

PLAIN PRINCIPLES  
PROSE COMPOSITION

BY

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CHAUCER TO SHIRLEY'

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS  
EDINBURGH AND LONDON  
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OF  
PROSE COMPOSITION

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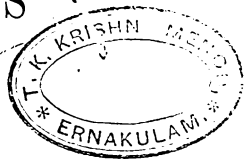
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CHAPTER I.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS.

*Introductory.*

THERE are many excellent people who think that all advice about composition is useless,—that a man has only to know his subject thoroughly, and the expression will come of itself.

An English Dissenting minister recently hit upon a very simple way of making a book. He wrote letters to some hundreds of English authors more or less recognised as competent practitioners of their art, saying that he had undertaken to give a series of lectures on composition to young men, and that he would be glad to have a few words of advice.

Writers are, as a rule, a generous race, and not unsusceptible of flattery, and so many of the eminent men answered the appeal of the ingenious applicant that he was able to make a very interesting book out of their replies. The remarkable thing was that many of them, even some of the most eminent, seemed to hold that the less people thought about the style of their writing, the better they were likely to write.

There is a certain amount of truth in this; how much, I hope to make clearer before I have done. But there is also a large amount of error, a certain amount of absurdity, and perhaps not a little affectation and pretence. The successful practice of all arts must depend largely upon natural gifts. In writing, as in other arts, rules do not carry the practitioner far; rules must always be for the most part negative, and a man may have the completest knowledge how not to write and yet dip his pen and cudgel his brains in vain. None the less it is absurd to suppose that in writing, which is one of the most difficult of arts, a man has nothing to learn, nothing to gain by study,—that he has only to know his subject and the words will come of themselves in the best possible choice and order to enlighten, impress, and persuade.

The obvious truth is that a man who writes well must learn to do so by example, if not by precept. In any language that has been used for centuries as

a literary instrument, the beginner cannot begin as if he were the first in the field. Whatever he proposes to write, be it essay or sermon or leading article, history or fiction, there are hundreds of things of the same kind in existence, some of which he must have read and cannot help taking more or less as patterns or models. The various forms or plans of composition of every kind have been gradually developed by the practice of successive generations. If a man writes effectively without giving a thought to the manner of his composition, it must be because he has chanced upon good models, and not merely because he knows his subject well or feels it deeply and has a natural gift for expression. He can spare himself the trouble of thinking because his predecessors have thought for him ; he is rich as being the possessor of inherited wealth.

Yes ; but example and precept are different things. Everybody would admit that something is to be learned by the study of the masters in writing, as in other arts. The question is whether any general rules or principles can be laid down which may help the beginner in composition. When good examples abound, is it not enough to leave him to their influence ? Is anything to be gained by considering the principles of effective writing ? Does the beginner not learn them best insensibly from studying the practice of effective writers ?

I take it that the main use of rhetorical principles—if the word rhetoric may be applied to the art of composition—is to quicken the beginner's natural judgment in his study of examples. He is placed in the midst of a host of writers, good and bad. The most effective writers naturally influence him most. He might learn from them as much as he wants of the art of composition without any guidance. He imitates what he admires, irrespective of all guidance. All of us acquire in this way the greater part of what skill we have. But while every great writer has his own inimitable charm, all effective writing is so in virtue of its compliance with certain general conditions. These general conditions the student may learn insensibly, but the most rudimentary of them admit of being stated, and the statement may stimulate and guide the student's own powers of observation and execution.

I have undertaken to give some hints to the beginner in composition, but, speaking candidly, I believe it is easy to exaggerate the use of rhetorical principles. The author of 'Hudibras' probably erred on the other side when he said that

"All a rhetorician's rules  
Teach nothing but to name his tools."

This is true only when rhetoric becomes too minute and loses sight of practice in the mazes of fine distinctions and subdivisions. Still we must bear in

mind that the writer's power is a growth from within, and that advice from without must always be preventive rather than impulsive. The writer acquires his vocabulary, his habits of arrangement, his turns of phrase and sentence, by a slow and gradual process day after day as he reads and feels and thinks. His habits of expression are interwoven with his habits of feeling and thinking; where the thoughts go often, the power of expression becomes rich and copious. This is the meaning of Buffon's aphorism, *Le style, c'est l'homme même*. Advice about composition cannot give this richness and copiousness; that must follow the lines of the writer's own nature. What advice may do, is to help the beginner in the management of his resources.

The hints that I have to give in the following pages are very rudimentary and very general, and they bear almost exclusively upon compositions that are addressed to the understanding. On what conditions a writer may make himself easily and clearly understood—this is what I propose to consider. How to be eloquent, persuasive, rousing, touching, entertaining,—these things lie far beyond any suggestions that I would presume to give.

*The Fundamental Principle.*

My first hint is, that one object of language—perhaps we should not say *the* object of language—

is the conveyance of ideas or feelings from one mind to another.

It is sometimes said that the object of language is to express thought. This is a misleading description for the student of composition. We want not merely to express, but to impress or communicate, which is not quite the same thing. In using language, we have to consider not merely the putting of our thoughts into words, the utterance or expression of what is in our minds; we have to consider also how to get our thoughts into the minds of others. Utterance might be comparatively easy, but the utterance must be such as to find an entrance elsewhere. We have not merely to pour the water out of the bottle. If this were all, we might trickle gently or gurgle and splutter convulsively as we pleased, with much the same result. We have to pour out in such a way that every drop may, if possible, be got into another bottle.

This is the first thing to be borne in mind—that the use of language is to serve as a medium of intercourse between mind and mind. Like all simple, rudimentary truths, it is apt to be forgotten. In speaking or writing, we must try to put ourselves in the position of the hearer or reader. It is his ease, his convenience, that we have to consult. Our problem is how to get the easiest, readiest admission to his mind for what is in ours,—how to effect the

transference most expeditiously and clearly and completely.

