ways than one, and that the writer perhaps in his punctilious concern for accuracy starts

thinking which of the many forms that suggest themselves is the correct, and the most facile one. But purists of this type hardly realize that there is no time for such deliberation when writing at their top speed and that, at the particular moment, they must either leave out the word altogether or put it down anyhow, and settle accounts with it afterwards. In the same way, where mistakes have been committed, it is unwise to attempt to correct them while the note-taking is in progress. It is a fatal and pernicious practice. All that is necessary is to leave a distinctive mark near the outline to remind you that something is wrong with it. However extensive one's knowledge of words, memorized outlines and phrases, one cannot hope to have mastered the phraseology of all the arts and sciences. While therefore the writer must be forearmed as much as possible, he must cast rules to the winds for the moment, and concentrate on getting down the recalcitrant word anyhow, possibly with the aid of an improvised outline. After all, the value of a shorthand note lies in its transcript, and whatever helps to secure its accuracy should be eagerly availed of by the student. A good practice is to revolve mentally the outlines of strange and difficult words whenever and wherever met with—whether in the books you read, in the course of conversation, or in the placards you see on the road. It is also a good plan for the student to get his dictator to select a series of long and difficult words, and have them dictated to him fairly rapidly. Training of this kind will, in course of time, enable him to put down strange words with as little mental effort as possible. The enthusiastic student should, in fact, try to live in an atmosphere of shorthand, live and move and have his being in it. This will quicken his powers of imagination, and create confidence. The brain will, in course of time, get saturated with the outlines for spoken words, and when it has been drilled properly, the hand will follow suit. In fact, the time is bound to come

sooner or later when the brain and the hand will work so harmoniously together, that what the former conceives the latter will mechanically execute without any conscious effort. The great point, however, is to preserve under all conditions calmness of mind, supreme indifference to difficulties and obstacles, and a sturdy feeling of self-confidence that refuses to acknowledge defeat. No lasting results are possible without these mental attributes, for they more than anything else go to make up the all-round, expert Phonographer who will not shrink from any reporting undertaking, however difficult and responsible, and who can invariably be relied upon to perform his work at any emergency honestly, quickly and satisfactorily.

There is one other aspect of fast shorthand writing which stamps it as an intellectual operation of a very high order. I refer to the ability to grasp the sense of a passage at the same time it is being taken down. Ignorant critics and detractors view shorthand as a mere mechanical art, having little or nothing to do with the higher processes of the brain. Statements such as these have been proved effectively to be false by several eminent writers on Phonographic topics. Nothing can be farther from the truth than to say that shorthand does not call for high mental powers.

There is, of course, a good deal to be said not in defence but in palliation of some of the more tenacious fallacies. Unfortunately, there exist shorthand writers not worth that name, who, out of the abundance of their ineptitude, blight their own careers, and bring unmerited discredit on the art with a knowledge of which they profess to be well equipped. Devoid of common sense and intelligence, they readily fall into the most egregious blunders which, unfortunately, give rise to the impression that the art is at fault, and not they, unworthy disciples of it. I am not referring to speed proficiency alone, for it is hardly necessary to labour the point that mere capacity to write at a break-neck speed, unaccompanied by many other indispensable

qualifications, will be of little or no avail in the practical work-a-day world.

At the same time, it must be observed in fairness to the shorthand clerk that the trouble arises in not a few cases from the incapacity of his employer to deliver himself of his ideas with accuracy, either in point of the subject matter involved, or as regards grammatical English. In such cases, the blame for a faulty transcript is passed on only too airily to the unfortunate scribe, it being conveniently forgotten that he can be made responsible only for the words as they are uttered, and not as they ought to be. Imagine, for example, a clever and intellectual type of shorthand writer waiting painfully with pen in hand to jot down the precious mental offspring of an imbecile who can neither think clearly, nor knows how to clothe his ideas in decent, intelligible and coherent language. To work under a chief of this description is nothing short of a misfortune. It were far better for him to tell his scribe what is in his mind, and leave it to him to express the ideas in his own words. Nevertheless, it is a well-known fact that the duty devolves on shorthand writers of correcting a lot of minor errors in the language of their chiefs, and that an intelligent reporter does a great deal to raise a bad speaker in the estimation of the public by doing all he reasonably can to correct obvious errors in the speech, both grammatical and otherwise, and present it in an attractive and readable form. Bad speakers ought to realize the favour that reporters do them in this respect. It would be a terrible eye-opener to many of them if the public were presented with an absolutely faithful literal transcript of all their balderdash, which by the courtesy of a cultured pressman is raised to the dignity of a speech, and sometimes an oration.

