

PREVENTABLE WORRIES.



SUPPOSE there are few people exempt from worries in their daily life. They may spring from endless causes, and possibly very many are altogether unpreventable and must be borne with patience and fortitude; it is not

of such as these that I would speak.

The limits of my paper will only admit of my touching upon some of those little frets and jars which cause needless trouble to busy people, and arise simply from lack of method in carrying out our work of whatever kind it may be.

I will first touch upon some small annoyances which are apt to hinder the comfortable dispatch of our daily letters. Quite a crop of preventable worries are apt to cluster around the inkstand and writing materials.

No doubt there are thousands of orderly, well-conducted people whose pens, ink and paper will bear examination by a critical eye and always be found in proper working order; but, ah me! how many of us allow the ink-glass to get lower and lower without replenishment, not observing the incessant dipping of our pens until, in the middle of a page of fair neat writing, we land a great clot of ink from the point of the pen. We then vainly wish we had thought to put fresh ink before beginning our letter. The thing is done and cannot be helped, but we make a mental note that our ink-glass shall be in future attended to in due season.

It is not the easiest thing to fill a small ink-glass without the catastrophe of an overflow, but this may easily be obviated by first pouring the ink from the stone bottle into a phial, from which we can readily replenish tiny glasses.

For the comfort of those who may have ruined a valuable table-cover or damask cloth by an inky flood, let me mention two remedies, not so well known as they deserve to be.

There is, I fear, nothing to be done if the ink-spots have dried, but, in the case of a coloured cloth, if, while the ink is wet, some milk is poured over the stain and rubbed gently with rag, the spot may be entirely removed. The milk must be renewed again and again until the cleansing is complete. The remedy for a damask cloth seeks scarcely to be credited, but I can only ask my readers to try it for themselves, and they will be assured that the statement is true. If some red ink is poured over the black ink-stain whilst it is wet, and the cloth is at once taken in hand by a laundress, not a trace of stain or spot will remain.

In public offices I fancy fresh blotting-paper is supplied daily, but in private houses how people do go on with a ragged, poverty-stricken sheet of that article, until it wholly refuses to do its duty and blots very emphatically just in the middle of our best sentence; or, worse still, the blotting-pad having parted with its last remaining strip of paper, we absently take it up and turn our writing into hieroglyphics by applying the bare wood to the wet lines. Linen blotting-paper sold in small sheets is by far the most effectual and pleasant kind to use, and with a packet of it at hand we are without excuse if our letters are ever ink-spotted. In these days of multitudinous pens our writing implement should always be in faultless condition. With J and R pens, Waverleys, Owls and Pickwicks, every style of handwriting may be easily suited; and yet,

do we not sometimes from lack of thought go on using a pen that has attained most vicious ways? With a point that splutters, catches up hairs, digs into the paper, and shows such a will of its own that, at last, when our temper is rasped and patience exhausted, we are led to replace the offender by a new pen whose smoothness and delightful ways make us deeply regret that we were led to bear so long with this preventable worry.

Our inkstand should always possess a well-pointed lead pencil for making casual notes; but are we not painfully familiar with pencils of an unusable kind—perfectly decrepit, hopeless articles, with the lead broken away and nothing left but jagged points of wood, instead of the delicate tapering point which a moment's application of a sharp penknife would produce? There are now also such excellent pencil-sharpeners to be had everywhere that there is no excuse but laziness if our pencils are not in good condition.

After we have been seated at our writing for a while, how frequently we find we are in a cramped position and so cumbered up with books and papers around us that we cannot push our paper higher up as we fill the sheet.

I am reminded of the advice of an old painter to a pupil who was going to sketch under his tuition. He said, "Now my first direction is going to be a most important one, which you must try and remember as a life-long rule: never grudge time or pains in making your position comfortable before you begin; it will be time saved in the end. You cannot do good work with cramped hands and aching limbs, nor maintain the easy mind and unruffled temper which will tend much to promote the success of your efforts." This advice is quite as applicable to letter-writing as to painting. Always, if possible, clear a sufficient space on the table before you begin, have the inkstand at your right hand, and for pity sake dip your pen in gently so that the ink may not be flicked over the table-cloth, or your friends—who may be quietly reading—be regaled by a teasing noise like a woodpecker engaged upon a hollow tree.