The prime difficulty of the process lies in this. What has to be transferred is often voluminous and complicated, while the conduit-pipe of language is small and narrow, and allows the passage of only a very little at a time. Suppose you wish to give your opinions on any question, or to describe a place or an institution, or to relate the chief events of a few days or years, you cannot transplant your subject bodily into another mind; you must dismember it, and dole it out point by point, fact by fact, incident by incident. You can utter, and the person addressed can take in, only one word at a time. The words must follow one another in a series; they must trickle in a thin stream; two cannot march abreast. It is like filing a battalion out of an enclosure through a narrow gate that allows only one man at a time to pass, and your reader as he receives them has to reform or reconstruct. No matter how large or how involved the subject, it can be communicated only in this way. Your hearer has to give admission to this narrow series of words, this thin stream of ideas, and piece them together in his mind.

In this process of gradual serial transmission, is one order better than another—easier, that is to say, for the reader, and less confusing as he receives

piecemeal and tries to reconstruct what was in your mind? Does it matter where you begin and how you proceed? That is the main problem that rhetoric tries to solve. If one order is better than another, I do not think any man of common-sense would say that one is likely to hit upon the best order without giving some thought to the subject.

I doubt whether any abstract hard-and-fast rules can be laid down, but some general considerations may help to set the beginner thinking for himself.

*The Starting-point.*

One main thing to be borne in mind as regards the starting-point is, that the best starting-point is so relatively to the persons addressed.

Before you begin to write on a subject, you have a certain collection of ideas in your head. But it is not always best to start from the point you have reached in your deliberations on the subject. Your natural tendency is to begin by setting down what strikes you as most important and interesting. But this may not be the easiest beginning for the reader, if you have been thinking over the subject for some time. If it is the easiest also for him, this can only be because your knowledge and interests happen to coincide with his. It is his knowledge and interests that you have to consider if you have anything to communicate to him. "Proceed from the known to

the unknown," is a rhetorical rule; the known from which you proceed is what is known to your reader. You must connect the subject somehow with what is already known to him, and what already interests him, if you wish to catch his ear and obtain ready admission to his mind. Thus it is sometimes not a bad plan to remember what first interested you in the subject, and by what steps your knowledge of it grew, and to follow in the order of your exposition what may be called the order of discovery or attainment for yourself. If your subject is at all new or unfamiliar, and its importance has been forced upon you gradually, this is likely to be the best order for the comprehension of your reader, who may be presumed to be in much the same attitude that you were in before you began to think attentively. What interested you first, stands a good chance of interesting him.

Of this, however, the individual must judge for himself in the particular circumstances. It is there that his native tact will serve him. The important thing is that he should at starting ask himself the question, How is my subject regarded by the people whom I am addressing?<sup>1</sup> What do they know about

<sup>1</sup> The principle, be it observed, does not apply to men of literary genius. The man of genius may begin where he likes, and go on as he likes: and the less commonplace he is, the more attractive he is. He can compel an audience to listen. He may ignore what they think and feel: his business is to give them new thoughts

it? How do they feel about it? No rhetorical rules can help the writer to answer the question; it is an affair of natural gift or trained sagacity. Writers with a happy instinct for popular exposition hardly need to ask the question; they adapt themselves to their audience insensibly.

The difficulty of starting intelligibly is hardly felt when you are writing about a subject that has what newspaper writers call "actuality,"—some topic of great and general interest at the moment. You are then in the position, as it were, of intervening in a debate. Your main concern is to get the point that you wish specially to urge well to the front, with as little preamble as possible. Native tact is shown in connecting your point with what is most prominent in the minds of your audience. Study any really impressive leading article that has caught your attention at once, and you will find that the writer, unconsciously, perhaps, has obeyed this principle; and the same with a really impressive speech, or even a letter. "Cut it short: come to the point," is the golden rule when you have to deal with an alert and impatient audience.

It is not so easy when the readers or hearers at and feelings and points of view—to bring them round to himself. But I do not write for men of genius. And the truth of my principle is confirmed by the fact that unless the man of genius consciously or unconsciously observes it, he has to be read again and again before his full meaning is apprehended. 9

whom you aim have not your own interest in your subject, and the desire to read or hear has to be kindled. The reason why profound specialists are often dull writers for the majority is that they have travelled too far away from their reader, and are incapable of coming back to take him by the hand. The greater disparity there is between yourself and your audience, the more difficult it is to make an effective start. One of the most masterly of popular expositors is Professor Huxley. He tells us that he has written some passages seven or eight times over before he was satisfied. We may be sure that he would not have had the same difficulty with a paper for the Royal Society.

"Start from your audience," is a safe precept. Is there any other principle to regulate the exordium?

As a general rule, it is well as soon as possible to put your reader in possession of the general drift of what you have to say. I assume that you have something to say, that you have a subject,—that you are not simply in the position of having to fill a certain amount of space or time with words. If you are in this predicament, begin anywhere.

"Spur boldly on, and dash through thick and thin,  
Through sense and nonsense, never out nor in."

Such writing is often very entertaining,—much more entertaining than regular composition. But if you

have a subject, it is advisable, as a rule, to give a general idea of it at starting.

Of course this may be done in many ways besides by a formal proposition such as usually introduced sermons of the old type. If you study the opening moves of various writers, in essays or sermons or leading articles, you will find that those from whom you carry most away do begin by striking a sort of key-note for what is to follow. But unless in a purely didactic treatise, to which the reader comes with a determined appetite for the dry skeleton of knowledge, or in a discourse on a subject of urgent interest, the opening is seldom a plain formal statement of the writer's intention. The topic being indicated by a heading or title of some kind, he may begin with a reference to an established opinion, a general reflection, a fact in nature or history, a fable, an anecdote, from which the reader catches his drift. There are hundreds of ways of beginning so that the reader may have the pleasure of discovering your general intention for himself. To give illustrations would carry me beyond my limits. I wish only to suggest that it is worth while to study how effective writers begin their discourse, and that you will find they generally open in such a way as to indicate the line they mean to take.

*The Body of the Composition and the Method of Procedure.*

That order is the best which best helps to make what you have to say easy to understand and to remember. Recognise this, and the order best suited to the particular circumstances probably will emerge as you consider them in this light.

In my next chapter I shall examine some principles applicable to the structure of sentences and paragraphs; meantime I would offer one or two practical counsels.