Practised in the right spirit, therefore, shorthand is a valuable mental tonic. There is no accomplished reporter who does not follow the sense as well as the sound of a

passage taken down. This will be manifest from his participation also in the varying emotions evoked in an audience by a powerful speaker. Nowhere is the necessity for grasping the sense greater than in condensed reporting. To "pluck" out, so to say, the "heart" of a lengthy speech is one of the most difficult of tasks, and calls for the exercise of great powers of understanding and discrimination. The ease and alertness with which experienced reporters perform work of this character, even as the delivery of the speech is proceeding, should be sufficient to dispel misconceptions, and lead to a proper appraisement of the standard of intellectual discipline demanded in the higher spheres of shorthand activity.

It is, therefore, important that the student should cultivate early the habit of following the sense of the passage taken down. It is true that in some cases this will be found difficult owing to the abstruse and technical nature of the subject dealt with. But it should be possible for any shorthand writer of ordinary intelligence to follow in all cases the drift of the subject, and the main lines of argument. If this has been done, half the difficulties of transcription will have been overcome. In the light of the context, many recalcitrant outlines will sooner or later reveal their identity. Even if they do not, the selection of suitable substitutes would be rendered all the easier. Absurd mistakes can be easily detected and rectified. Not only the whole tone of the work of the shorthand writer would thus be raised in general estimation, but the dignity of reporting as an intellectual accomplishment established —an accomplishment in the performance of which the eye, the ear and the hand are all found co-operating and carrying out their respective functions, with the brain as the foreman in vigilant command over them all.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ESSENTIALS OF HIGH SPEED

Out of the many thousands of students who take up the study of shorthand, only a comparatively few attain anything like a high degree of excellence. Far from there being anything strange in this, it is in perfect harmony with the natural law in fulfilment of which some men are, and are bound to be, greater than others, through the sheer force of natural and acquired capacity, which differs so much from man to man.

But tenacity and perseverance are the birthright of all men, and if, as has been rightly observed, genius consists in an infinite capacity for taking pains, there is hope for even the dullest among us. There are hundreds of cases where poor natural abilities have been supplemented by untiring industry, and the history of many great men who have risen to eminence in their respective walks of life is an astonishing record of self-exertion and indomitable perseverance in the face of difficulties that would have daunted and overpowered men of weaker calibre. Some are, no doubt, favoured by circumstances, but to push one's way up to, and take a place in, the forefront of any profession, or occupation, requires exceptional resourcefulness, considerable tenacity of purpose, and an all-mastering will power. It is not every one who can achieve this. It is here that the moral fibre of a man, and his personality assert themselves. In the domain of expert shorthand writing, these factors play a vital part. Not every student who buys the *Instructor* develops into an accomplished writer, or wins a high-speed certificate. As a matter of fact, it is only a limited few who make their mark in the profession. Many and varied are the causes

of failure. To my mind, these are more psychic and moral in their nature than either physical or even intellectual; and the advice offered in this chapter will therefore be more in the nature of an exhortation, and will endeavour to draw pointed attention to some of those invisible, but, nevertheless, potent factors which are at the back of all achievements worth the name. The point I desire to emphasize is that it is perfectly possible for every Phonographic student to attain success in life, provided he is prepared to exert himself. He may not come up to an unusually high level of excellence in the profession, but there is no reason whatever why he should not acquire a speed of at least 150 words a minute, and earn a respectable livelihood.

High speed presents itself to me as a well-built four-wheeled vehicle which, to be driven at the fastest possible speed, presupposes a good well-metalled road, a lusty horse, four strong and properly lubricated wheels, and, above all, a skilled coachman. For our purposes the road is a note-book well adapted for high-speed work; the horse is a reliable fountain pen, kept in good condition and taken proper care of; the wheels are (1) a good education, whether collegiate or self-acquired, and a good working knowledge of the language; (2) a thorough mastery of the rules, and a capacity to apply them without the least mental hesitancy; (3) plenty of dictation practice on the right lines; and (4) methodical transcription work. Your lubricants are, firstly, a wide range of information, a taste for literature, and a ready acquaintance with the events taking place in your neighbourhood, and, if necessary, of all important movements that are agitating the public mind all over the world; secondly, constant touch with the theory even when high speed has been attained; thirdly, abundant copying practice and reading of the best Phonographic literature; and lastly, the detection and elimination of your weak points as disclosed by systematic transcription of your

notes. If these conditions be satisfied, the progress of your vehicle will still in no small degree depend upon your skilful coachmanship—upon the thoroughness of your mental equipment, your self-confidence, and resourcefulness, eagerness to learn from your superiors, and the spirit of emulation and enthusiasm you bring to bear on your work with a view to achieving the highest of which you are capable.

