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## THE USE OF CAPITALS.

BY CHARLES A. CUTTER.

MR. JOHN FISKE has just printed for his assistants in Harvard College Library some well-devised rules on a subject—the use of capitals—not in itself of great importance, and yet of considerable interest to the cataloguer, because these troublesome majuscules obtrude themselves upon his attention, and puzzle him with their claims in almost every title he writes.

In books, capitals ought to be used only when they assist in the comprehension of

the sense. This they undoubtedly do when they begin sentences (increasing the effect of the period and the period-space), and to a less extent when they begin proper names. Probably this latter use could be discontinued with very little loss of perspicuity—that is to say, as soon as we were thoroughly accustomed to a text in which capitals were employed only at the beginning of sentences, we should find it very nearly, if not quite, as easy to read as our present texts.

But the style now in use is thoroughly established; by long habit, we have come to depend on capitals to mark proper names, and there is no advantage to be gained by changing. There are, however, certain other uses of capitals which are not equally defensible. There is no good whatever in capitalizing titles of honor and abbreviations, as Earl, King, Dr., Mrs., B.C., A.D. When the abbreviation is in one letter, it looks much better printed in "small capitals," as A.D. 1400; when it consists of several letters, there is no more reason for capitalizing it than any other short word. There is very little advantage in capitalizing titles of honor, as Gen. G. B. McClellan—indeed, it may be said that the name following is brought out less clearly by the practice; but it is firmly established, and not likely to be changed, and there is no strong motive for making any change.

So much for general book-work. In regard to catalogues, two things may be noted: *First*. That all unnecessary capitals are to be avoided. In the short sentences of a written and the short lines of a printed catalogue, a profusion of capitals confuses rather than assists the eye; to capitalize every noun and adjective is to capitalize nearly every word; in trying to distinguish too much, we distinguish nothing. *Secondly*. It is not well to introduce, without strong reason, any very unusual style, any thing which will attract the attention of the reader and divert his thoughts from the sense, because it will, so far as it does this, interfere with the use of the catalogue. In fine writing, this may be occasionally pardoned, for the author's object may be best attained by it; but never in cataloguing. To adopt a novelty which will perplex or shock, for the sake of having one uniform rule, and of avoiding the necessity of learning and remembering exceptions, is to save trouble to the cataloguer at the risk of causing trouble and offence to the reader.

The earlier English catalogues, imitating

the prevalent fashion in the older English books, capitalized \* every noun and adjective, or else important nouns and adjectives; and in England nearly all library catalogues and booksellers' lists at the present day continue the practice. The Bodleian catalogue, being written in Latin, naturally avoided capitals; and so does the library of the College of St. Mary Magdalene, Oxford; but no others that I have seen.

In this country the Boston Public Library confined capitals to names of persons and places, and printed such names as whig party, congress, academy of arts and sciences, jesuit, with small initials. The Library of Congress went still further, and, like Grimm and a few followers, discarded capitals in German nouns. Less important libraries have ranged themselves about equally on the two sides. The Harvard College catalogue has been hitherto made on the old English plan. How great a change is now proposed will be seen from the following reprint of Mr. Fiske's Rules. I have inserted some remarks in a smaller type.†

#### RULES FOR THE USE OF CAPITALS.

A. In headings and sections admit capitals according to the old rules.

B. I. In titles, notes, and whatever goes on the body of a card, capitalize as follows:

(i.) The first word of every sentence, of every title quoted, and of every alternative title introduced by *or*.

*N.B.* In quoting titles like the Nation, the Times, etc., capitalize the word following the article and not the article, and do this even in defiance of quotation-marks;

\* I use the word, as we all do, as meaning to print with an initial capital, although the dictionaries do not recognize this usage.

† §§ 161, 162 of Part II. of the Library Report contain rules on capitalization.

*e. g.* extracted from "the Times," extracted from "the Nation." This rule allows capitals to the Bible, the Scriptures, the Book of Mormon, etc.

[It would be better to make the quotation-marks conform to the capitalization, and write the "Times," the "Nation," not "the Times," "the Nation."]

(ii.) Names of persons.

(iii.) Epithets standing as substitutes for personal names; *e. g.* the Pretender.

*N.B.* The epithets His Majesty, Sa Majesté, His Excellency, etc., when not followed by the personal name or by the titles king, president, etc., are substitutes for a personal name, and should be capitalized. But when followed by the personal name, or by the title, such epithets should always be omitted; *e. g.* "the presence of His Majesty at that time," "the coronation of ... George III.," "the favor of ... the king." When these epithets occur with superfluous adjectives, the latter should be omitted; *e. g.* not "His Most Glorious Majesty," but "His ... Majesty."

