"THAT DASHING DRESSMAKER."

This young contributor is a *born* writer. Unfortunately he is not a *cultivated* one, else he could not be guilty of passages which read so well, yet are not in reality clearly, nor even correctly expressed. Perhaps a careless reader, one who seeks only the unravelling of an interesting plot, or the skillful development of a character, would pass these imperfect sentences by unnoticed, but work so admirable in many respects deserves greater consideration, and we prefer to find fault in a few instances, believing that injudicious praise can only retard the success absolutely assured to this young man when he has learned to detect a flaw wherever it exists. Already he is conscious, he tells us, of "a lack somewhere," which is in itself a good sign, but it is necessary that he should himself discover just what this "lack" is. His tales would find acceptance, with all their imperfections, but the artist in any profession cannot rest content with acceptance on sufferance. A finished rendering of whatever he undertakes is his *first* object—after that gold and glory.

Let us analyze a single page of "That Dashing Dressmaker."

"It is less light than the ghost of light, so cold, and gray, and dead it seems, through which farmer Robbins is driving his team of lazy steers into the village of L."

The parenthetic "so cold, and gray, and dead it seems," is quite superfluous.

"Ghost" includes the three adjectives "cold," "gray," and "dead," and the single noun is far more significant.

"No sounds are heard but the crackling of the frozen earth beneath the wheels, the deep breathing of the oxen, emitting clouds of vapor from their nostrils, and an occasional 'Git up, boys!' from their spectral-looking driver, leaning forward to touch their swaying flanks with his long hickory switch."

Driver and team are almost inextricably mixed here!

The oxen are not only emitting clouds of vapor from their nostrils, but an occasional "Git up, boys!" from the driver!

Examine the rest of the sentence and it will be found wanting throughout. Nor does it stand alone.

Take the next paragraph:

"Of a sudden, however, quick footsteps ring upon the frost-hardened ground *in front* (?), and a tall, lank figure, Jim Spears, the village blacksmith, grows out of the gray depths, and, coming forward, stops beside the cart."

Now the very necessity for excessive punctuation here proves it an ill-arranged sentence.

The photograph of "a tall, lank figure growing out of the gray depths," is blurred by the explanatory "Jim Spears, the village blacksmith."

The man's name and trade would better fit into the next paragraph.

Now let us see how all this can be strengthened by a mere transposition of words, omitting those of doubtful value.

"It is less light than the ghost of light through which farmer Robbins drives his team of lazy steers into the village of L. No sounds are heard but the crackling of the frozen ground beneath the wheels, the deep breathing of the oxen, and an occasional 'Git up, boys!' from their spectral-looking driver, as he leans forward to touch their swaying flanks with his long hickory switch.

"Of a sudden, however, quick footsteps ring upon the frost-hardened ground, a tall, lank figure grows out of

the gray depths, and coming forward, stops beside the cart.

"'Heyo, Mist' Robbins!' cries Jim Spears, the village blacksmith, taking his corn-cob pipe from between his teeth. 'Hyeard dih news?'

"'Huh?' lifting a cold red face framed in by the folds of a thick, white muffler."

Who lifts a cold red face? The driver of the ox-cart, of course, but although the conversation is dialogue, we want each participant in it clearly designated at the outset.

Framed "by" or "in" the folds of a muffler—not both.

We have again to take the author of "That Dashing Dressmaker" to task for his too luxuriant word painting. There are three cases in half a dozen pages of resplendent sky, "pink," "flaming orange and sea shell pink," and "yellowish rose of western sky."

Trees figure as often in the tale, and their boughs are almost as variously tinted as the heavens.

The same tendency to produce effects by laying on the color too heavily leads to the use of double adjectives, inverted—and therefore weak—sentences, until we sigh for something less gorgeous.

It is hardly possible to lay stress enough on this fault. It will grow with time and spoil everything unless the writer corrects it in the beginning.

He speaks, for instance, of catching emotions on a camera.

Fortunately the plate sufficiently sensitive to reproduce thought and feeling is yet to be discovered!

One more suggestion and we have done.

Give to the village of L—— a name. To designate place or person by initials only dispels the illusion essential to the charm of a story. Frank Stockton has a gift of names which helps to make impossible geography and equally impossible humanity appear perfectly natural in his books. Had he dubbed Pomona "P——" had Mrs. Aleshine and Mrs. Lecks been presented to us as "Mrs. A——" and "Mrs. L——," who could believe in their existence?

Even in *The Lady or the Tiger*, where (if our memory serves us) the "Semi-barbaric Princess" remains unchristened, "The Lady" is so skillfully substituted that the omission of any special name is forgotten.

We shall speak on this subject again later. Meanwhile, it is due to the story before us to say that after a pretty searching examination, we find *all* the faults of composition on the opening page.