When all is said and done, the secret of success lies in the three mystic words "Practice, Patience and Perseverance." It is worth reiterating that there is a world of significance in the time-worn statement that there is no royal road to the goal of high speed, and no short cut either. Much toil would necessarily have to be undergone. Your optimism may often be tried sorely. Let, however, nothing discourage you. Hold fast to the conviction that perseverance along right lines must triumph in the end. Checks to progress may, and are bound to, come in the shape of physical infirmities, domestic troubles, depressing failures at examinations, and professional disappointments, but throughout it all, work on doggedly and in the right spirit, keeping constantly before your mind's eye the day when you shall reap the rich harvest of your labours, for the prospect of pecuniary advancement is certainly a spur to vigorous activity. If only you have got the right spirit you must win. The power of sustained continuous exertion is the very first requisite for success, and if only you grasp the full significance of this exhortation and exert your best, you may rest assured that your tender Phonographic sapling will, with proper nurture and in the fullness of time, grow into a mighty and weather-beaten tree that no rhetorical storms, however violent, can shake, still less uproot.

CHAPTER XXIII

SOME NON-PROFESSIONAL USES OF SHORTHAND

THOUGH in the great majority of cases the study of shorthand is taken up as a passport to one or other of the numerous avenues of lucrative employment which it has been instrumental in opening out, it is by no means necessarily confined to the shorthand clerk, or the professional reporter. The aesthetic beauty and the geometric simplicity of the Pitmanic shorthand, combined with the ease and rapidity with which it can be learnt, and the manifest advantages it affords have acted as a charm on, and been a strong inducement to its study by, eminent men in all walks of life, who successfully utilize it for diverse private purposes.

The *English Review* once truly remarked: "Who that is much in the habit of writing has not often wished for some means of expressing by two or three dashes of the pen that which, as things are, it requires such an outlay of time and labour to commit to paper. Our present mode of communication must be felt to be cumbersome in the last degree, unworthy of these days of invention. We require some means of bringing the operations of the mind and the hand into closer correspondence." It is on the immense economy of time and labour effected by shorthand, by obviating the drudgery of wearisome longhand writing, that its claim as a "boon and a blessing to men" must rest.

Leaving aside those to whom shorthand is an indispensable equipment for the proper discharge of their everyday work, it is almost impossible to think of any sphere of human activity, involving writing work of any kind, where shorthand cannot be utilized with advantage. Moreover, as a valuable aid to the acquisition of knowledge in general, the value of shorthand is too well known to need any detailed

reference. The mere act of copying in shorthand of literary and other works is a powerful impulse to the mastery of English, and its grammatical and other attributes. At the same time, it also widens the range of one's information, and hence it is an intellectual occupation of no mean order.

To the student, whatever his line of study, shorthand comes in as a useful handmaid. With a fair working knowledge of it, he is enabled either to take full notes of important lectures, or jot down quickly all the salient points of the less important ones. In making summaries of lengthy chapters, the brief and facile characters of Phonography render it possible to bring the material portions of the subject under study within reasonable compass. Students in schools and colleges, possessed of sufficient capacity to take down notes in shorthand, can afford to dispense with the purchase of many costly books, of which useful summaries could be made with comparative ease, and with the added advantage of gaining by the process a more thorough grasp of the subject than would otherwise be possible. To authors in general, more especially to those whose alert brains conceive ideas quicker than their hands can record by means of longhand, ideas which in consequence vanish before they are pinned down to paper, and are often lost for ever, shorthand literally comes as a godsend, as it liberates them from what would otherwise prove a veritable drag upon the celerity of their thoughts. In spite of the fact that the employment of a sufficient number of shorthand writers in courts of law has minimized remarkably the laborious task of recording evidence on the part of the judges, there is no doubt that judicial work could be carried on with still greater expedition if the judges themselves were acquainted with a smattering of shorthand. Lecturers, who are constantly addressing public assemblies, would find it very convenient to note down points on a handy slip of paper, from which they could weave out their speeches. I can recall the