1. Avoid crowding too much into your composition. Any subject in the world has a multiplicity of relations; you must select what you think your reader is likely to be able to carry away. Every composition is done under limits of time and space: it is better to handle a few points lucidly than to pile up more than the memory can retain.

To convince yourself of the wisdom of this precept, think of the many discourses you have heard and read from which you have carried nothing away. In nine cases out of ten this was because the writer had not tried to impress a few points upon you, but had laboured to disburden himself of every idea that his topic had suggested.

2. When you have chosen your points, arrange them in some sort of rational sequence. You need not lay them out in formal heads—first place, second

place, and so on; but see that they have some coherence founded on their natural affinities. Do not jump from point to point. Try to be consecutive. Ideas always will occur to you as you write, however carefully you have considered your subject beforehand. I do not say that you should reject them unless they fit in with your preconceived plan, because this might unduly impoverish and attenuate your composition; but it is a safe rule—for your reader's convenience—not to introduce any idea that you cannot connect with what has gone before.

3. Beware of digressions. Digressions are often ornamental, and serve besides to relieve the strain of a logical method, but they are always confusing unless they are clearly marked as digressions. You should know clearly yourself, and you should somehow help your reader to know, when you leave your main purpose and when you come back.

I am aware that these counsels are counsels of perfection. I should not like my own writing to be tried by them as critical rules. They assume that we have all our materials perfectly mobilised in our minds before we begin to write, and can shape and order them with free power. Most of us too often find that we are the slaves rather than the masters of thought; that the ideas that occur to us on any topic are too heterogeneous and headstrong to be com-

bined on any rational or artistic plan. They must be humoured.

Still, to have an ideal of the best order as the most lucid and simple for the reader should help us to catch and fix our thoughts on any subject as they start up and float before the mind. Even if we leave the details to shape themselves as we proceed, something is gained by trying to keep in close touch with the reader's intelligence.

All this, of course, is assuming that the reader desires his understanding to be informed,—that he reads for instruction. This is as much as to say that our precepts have a comparatively narrow and humble scope. Genius, whether sublime or sportive in its aspirations, need pay no heed to them, and the penny-a-liner does well to hold them in contempt. Except in avowedly didactic treatises, the endeavour to be lucid and simple is thankless labour. The majority of readers read for entertainment, not for information. It must be admitted, besides, that too much care to be intelligible is often fatal to lightness of touch. The writer who keeps trying for aphorisms and epigrams, and jots down his good things as they come, without troubling himself about order, has an advantage in respect of brilliancy. To make too much use of the formalities of exposition when your subject is simple, is an insult to the intelligence of your readers. It is only fair also to warn the be-

ginner that if he writes lucidly, many honest folk will set him down as a shallow thinker. Intricacy of exposition often gets a man credit for profundity if his ideas are sufficiently commonplace. We believe that he agrees with us, and fancy that he sees grounds too deep to be expressed.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES AND PARAGRAPHS.

It cannot be too often repeated that the grand object in all writing for purposes of instruction is the easy communication of your thoughts to your readers. Take pains to realise this, consult your reader's ease and convenience, try to present your subject in such a way that it shall interest him and obtain the readiest possible admittance to his mind, and in time you will discover for yourself all that rhetoricians can teach you. All their maxims should be tried by this principle.

Two leading maxims may be formulated with regard to the structure of sentences : (1) The sentence should not be overcrowded ; (2) The right words should be in the right places.

It is a common rhetorical rule that a sentence should have "unity." But unity is often defined in such a way<sup>o</sup> as to make the rule of little practical

service. To say, for example, that "every sentence should express an entire thought or mental proposition," is not much of a help to the beginner. It may apply to expository sentences, though even as regards them it makes no allowance for the complexity of thoughts; it hardly applies at all to descriptive or narrative sentences.

It is more instructive to say, with Professor Bain,<sup>1</sup> that "every part of a sentence should be subordinate to one principal affirmation."

Perhaps the best way of illustrating a rule is to produce extreme cases of breaking it. The following sentence is from Thomas Hearne.<sup>2</sup> I will not say it is the worst sentence in the English language, but it is the worst that I happen to have remarked:—

"Just after I had published 'Robert of Gloucester,' I had the good fortune to see and converse with a learned, modest, and honest Friend of Herefordshire (the same, I mean, that besides his other great assistance in the work, drew up the indexes to the celebrated Dr Hickee's 'Thesaurus Linguarum Septentrionalium,' and is so excellently well qualified to compile the antiquities of that county, about which he hath many curious materials), at which time he was pleased to lend me the Life of St Thomas Cantilupe, Bishop of Hereford, which, tho' a printed Book, yet is rare and seldom to be seen, as

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<sup>1</sup> See his 'English Composition and Rhetoric,' enlarged edition, Part I., pp. 85-90.

<sup>2</sup> An enthusiastic antiquary of last century.

"Plague on't!" quoth Time to Thomas Hearne,  
Whatever I forget you learn."

many books of the same kind are also very scarce, and therefore greedily and industriously picked up by such curious collectors as was the famous Mr Richard Smith, that writ about Christ's Descent into Hell, and collected most of his Rarities out of the Library of H. Dyson, a person of a very strange, prying, and inquisitive genius in the matter of Books, as may appear from many Libraries, there being Books (chiefly in Old English), almost in every Library, that belonged to him, with his name upon them."

What is the principal affirmation here? There is none. The sentence merely illustrates the tendency of a garrulous man, stored with facts and pleased with the store, to pour them out as they occur, rambling along in pleasant gossip without regard to any pressing central purpose. The order is not logical or rational but personal, obeying the chance suggestions of memory, easy to write, but confusing to read. It is an extreme case, but all of us are apt to err in the same way, though not so flagrantly; and many discourses, though the separate sentences are neater and not quite so artless, are seen to be equally rambling when viewed as wholes.

The fault of overcrowded sentences is that they confuse and perplex the reader, and consequently we can easily decide when the fault has been committed by another. The reason why we cannot decide with equal ease in what we have written ourselves, is that we already know the meaning, and have not to take it in. Let the beginner recognise this, and acquire the habit, if he has not the instinct, of looking at

his sentences from the reader's point of view. It may embarrass him at first and make him self-conscious, but it is a duty that he owes to others; and self-consciousness is a less sin than unintelligibility.