Now a word about unreadable writing. Do we not all know what a misery it is when a letter arrives just as we are going out or otherwise pressed for time, and we see with dismay that it is from a friend whose writing is the next thing to Sanscrit for its illegibility. We can read enough to learn that it needs an immediate answer, but what is its purport? One word is run into another, the t's are not crossed, the b's are the same height as the m's, the y's have no tails—in fact, one's reading can only be a series of guesses. It is difficult to bear patiently such a needless strain of mind, but the messenger waits—what is to be done? I have heard of one puzzled friend putting the "vexing letter" upon the floor and walking round it once or twice, hoping for inspiration by viewing it upside down. If only there is time a clue can generally be obtained by observing how the letters of one's own name and address are formed, and then, by applying the same rule to the unreadable words, at last some light begins to dawn. Here and there a sentence can be read, and by degrees the rest is deciphered.

How truly needless and provoking is all this trouble! Surely young people, who can easily alter their style, should endeavour to attain the useful gift of a very clear handwriting. It predisposes one to like a letter and its writer if the missive can be read without trouble, and the saving of time and avoidance of worry are really of importance in this busy life of ours. It was a wise writer

who gave us this excellent piece of advice: "Be a whole man to one thing at a time." I suppose it is the neglect of this rule that leads so many correspondents to say "I enclose" such a thing, but the thing is omitted and you have the trouble of writing a second time to ask for it. It is always well to read over our letters before closing them, to supply any words left out, and to be reminded ourselves of any promised enclosures.

This may seem but a trivial piece of advice, but the omission, for instance, of the word "not" may alter the tenour of the letter and keep some friend waiting for us for hours when we thought we had said "I shall not be there." The non-enclosure of a cheque or postal-order required on a special day may also be of the most serious consequence. In addressing letters it is never wise to add the name of some post-town we think may be right, for if incorrect it will lead to at least a day's delay, whilst the letter is sent there and returned.

No hard-and-fast rule, however, can be given about addressing letters; it simply needs thought and intelligence to avoid mistakes.

Where the name of a town is a very common one, it is most needful to add the county, as there are, for instance, nine Whitchurches and fourteen Newtons, and a letter sent to either of those places without the county would probably be returned in a few weeks' time, ornamented with endless post-marks, showing the needless trouble given to the postmen, who are bound to do their utmost to find the right destination of the letters committed to their charge.

Some people are in the habit of signing their epistles with initials only, so that in the case of strangers one is left in doubt as to the sex of the writer. No one likes to make mistakes, and it is with a feeling of annoyance that one discovers that the correspondent we have addressed as esquire proves to be of the gentler sex. I would earnestly counsel young people to adopt the habit of invariably signing Christian and surname in full, and clearly written, if they would avoid the loss of their letters from misspelling. It is only kind to inform strangers whether they are to address you as Mrs. or Miss, yet how often this simple guidance is omitted!

I often marvel at the unbusinesslike ways of some secretaries. They ask for your subscription to a society the name of which they only give you in perhaps five initial letters. Now in these days of multiplied charities it is really difficult to remember all their names; many are very similar, differing only it may be in one letter, yet the object of the charity may be totally different. Then also it should be a standing rule always to mention the amount of the annual subscription asked for, it saves a busy person having to refer to a list of charities or it may be turn over cheque counterfoils, or search for last year's receipts. All this is clearly preventable worry arising from unbusinesslike habits. Much more might be said upon this subject, but instances enough have I think been given to show the need of careful thought being bestowed upon the work we do with our pen, to avoid as much as possible giving rise to needless trouble. I hope to be forgiven if my strictures seem to touch upon small matters, which to many may appear too trivial to be censured; but let me say that, just as a little pebble may hinder the action of a great steam-engine, so the needless delay of half an hour in our morning's work, and a ruffled temper for the rest of the day, may have very sad and far-reaching consequences.

ELIZA BRIGHTWEN.