instance of a speaker who, with quite a tiny slip in his hand, held forth for nearly two hours. Naturally there was a feeling of surprise on the part of some of the audience as to how that small bit of paper could have contained all the points referred to. It transpired that the speaker had a good knowledge of shorthand, and had managed to compress all his main points into that short space in neat and small shorthand characters. Lawyers and police officers are, perhaps, the men to whom shorthand ought to appeal with special force. To the former it must prove of great help in jotting down points for their arguments, in taking down the material portions of an opposing counsel's address, and in preserving, wherever necessary, the *ipsissima verba* of important witnesses, if the question at issue is a complicated one, and the decision turns on the interpretation of a particular word, or set of words, used in the course of evidence. Policemen would appreciate the relief afforded by shorthand in view of the ease with which they could make notes of their inquiries, depositions of witnesses, and dash down rough and ready memoranda in circumstances when it would obviously be impossible to resort to longhand. Likewise, in the case of many other professions such as the Army, Medicine, Commerce, etc., in short, wherever time is a factor to reckon with, shorthand enables work to be turned out from four to six times as fast as longhand, not to speak of the appreciable economy of space and energy. Instances could be multiplied endlessly, where the winged forms of Pitman's Shorthand have come to the relief of men hard pressed for time, who have literally panted for some readier means of expression than that afforded by wearisome longhand, but the foregoing will perhaps suffice to indicate some of the more important directions in which shorthand can be, has been, and is being, employed with the greatest advantage.

Indeed, the subject of the utilization of shorthand is one that lends itself to the most extensive possibilities, and it

might safely be asserted that a time is bound to come in the near future when it will be found to be in almost universal use, and to have permeated practically every sphere of literary and business activity. Signs are not wanting to show that this is no idle hope. Shorthand is a subject worthy of study not only by kings and statesmen, but by the humblest labourer, and even children in schools; and those obscurantists who try to detract the value of shorthand may well bear in mind the opinion of Dr. Johnson:

"Shorthand, on account of its great and general utility, merits a much higher rank among the arts and sciences than is generally allotted to it. Its usefulness is not confined to any particular science or profession, but is universal. It is therefore by no means unworthy the attention and study of men of genius and erudition."

CHAPTER XXIV

SHORTHAND AND ITS POTENTIALITIES

THERE are several unique features associated with the study and professional use of Pitman's Shorthand to which there is no parallel in the case of any other subject of similar character that I can think of. These features pertain to the value of the system not only as an instrument of self-discipline, an educative and literary force, and a valuable intellectual stimulant, but also as a powerful lever for social, pecuniary and professional advancement generally.

A careful and systematic study of shorthand instils habits of concentration of mind, punctuality, agility, both mental and physical, neatness, accuracy, etc. Without methodical practice and intellectual alertness, success in shorthand is well-nigh impossible. Nor in shorthand writing can one afford to take liberties with the prescribed geometrical proportions of the outlines. You cannot, for example, make a hook a bit larger, a circle slightly bigger, a stroke or curve a little longer or shorter, without impairing, to a certain extent, the legibility of the notes. Moreover, the attainment of high speed presupposes years of sustained effort, perseverance and determination, factors which exercise a salutary influence on the whole gamut of a man's thoughts and actions.

As an educative factor, the utility of shorthand is too well known to need any detailed mention. Intelligently pursued, it enlarges the mental horizon, extends your vocabulary, improves your pronunciation (by reason of the phonetic nature of the alphabet you have to master), helps you to a correct appreciation of the beauties of the English language, and above all, aids in no negligible degree your powers of composition. Extensive copying in

shorthand of masterpieces of prose and poetry is in itself a highly literary occupation, and facilitates the mastery of the subject in hand, with an amount of thoroughness that would otherwise not be easy.

It has been remarked truly that nobody hears so much of the world's greatest orators as the reporter in the full practice of his profession. At the same time, it also falls to his lot to deal with bad and indifferent speakers whose utterances display a wide variety of defects, peculiarities and errors as regards their grammar, style and statements of fact respectively, and which have, in consequence, to pass through the alembic of the reporter's brain before they can be given out to the public in readable form. If the reporter is the right sort of man, constant training of this kind is bound to react on him wonderfully, to his great and lasting benefit. The fact of the matter is that the utterances of eminent men, whether they be politicians, theologians, lawyers, scientists or historians, are crystallized, as it were, upon the pen of the reporter who metes out to each speaker his proper share in the columns of the newspaper. That by this process the reporter gains a knowledge of a wide range of subjects is unquestionable, and though it may seem that he is simply echoing the thoughts of others, still there comes a time when facility in composition comes to him as a matter of course with ever-enlarging experience. There is no efficient reporter who cannot also wield a ready and facile pen on a fairly wide range of general topics.