As for an absolute standard of unity, it is vain to look for this. The amount of matter that may legitimately be put into a sentence depends upon circumstances. In difficult cases you cannot settle the right proportion without going beyond the sentence itself. You must consider the subject on which you are writing, whether it is simple or abstruse; the scale on which you are expounding it, whether your exposition is brief and condensed or open and diffuse; the nature of the attention that you may reasonably expect from your reader, according as he reads you running or sits down to study you with deliberate care. On this last point we are particularly apt to deceive ourselves.

A mere mechanical rule of length will not necessarily answer the purpose. I have heard of a newspaper office where it was an editorial rule that no sentence should exceed five lines. But an article of short sentences is not necessarily easy to understand. The sentences may be disconnected; the bearing of one statement on another may not be obvious. In a closely argumentative passage, short sentences are often more difficult to follow than long. Short sen-

tences are preferable to long if the connection can be maintained, but not otherwise.

It is, of course, in many-sided questions, opinions held with reservations and qualifications, the settlement of one's position relative to conflicting views, that the temptation to overcrowd occurs. A miscellaneous precept or two may perhaps be borne in mind with advantage.

*Don't be in too great a hurry with your qualifications.* State your main point broadly; and if the subject is at all intricate, give the qualifications separately. Never state a qualification in the same sentence if it would distract from the full understanding of the main statement. Never qualify a qualification in the same sentence.

*Have some confidence in the candid intelligence of your readers.* Do not burden your sentence with what is obvious without statement. Many writers are tedious because they fatigue the attention with unnecessary clauses. An ordinary discourse cannot be constructed with the verbal precision of a statute. You must, of course, judge for yourself how far you can carry this confidence in your readers.

*Beware of parentheses that might distract from your main topic.* When you cannot resist the temptation to throw in an aside, see that it stands clearly as such. Remember that in writing you cannot introduce parentheses and subordinate clauses as

easily as you can in speaking, when parenthetical and subordinate character can be indicated by the voice.

As a rule, it is not mere length that makes a sentence confusing. The fault is generally one of arrangement. If the right words are in the right places, a sentence may be carried to considerable length and yet remain perfectly perspicuous.

But what are the right places? I doubt whether we can get nearer a rigid definition than saying that words are in their right places when the most important words are so placed as to attract easily the reader's attention and easily find their proper reference.

In speaking, you can lay the stress of your voice upon cardinal words, phrases, or clauses. Everybody does so unconsciously. But you have no such help in writing. The employment of italics is an attempt to make up for the emphasis of spoken language, but italics are generally condemned as vulgar. I confess I can see no reason why difference of type should not be used to guide the reader's attention, except that it gives more trouble to printers, and might encourage careless persons in slovenly construction. But the common voice is against it as an inartistic and indolent practice. The construction of the sentence is expected to do everything.

For very obvious reasons, the beginning and the

end of a sentence are the places of greatest emphasis. Generally speaking, the words that catch the eyes first when we turn them in search of a meaning, and the words on which the eyes rest last when a meaning is conveyed, make the strongest impression. In spoken language, the words that come first when silence is broken, and the words that come last before a pause, have the strongest hold on the attention; and a similar reason holds good of written language.

I say "generally speaking," because most writers fall into tricks or mannerisms of arrangement, and if we have read a good deal of an author, unconsciously we adapt our habit of interpretation to his manner, and our attention is on the watch for his strongest points where we are accustomed to find them. Habits of writing prevail in a generation, and habits of reading go with them, so that it may happen that an arrangement best on general principles puts the reader out by disturbing his habit.

Still most good writers will be found consciously or unconsciously to place at the beginning and the end the words or phrases for which they desire the reader's special attention. The value of an effective ending, particularly, is soon learned by the practised writer. The driver of a French diligence, however slowly he creeps through intermediate stages, always cracks his whip and rattles up at the gallop to his terminus. A practised platform orator always tries

to sit down amid cheers. The same principle applies to the construction of sentences, and is very generally observed.

Indeed a habitual sense of the value of the end as a place of emphasis often betrays a writer into arrangements that are bad on other grounds. It is a rule, for example, that qualifying words should be placed near the words they qualify; and writers in placing their phrases for emphasis are apt to break this rule.

We have not much space for illustrations, but as both principles are important it may be worth while to show how they sometimes conflict, and to consider which should give way and how far.

Critics often treat the juxtaposition of qualifying phrases and their subjects as if it were an absolute rule—as if the structure must be wrong if a mis-reference is grammatically possible. The late Professor Hodgson, for example, in his book on ‘Errors in the Use of English,’ gives a large collection of what he calls errors in collocation. Many of the sentences quoted are manifestly bad, but in many of them we can see that the writer has been governed in his structure by a principle of emphasis, which also deserves consideration.

To take an instance or two :—

“A piano for sale by a lady about to cross the Channel in an oak case with carved legs.”

A comic misreference is—possible. The sentence is not a model. And yet the writer of this advertisement constructed it on a sound instinct. The important points are the article for sale and the description of it. The one is put at the beginning and the other at the end; what comes between, the reason for the sale, is of secondary consequence. If this were put in brackets, so as to avoid the absurd suggestion, it would be a perfect sentence for its purpose, so far as the arrangement goes.

“Hence he considered marriage with a modern political economist as very dangerous.”

This is an example of bad arrangement pure and simple, with no compensating advantage. Such a construction is the result of pure carelessness. But in the following, though an absurd misreference is possible by a critic on the outlook for breaches of a rule, I doubt whether a rearrangement would be a gain. There would be a decided loss of emphasis.

“The beaux of that day used the abominable art of painting their faces, as well as the women.”

“Mr Carlyle has taught us that silence is golden in thirty volumes.”

“The carriage stopped at the small gate which led by a short gravel walk to the house, amidst the nods and smiles of the whole party.”

“He always read Lord Byron’s writings as soon as they were published, with great avidity.”