*N.B.* The rule allows capitals to Trinity, the Deity, the Creator, etc., but do not capitalize holy, sacred, divine, etc., except in Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit.

[In such a phrase as "the doctrine of the trinity," the last word, not being here a substitute for a proper name, need not be capitalized.]

(iv.) Mr., Mrs., Miss, Dr., Sir, Lord, Lady, Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle, Signor, Don, Herr, Frau, used as prefixes to names of persons.

(v.) The Great, the Lion-Hearted, le Grand, der Grosse, etc., used as affixes to names of persons.

(vi.) Names of places.

*N.B.* Names of places often consist of an individual name joined to a generic name. In such cases capitalize only the former; *e. g.* state of Connecticut, Berkshire county, city of Boston, Susquehanna river, Catskill mountains, Arctic ocean, south

Pacific, east Tennessee, tropic of Cancer, arctic regions, equator. But there are some cases in which the generic name has come to be so closely united with the individual name that both should be capitalized; *e. g.* Niagara Falls, White Mountains, Mont Blanc, Lake Erie, Zuyder Zee, North Carolina, Lundy's Lane, Van Diemen's Land, North Pole, Bull Run, Fall River, Mound City, the steamer "City of Boston," etc. It is not generally difficult to distinguish between these two cases. Ability to use the individual name by itself will usually afford a safe criterion; *e. g.* we can say "the Catskills," but not "the Whites."

[From "state of Connecticut," "city of Boston," a cataloguer should leave out the words "state of," "city of," as entirely superfluous, so that the question of capitalization need not come up. As to the other examples, I do not see the use of making any distinction between Susquehanna river and Bull Run, between Catskill mountains and White Mountains. It introduces an exception, a necessity for thinking and recollecting, and there will certainly not be uniformity in practice. Why not take the simple rule. "In proper names of persons and places, capitalize each separate word not an article or preposition"? Mr. Fiske's criterion is good, but why have any criterion? And it does not apply well to some of the examples. In "the Arctic ocean" and "the tropic of Cancer," one cannot use the individual name by itself and say, "the Arctic," "the Cancer;" and one can say, "the Equator." The phrases "south Pacific," "east Tennessee," hardly belong here. They are not proper geographical names; they mean somewhat indefinitely the south part of the Pacific, the east part of Tennessee. West Virginia, however, being the legal name of a State, must have both parts capitalized. And a similar remark can be made of two others of the examples. Why write Arctic ocean and arctic regions, except that one is considered as the accepted name of a definite place, the other as a rather vague collective appellation?]

(vii.) Epithets standing as substitutes for names of places; *e. g.* the South, the Orient, United Kingdom, etc.

(viii.) Arbitrary, undescriptive, fanciful,

outlandish, or otherwise purely individual epithets occurring in the name of a society, corporation, or building; *e.g.* Vulture insurance company, Pi Eta society, Globe bank, Star and Garter inn, Adelphi, Star chamber, Excelsior mine, court of Oyer and Terminer, Chrestomathic day-school, Old Bailey.

*N.B.* Do not capitalize names of societies or collective bodies, except in such cases as those just named, but write royal society, board of trade, house of representatives, first congregational church, Harvard college, American academy of arts and sciences, state department, university of Oxford, parliament, college of physicians and surgeons, etc.

The rationale of this rule will be seen to be that names of collective bodies, etc., are treated as collections or congeries of common nouns, and only the *strictly* proper nouns or adjectives which may occur in them are capitalized. In general, the most distinctive mark of a strictly proper name, as "John" or "Excelsior," is its undecisive and arbitrary character.

[Another exception of doubtful expediency. "Royal Society of London" is as much a proper name as "John Smith;" why should it not be capitalized as well? It is true that there is a Royal Society of Edinburgh and a Royal Society of Dublin, but so are there several John Smiths. Moreover, there is only one Royal Society of London. The fact that royal and society are words with a meaning has nothing more to do with the question than the fact that smith has a meaning. The important point is that Royal Society is as fully the legal name of the institution and of none other, its *proper* name, as John Smith is of the man. To avoid the accumulation of capitals in printing a long name (as, Society for the Propagation of the Gospel among the Indians), it may be, perhaps, well to capitalize only the first word (as Royal society, Board of trade, State department). In doing this, we regard, by a sort of typographical fiction, the whole name as one word. This is the greatest concession that the conservative party can make to the radicals who would tear their capitals down about their ears. And even

this is open to the objection that there is then nothing to show how far the name extends, whereas on the other plan the capitals have the effect of quotation-marks.]