The intellectual operations of the mind called into play in fast shorthand writing are of a high order. The mind is always alert, as even the tiniest word has to be put down with precision, and with due regard to its position with reference to the lines of the note-book. Imagination is quickened as a strange word, suddenly hurled down from the speaker's lips has to be represented instantaneously by an improvised outline, if the correct one betrays the writer at the psychological moment. As a counterpart of

this, memory is trained, since the outlines thus improvised, on the spur of the moment, have to be deciphered correctly perhaps several hours after they were taken down. A stimulus is imparted to the reasoning faculties since the writer has to think out frequently which of a certain number of words fits best into a particular context. In fact, fast reporting trains the mind and the hand in those paths of attention and application which are so essential to success in any walk of life. It keeps, so to say, a rein on wandering thoughts, focuses and guides them through proper channels. The fact is that two independent regions of the brain are set at work simultaneously during the process of taking down the words of a speaker, and this in itself is a mental exercise of no mean order.

One of the most pleasing aspects in connection with the practice of shorthand is the feeling of fraternity and *esprit de corps* which is almost unconsciously engendered among its practitioners. Especially is this the case when they are jointly engaged in the discharge of a common task. An atmosphere of geniality invariably pervades such occasions, and numerous opportunities present themselves for mutual help and for other manifestations of courtesy and comradeship, which conduce so much to relieve the monotony of the situation when engaged in arduous work. Pitman's Shorthand has, moreover, been the medium of many lasting friendships between persons who would otherwise have remained perfect strangers.

Shorthand amanuenses occupy a position which is recognized and respected. In intimate contact with their chiefs, and therefore the trusted custodians of valuable secrets, they are frequently entrusted with responsible and confidential work which scarcely falls to the lot of others, and enjoy an amount of personal independence and freedom from the trammels of a soul-deadening system of office routine, that are often the objects of envy. The very nature of their appointment places them in an exceptionally

favourable position in the matter of widening their knowledge of the subjects dealt with by their chiefs. If, for example, the chief is a prominent man in the world of journalism or authorship, it goes without saying that the amanuensis, if he goes about his work in the right spirit, is bound to gain a valuable insight into the conditions of success governing his master's profession, and utilize it in due course to his own advantage.

In the case of reporters, the position is still more striking. Time was when they were regarded as the most odious of mortals, their presence at public gatherings with their writing implements was detested, and attempts were not infrequently made for summarily ejecting them as undesirable intruders. The position has completely altered in modern times. The Press is now a recognized institution, and by common consent a reporter has a greater claim to a seat at public meetings than anyone of the audience, however distinguished. Wherever he appears in his professional capacity, he is treated as an honoured functionary, is afforded every facility for the effective discharge of his duties, and meets the highest in the land on terms of perfect equality. Indeed, instances can be recalled of the postponement of the deliberations of important legislative assemblies solely in order to secure the presence of reporters, and, consequently, publicity to the proceedings.

The well-known saying in connection with the ecclesiastical profession, "Once a priest always a priest," does not necessarily apply to the shorthand writer. Of course, much depends. Many men begin their careers as shorthand writers, and end as such. At the same time, instances can be cited where shorthand has acted as a stepping stone to more lucrative spheres of work, serving, in fact, as a means to an end. There are numerous instances of enterprising shorthand writers in commercial offices, who have bourgeoned into managers, private secretaries and influential business partners, and even carved out independent and

prosperous careers for themselves. The chances of professional betterment in the case of reporters are still more remarkable. Many men who eventually rose to eminence in after life began as reporters, and utilized their transient connection with the Press as a training-ground to higher fields of activity. Many reporters develop into sub-editors or editors, eventually enter public life, or win renown in the world of authorship. Their example ought to fire the zeal of, and be a wholesome source of inspiration to, every ambitious young Phonographer.

Nor is shorthand without its attractions to the Mammon worshipper, pure and simple. Human nature being what it is, it is but legitimate that those who take up the study of shorthand should ask themselves what a good working knowledge of it is likely to bring them pecuniarily. Reference may be made in this connection to the somewhat startling assertion recorded to have been made by a certain individual to the effect that there were more gold mines in London than the world supposed. Pressed by an inquisitive listener to let him into the secret of this cryptic utterance, its author explained that shorthand cost him with the luxury of a private teacher only five pounds, and that in a few months it certainly brought him not less than a thousand pounds. I can remember vividly how in my student days shorthand, frequently, and often when least expected, put considerable extra money into my pocket, which was not only welcome, but helped me materially. It is impossible to think of a competent shorthand writer hanging on for any length of time in quest of employment; and efficient men may undoubtedly depend upon reaping a rich harvest as the reward for their hard work and proficiency. I have particularly in mind the instance of a well-known reporter in India who, being one of the first in the field, held long and almost undisputed mastery of it, and accumulated a huge private fortune, which is, I may say, unprecedented, at least in this country. Instances of