Obviously there should not be too long an interval

between a word or phrase and its adjuncts. But the true test to apply is to consider whether there is any real risk of misinterpretation or misleading suggestion in the ordinary currency of reading. If there is not, and if emphasis is gained by the separation, the construction cannot be said to be rhetorically incorrect.

We have been dealing with sentences, but the same principles apply to paragraphs. Each paragraph should have a certain unity; it should not be overcrowded or burdened with irrelevant digressions. And care should be taken to get the right sentences into the right places, the right places being the places where the bearing of the sentence can be taken in with the greatest possible ease and the least possible risk of confusion.

English writers, as a rule, give too little heed to the structure of their paragraphs. Their sense of unity and method stops at the sentence. They are alive only to the importance of not burying any particularly effective sentence in the body of the paragraph. If they are afraid of such a sentence being passed over, they lead up to it and stop, or take the other way of giving it prominence, using it to begin a new paragraph.

Perhaps one reason why our writers attend so little to paragraph method and the method of discourses as wholes, is that rhetoricians have had so

little to say on these heads. There is even an impression that in going beyond choice of words and structure of sentences, they are travelling beyond their legitimate province. The late Mr Cotter Morison, for example, in his sketch of Macaulay, says that we may consider Macaulay's style "from the point of view of the Professor of Rhetoric, or *from the higher standpoint*—the general effect and impressiveness of the whole composition, the pervading power, lucidity, and coherence which make a book attractive to read and easy to master." But if the Professor of Rhetoric does not consider these things, he takes an unjustifiably narrow view of his office.

It is possible that the reason why writers on rhetoric seldom go beyond sentences is that the method of paragraphs and whole compositions cannot easily be illustrated. The writer of a manual cannot quote a whole history, and criticisms are of little value unless the body of the thing criticised is present to the mind of the reader. He may make references, but references are hard to follow.

There is, however, a way out of the difficulty if rhetoricians had only thought of it,—a way that at least may take the reader some distance toward his end. The same principles that govern the structure of sentences govern the whole composition; the "power, lucidity, and coherence which make a book

attractive to read and easy to master," are shown on a smaller scale in the sentence.

There are, for example, three artificial kinds or types of sentence that rhetoricians have distinguished by special names—the Balanced Sentence, the Period, and Climax. Each of these structures depends on simple principles, and may be used with the same advantages and disadvantages on a larger scale.

Take first the Balanced Structure. Balance consists in taking words expressive of ideas that are meant to be compared or contrasted, and planting them in corresponding grammatical places, in similarly constructed phrases or clauses or sentences.

Take an instance from Hazlitt:—

"Few subjects are more nearly allied than these two—vulgarity and affectation. Of the two classes of people, I hardly know which is to be regarded with most distaste, the vulgar aping the genteel, or the genteel constantly sneering at and endeavouring to distinguish themselves from the vulgar. These two sets of persons are always thinking of one another; the lower of the higher with envy, the more fortunate of their less happy neighbours with contempt."

Johnson is a vigorous master of the art. The force of the structure may be felt in the concrete in any of his 'Lives of the Poets,' a work which, with all its limitations, still remains the most instructive body of criticism in our language. For example:—

"Addison thinks justly, but he thinks faintly." "His prose

is the model of the middle style ; on grave subjects not formal, on light occasions not grovelling ; pure without scrupulosity, and exact without elaboration." "Dryden borrows for want of leisure, and Pope for want of genius ; Milton out of pride, and Addison out of modesty."

The trick of the balanced style may be caught by anybody from Johnson, or if he wishes a more modern master, from Macaulay. Of the abuse of it I will speak presently ; meantime a word on its use. On what principles does its advantage rest ?

The basis of its use in exposition is the value of comparison and contrast for making ideas clear. If we wish to obtain a precise idea of anything, we must compare and contrast it with the things that are most like it in nature ; in this way only can we apprehend its precise character. This is the rationale of the matter of a balanced sentence. We must say what a thing is not as well as what it is, if we would be clearly understood ; and comparison of nearly allied things one with another is more instructive than the comparison of things wide as the poles asunder.

The rationale of the form is simply this, that by making the structure as nearly as possible identical except as regards the words brought into comparison or contrast, we economise the reader's attention. The same scheme of clause or sentence is kept up, and the attention may thus be concentrated without distraction on the cardinal words. It is a special art

for giving emphasis, and obviously need not be confined to clauses or sentences, but may be extended to a whole composition.

Obviously, also, the advantage is purely intellectual, or nearly so. Balance is a great feature in the verse of Queen Anne's time. Pope uses it with masterly effect in his didactic verse and in his satires. But it is essentially unsuited to the expression of deep and sustained feeling, because its purpose is to bring distinctions to a sharp point, to make the way clear for the intellect; and it is a well-known law that sharp intellectual effort kills emotion.

Like all marked literary arts, balance becomes monotonous, and even irritating, when carried to excess. The best example of this is found in a writer of the Elizabethan times—Lyly the Euphuist. For example:—     •

“As I have found thee willing to be a fellow in my travel, so would I have thee ready to be a follower of my counsel; in the one shalt thou show thy good-will, in the other manifest thy wisdom. We are now sailing unto an island of small compass as I guess by their maps, but of great civility as I hear by their manners. Which if it be so, it behooveth us to be more inquisitive of their conditions than of their country, and more careful to mark the natures of their men than curious to note the situation of the place.”

When every clause is balanced like this, the smartness and cleverness of the antitheses may be very lively for a time, but we soon tire of it as a ridiculous

affectation. Even Pope's wit is not always equal to the strain of his balanced couplets: with all the ingenuity and brilliancy of his epigrams, the tired ear soon begins to long for more variety of form. The attention is pricked so often by his sharp points that it becomes callous, and will not answer to the spur.

Not only should you reserve balance for real distinctions and real epigrams; not only must you take care that the trick of it does not master you and drive you into fanciful distinctions and sham epigrams; but you should also remember that the effect of balance, as of every artificial structure, depends upon its comparative rarity.

Let us proceed next to the Period.