(ix.) The pronoun I; interjection O; A.D., B.C., in dates; D.D., M.D., etc.; MSS., etc.

II. In English, but not in any other language, capitalize also:

(i.) Adjectives derived from names of persons and places; *e.g.* English, Platonic, etc.

*N.B.* This rule allows the capitalization of many names of parties and sects which may be regarded as adjectival nouns derived from proper names, as Lutheran, Arminian, Jesuit, Christian, Buddhist, etc. Otherwise do not capitalize such words; *e.g.* catholic, episcopal, puritan, whig, democrat, quaker, unitarian, trinitarian, etc.

[The distinction here is objectionable. The reader is likely to see such names as Arian and unitarian, or trinitarian, or Jesuit and catholic used in juxtaposition, and will not readily discover the reason for the difference. Indeed, what reason is there for making a distinction? It would be better not to capitalize any of the names of parties and sects, and of adjectives and adjectival nouns derived from them, as the Boston Public Library does, or to capitalize all on the ground that they are all proper names. Lutheran or Lutherans, Whigs or Whig Party, are as much the proper names of certain bodies of men as Royal Society—names, that is, that belong to them respectively, as individual bodies, and do not signify a class of bodies. If this be allowed for the whole body, of course "a Lutheran doctrine" or "Whig principles" may be capitalized, as "a Frenchman," "the French language," are.]

(ii.) Names of the months, days of the week, and holidays, but only the individual part of the name; *e.g.* Shrove Tuesday, Candlemas, fourth of July, Fast day.

*N.B.* Capitalize also Advent, Lent, Lord's Supper.

[As no provision is made for the names of noted events or periods, like French Revolution, Popish Plot, Middle Ages, they come

under III., and would be printed "popish plot," "middle ages."]

(iii.) Pope, Saint, Bp., King, Earl, Capt., Rev., Hon., Prof., Judge, Gov., etc., used as prefixes to names of persons; *e.g.* King George III., Earl Russell, Bp. Colenso, Secretary Fish. Otherwise do not capitalize such words; *e.g.* the king of England, the earl of Derby, the bishop of Lincoln, the secretary of war.

III. Except in the cases specified above, use small letters exclusively, paying no regard to local usages, such as *e.g.* the capitalization of nouns in German.

[The application of the phrase "local usages" to "the capitalization of nouns in German" is very ingenious. It is worth a page of argument. One may doubt, however, whether it is well to print German titles in a style which nine tenths of the German people detest, and Danish titles in a style which no Dane has adopted. The orthographical convention called by the Cultusminister to meet in Berlin last January, decided in favor of the retention of the "Fractura" or German alphabet, in preference to the "antiqua" or Latin; and there is no chance that the use of capitals for nouns will be discontinued as long as the "Fractura" is

retained. Just so long will every German and every American who learns German be accustomed to the capitalization of nouns, and a great majority will be annoyed at the opposite practice. Therefore, as the use of capitals annoys hardly any one, and the gain from disusing them is trifling, and the rule for them is very easy to remember and apply, it seems to me that the greatest good of the greatest number requires their retention.]

C. In the case of books published before 1600, all peculiarities of style in title, heading, or colophon are to be strictly followed, without regard to the above rules.

The general spirit of these rules is excellent. It may be doubted, however, whether it was well to introduce exceptions to general principles (as in B I., vi. and viii., and II., i.) for the sake of getting rid of capitals in certain classes of words when other classes of the same family retain them. This course loads the memory with rules while relieving the page of capitals. Nor was it well to make up for this complexity in English, in which the greater part of our work is done, by a simplification in the less-used foreign languages that requires us to disregard their usages.

## BEST HUNDRED NOVELS.

BY F. B. PERKINS.

THE LIBRARY JOURNAL cannot, of course, give much room to lists of books. But perhaps it may be worth while to print this very condensed list of a suggested Best Hundred Novels.

1. Some of these—for instance, "Decameron," "Tom Jones," perhaps "Wilhelm Meister"—are included for their deservedly famous merits, and in spite of the grossness which render them now more or less hazardous in mixed society.

2. Such as the "Decameron" and the "Arabian Nights," though collections of tales, are too famous to be omitted. Hoff-

mann's and Poe's tales are intrinsically entitled to admission also.

3. The list is confined to books accessible in English. But there is no first-class work of fiction that is not accessible in English.

4. Except a very few (as above in No. 1) whose reputation seemed to outweigh their faults, grossness or wickedness has excluded. Rabelais, for instance, which I confess is too nasty for me; the "Contes Drôlatiques" of Balzac; the villainous story of "Jack Sheppard"—all of which for mere power are entitled to a place in the list—are omitted.