A Period is commonly defined as a sentence in which the meaning remains suspended till the whole is finished. A sentence is not a period, according to this definition, if you can stop anywhere before the last word and yet have a complete meaning, as in the sentence I am now writing. You cannot, of course, have the meaning intended by the writer till you reach his last word; but if the mind can rest upon a subject and predicate before the end is reached, the sentence is not technically a period. The structure is said to be "loose," as opposed to periodic, if anything is added after the grammatical

essentials of a sentence. The following from De Quincey is an example of a perfect period:—

“Raised almost to divine honours, never mentioned but with affected raptures, the classics of Greece and Rome are seldom read.”

To explain precisely how periods are constructed, I must assume a knowledge of the ordinary terms of grammatical analysis. Every sentence being grammatically divisible into two parts, subject and predicate, there are obviously only two ways in which you can leave your sentence without meaning till the very last word. You must leave to the last, either the leading word in the subject or the leading word in the predicate. If either the subject noun or the predicate verb has adjuncts attached to it, these adjuncts must be given first. There is thus an inversion of the common structure of English speech, in which phrases and clauses follow the words to which they are applied.

This is really the essence of periodic structure. It consists in bringing on predicates before subjects, qualifications before the words they qualify, clauses of reason, condition, exception, before the main statement. If a writer does this habitually, he is said to write in the periodic style, although his writing may contain few technically complete periods. You may often read a page of Gibbon, De Quincey, or any other master of the periodic style, without

finding one perfect period as it is defined by rhetoricians.

Obviously the same method may be applied on a larger scale than the sentence. It may be, and often is, applied to paragraphs, and often in a way to articles, sermons, and addresses. A speaker often indulges in several consecutive sentences of general reflections before he discloses the precise application of them. A journalist often in like manner reserves the point of his remarks for the end of a paragraph or an article. This is in effect a periodic arrangement.

What is the advantage of this method? Has it any advantage? Impatient critics have sometimes declared that it has none,—that the periodic style is radically and incurably vicious. But this is true only of the abuse of the structure, and if the beginner takes pains to understand when and why it is bad, and the risks attending it, he may be able to avail himself of its advantages. That it has advantages is apparent from the fact that majestic writing, the grand style, whether in verse or in prose, is impossible without periodic structure. The opening of ‘Paradise Lost’ is periodic; so are Wordsworth’s finest sonnets; so is Othello’s speech before the Signors of Venice.

Looked at from the reader’s point of view, the effect of periodic structure—of holding phrases or clauses or sentences in suspense—is to impose a

certain strain on the attention. The reader has nothing to attach them to till the key-word comes, and his attention is consequently excited to a higher pitch, if it is excited at all. This strain of attention is exhausting; some readers are incapable of it altogether, and no reader is capable of sustaining it for long. The main danger in the use of the periodic style is that you either never catch your reader's attention, or lose hold of it before you reach the object of your unattached expressions.

From this principle one or two practical hints may be deduced. Within the limits of the reader's capacity and patience, the periodic arrangement is often good. If he apprehends the bare meaning of your unattached clause or clauses, he can apply them to their subject when it comes with greater precision than if you named the subject first and gave the qualifications afterward. But you must make sure that he is able and willing to make the necessary intellectual exertion.

You must have something important to say, something that will reward the reader for the strain upon his intellect. Nothing is more tedious than to hear a speaker slowly evolving periods up to a familiar application.

Again, it has to be remembered that one effect of periodic arrangement, from the strain it puts upon the intellect, is to give a certain dignity and state-

liness to the style. Hence it is adapted to a weighty, solemn strain of sentiment, such as raises men's minds above that lax, familiar tone which is their ordinary attitude toward ordinary subjects.<sup>1</sup> Bearing this in mind, you will abstain from inversions and suspended statements when your topic is simple or trivial. Majesty of manner without majesty of matter is ludicrous, like all affectations.

A few words next on Climax. The word has passed out of books of rhetoric into common speech. It literally means a ladder, and was applied by the ancient rhetoricians to a sentence so constructed that its members were on a scale of ascending interest, rising step by step to a culminating point. A sentence from Cicero's impeachment of Verres was quoted by Quintilian, and has remained ever since the standard example of climax:—

“It is an outrage to bind a Roman citizen ; to scourge him is an atrocious crime ; to put him to death is almost a parricide ; but to crucify him—what name can I find for this ?”

The word “climax” is generally used in common speech for the culminating point, but, strictly speaking, it applies to the whole flight of ascending steps.

<sup>1</sup> It may be worth noticing that the most colloquial of novelists show a tendency to become periodic when they reach their catastrophe. “George Eliot” is a periodic writer by habit, but the stately conclusion of ‘The Mill on the Floss’ is seen on analysis to be more periodic than the body of the story.

The principle of it is simple, and is obeyed by all writers with any instinct for literary effect, whether consciously or unconsciously. It depends upon the law of our nature that all strong feelings tend to decline unless they are fed by stronger and stronger additions. No feeling can be sustained long at a uniform pitch. This is why climactic structure must be more or less studied in all composition. If you have an audience to interest, you must keep alive the attention to the last; and you cannot keep alive the attention if you bring out all your best things, your most interesting, impressive, moving, exciting, startling thoughts at the beginning.

Great orators frame their speeches on this principle, and it cannot be neglected with impunity in the humblest essay. You must lay your account with it before you begin, when you think over the general plan of what you have to say. Above all, it is well to know how you are to end. There is much wisdom in the paradox enunciated by Edgar Allan Poe in his instructive essay on the "Philosophy of Composition," that the plot of a story is best constructed from the *dénouement* backward. I do not know whether, as a matter of fact, any great speech was ever thought out from the peroration backward, but one can see that such a procedure would have its advantages.

Be it understood that all these hints about method

bear solely on compositions with a purpose, whether that purpose be to convey certain information or to drive home a certain conviction. Balances and periods and climaxes are merely means to certain definite ends; a man may have a workman-like command of these instruments,—he even may be able to use them without seeming to use them, may have the art to conceal his art,—and yet have none of the charm of a writer of genius. I do not think that any writer of genius is likely to be spoilt by the study of these elementary arts; they will not, of course, teach him how to snatch the grace that is beyond the reach of art, the spontaneous felicities that are the delight of the literary epicure. How to prepare a substantial meal for the hungry—that is as far as practical hints on writing can profess to go.

## CHAPTER III.

## FIGURES OF SPEECH.

You may think that in what I have said about structure or arrangement I have not been sufficiently definite and magisterial in my precepts,—that I have left too much to your own discretion. But this has been my deliberate intention: right or wrong, it is my opinion that the greater part must be left to the writer's own discretion,—that the best a rhetorician can do for you is not to furnish you with rules, but to set you thinking on general, common-sense principles, from which you can deduce rules for your own practice.

If I have been indefinite in my remarks on structure, I shall be still more so in my remarks on what rhetoricians call Figures of Speech. In the use of figurative language, the writer must trust still more to his own resources. I shall merely endeavour to show what a figure is, why people use

figurative language, and on what depends the effect of some of the leading figures that have been distinguished. When we realise what figures of speech are, we can see at once why they cannot be manufactured by rule, though there may be some practical advantage in knowing their true nature and office.

A figure of speech may be broadly defined as any departure from the ordinary or commonplace in expression, whether in form of sentence, or the use of certain forms or modes of exposition or illustration, or application of words. It is not easy to cover with a definition all the figures that rhetoricians have named, but this about does it.

The word "figure" is a translation of the Greek *scheme*, our "scheme," and was applied at first to extraordinary figures or forms of sentence, such as balance, the period, climax. These are, as it were, figures by pre-eminence, sentences in which the figure or form is remarkable enough to stand out. Gradually the name has been extended to other departures from the ordinary in expression, for some of which the old rhetoricians had the distinctive name of *tropes* (literally *turns*—i.e., from the ordinary); such as Interrogation and Exclamation, which are departures from the plain or ordinary use of certain forms; Personification, Hyperbole, Irony, which are departures from the plain mode of exposition; Simile, a departure from the plain mode

of illustration; Metonymy, a departure from the ordinary direct application of words.

On each of these I shall make some comments, but mark at the outset that the essence of all figurative as distinguished from plain expression is the departure from the common, and that the motives for this departure are partly the natural love of variety and irregularity, the instinct of rebellion against routine, and partly the natural love of impressing, startling, exciting attention. It is this last property of figurative language that commends it to the notice of the rhetorician. This makes it useful for the torpid or lethargic reader. If everybody were as much interested in everything as everybody else, and if nobody were ever excited beyond a certain steady pitch, there would be no occasion for figurative language. But we are variously interested in things, and so all of us when excited are apt to depart from the common in our expressions in order to stir others up to our level. Hudibras is not the only man of whom it may be said that—

“He could not ope  
His mouth, but out there flew a trope.”

Savages use more figures of speech than civilised men; children more than grown-up people. The fewer words a man has, the more apt he is to make an uncommon use of them. We may say generally that a man's figurative language is proportionate to

the liveliness of his ideas and the poverty of his vocabulary.

*Interrogation, Exclamation, Apostrophe, Vision.*

These figures, like all artifices of style, were much in use among the writers of last century. Being strong and marked, they have a great attraction for beginners. The earlier letters of Shelley are full of them. The greatest modern master of the style is Carlyle, and a study of his use of abrupt figures gives the best clue to the conditions of their effect.

The plain use of the Interrogative form is to ask a question; it is a figurative use to convey a feeling or an opinion in the form of a question. "Where are the snows of last year?" "Where now is Alexander or Hercules?" "What is love or friendship? Is it something material,—a ball, an apple, a plaything—which may be taken from one and given to another? Is it capable of no extension, no communication?" No answer is expected to such questions, as in plain interrogation. Either the answer is obvious, and the question intended merely to give a turn to the reader's reflections, or the question is intended to call attention to a topic and prepare the reader's mind for an answer which the writer proceeds to give.

The form of Exclamation is seen in its plain use in interjections, which express a present excitement

too sharp and sudden for the formality of a regular sentence. The form is used figuratively when a writer exclaims as if under the pressure of a sudden feeling, "What an entity, one of those night-leaguers of San Martin; all steadily snoring there in the heart of the Andes under the eternal stars!" "The battering of insurrectionary axes clangs audible across the *Œil-de-Bœuf*. What an hour!"

Similarly, the form of *Apostrophe*, the plain use of which is to address by name or epithet a person within hearing, is put to extraordinary or figurative use when applied to absent persons or inanimate things. "Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour!" "Ancient of days, august Athena, where, where are thy men of might?" "O Tam! O Tam! thou'lt get thy fairin'!"

It is to be remarked that in all these three figures, *Interrogation*, *Exclamation*, and *Apostrophe*, there is assumed, as it were, an extraordinary excitement, an unusual height of sublime or humorous feeling, as if the subject were bodily before the eyes of the writer. There is thus in all three an element of what rhetoricians have termed *Vision*, that mode of narrative or description in which events and scenes are described as if the writer were looking on, and had all the vivid emotions of an actual spectator. Carlyle's 'French Revolution' is one continued "vision" of this sort; the writer exclaims, questions,

and apostrophises as the scenes and actors pass before him.

"Wo now to all bodyguards, mercy is none for them! Miomandre de Sainte-Marie pleads with soft words, on the grand staircase, descending four steps to the roaring tornado. His comrades snatch him up, by the skirts and belts; literally from the jaws of destruction; and slam-to their door. This also will stand few instants; the panels shivering in, like potsherds. Barricading serves not: fly fast, ye bodyguards; rabid Insurrection, like the Hellhound Chase, uproaring at your heels!

"The terror-struck bodyguards fly, bolting and barricading: it follows. Whitherward? Through hall on hall: wo now! toward the Queen's suite of rooms. . . . Tremble not, women, but haste!"

The exclamatory style is best used to express strong feeling. This gives the clue to the right use of it. There is no excuse for departing from the ordinary forms of expression unless there is a departure from the ordinary level of feeling.

The beginner who is tempted to experiment in these abrupt forms—and most beginners have felt the temptation—should bear this in mind. One or two other cautions may be given for his consideration.

1. If you use these abrupt forms in description, you must see that the general energy of your language is in correspondence. It is not everybody that has Carlyle's graphic vigour; and feeble, commonplace language combined with these ambitious figures is open to be laughed at.

“2. Bear in mind that the effect of a figure is due to its being a departure from the common mode of expression. If it is used too often it ceases to be a figure; it becomes normal; it loses the charm of rarity.

3. You may feel strongly about the subject yourself, strongly enough to warrant your departure from ordinary expression, but your theme may not bear equal dignity in the eyes of common-sense. Your emotion may be purely personal. Still, instinct is the only safe guide here. Make sure that your emotion is genuine, and take your chance of finding it shared by others.

There are figures, for example, in every sentence of the following extract; it is all compact of figures technically; but it has none of the essence of figurative language; it is essentially commonplace. The writer is supposed to stand before the tomb of Eugenia’s husband under the impression that Eugenia herself is also dead and buried there:—

“‘And is it even so?’ I half-articulated with a sudden thrill of irrepressible emotion, ‘poor widowed mourner! lovely Eugenia! Art thou already reunited to the object of thy faithful affection? And so lately! Not yet on that awaiting space on the cold marble have they inscribed thy gentle name. And these fragile memorials! Were there none to tend them for thy sake?’”

I should be sorry if these cautions prevented the beginner from attempting the high style of in-

versions and exclamations. He should not let caution freeze his ambition. The vulgarity of the style may always be redeemed by freshness of idea and language. He should trust his instincts. He will find out soon enough from others when he becomes ridiculous. No one who is too much afraid of being laughed at can ever become a very effective writer.

*Personification.*

The same cautions and counter-cautions to "be not too cautious neither," apply to Personification, the art of writing about inanimate things as if they had human life, feeling, and personality.

Children and savages personify naturally and literally, and for children of a larger growth there is a certain irrational charm in making-believe that things about which we feel strongly have a life and feeling of their own. An attachment to any object inclines us to attribute life to it, and feeling, and thought, perhaps as a result of our craving for reciprocity. A sailor speaks of his watch as "she," personifies his weather-glass, and half-believes the mercury within it to be a living, sentient being.

This gives the clue to the right use of the figure. There must be some excess of feeling to justify it, if it is to be used with really telling and convincing effect. One of the counts in Wordsworth's indictment of the "poetic diction" of the eighteenth cen-

tury was the use of personification as a mere grace or embellishment, a mere trick or habit, without reference to the strength of the feeling to be expressed. It was on this ground that Wordsworth objected to Cowper's lines—

“ But the sound of a church-going bell  
These valleys and rocks never heard ;  
Never sighed at the sound of a knell,  
Nor smiled when a Sabbath appeared.”

But it shows how relative all principles of style are, that to thousands of good evangelicals, such as Cowper himself was, this personification of the valleys and rocks would appear perfectly natural, the appropriate vehicle of a strong feeling.

The effect of personification in heightening description has always been felt, and various fashions or modes of the figure have prevailed at different periods. It would take a treatise to follow them. The general remark may be made that the literary effect decays as the fashion spreads, each fashion in its turn becoming old-fashioned and vulgar.

“ And see where surly Winter passes off,  
Far to the North, and calls his ruffian blasts.  
His blasts obey and quit the howling hill,  
While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch ”—

When Thomson wrote his “ Seasons,” this kind of thing was not too easy, but after a generation or two people tired of it.

A very similar fashion in prose was popularised by Dickens, who was a great master of it—the fashion of describing the objects of a landscape, the houses of a street, the furniture of a room, as if they were a company of human creatures, with individual caprices, longings, likings, and antipathies. Dickens generally practises this art as an artist, and uses it to harmonise the details of his pictures and expand and deepen the sentiment of his story, as, for example, in his description of the night-wind in the opening of ‘The Chimes,’ or of hunger in the Saint Antoine quarter in ‘The Tale of Two Cities.’ But even in his hands this personification became a mere trick or knack, and since his time it has been as much a commonplace element in novelists’ diction as it was in the poetic diction of last century, a cheap ornament put on without much regard to its suitability.

### *Hyperbole.*

Hyperbole, or Exaggeration, is classed among figures of speech. If we take figurative language to mean any departure from ordinary expression, this is a figure on the assumption that ordinary speech presents things as they are, things as they appear to the eyes of cool, sober common-sense, in their true relations and proportions. Things are exaggerated from this standard by personal feelings, by loves and hatreds, hopes and fears, admiration,

wonder, and contempt. Strictly speaking, it is only what we love or admire or fear that we exaggerate, or make to appear bigger than it is; but the word hyperbole is applied equally to the minimisings or belittlings or distortions of hatred or contempt.

This is how hyperboles arise, and we are all so apt to view things through the medium of passion and prejudice that exaggerated language is the rule rather than the exception. Who can profess to see things steadily through a clear and colourless medium, a medium uncoloured by prejudice, unclouded by mists of passion? Still, there is a certain average level, which varies with the habits of generations, and the temperaments of races and nationalities; and it is from this level that each generation judges what is hyperbolical or extravagant in speech.

Many persons habitually use language of exaggeration from mere ardour of temperament. Their feelings are always in extremes. What interests them for the moment is the most wonderful thing in the whole course of their experience. Their geese are all swans; their wicked men monsters of depravity, their good men paragons of virtue. We are all apt to exaggerate in this way more or less.

But is it ever permissible to exaggerate for rhetorical effect? One would be disposed to say offhand that it can never be,—that nothing but plain, sober statement can ever be justifiable, that the bare truth tells

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twice. But the question fairly faced is not so simple as it looks. It is partly a question of ethics, and partly a question of taste.

On the ethical side, it may be argued in this way. Suppose a case of distress to be relieved, of a bad habit to be changed, a law to be repealed or enacted, an institution to be reformed. The public are apathetic and indifferent. An enthusiast in the cause addresses them. He believes the distress to be worse than it really is; he ascribes all sorts of pernicious consequences to the bad habit: he expects too much from his scheme of reform. He uses hyperbolical language. But the impression he produces is no stronger than the bare truth ought to produce. If he used sober language his apathetic public would not stir; he would produce no impression at all. His hearers are at a distance from him, wrapt up in their own concerns; he must raise his voice, or they will not hear. A statue intended to be seen at a height must be carved larger than life-size, otherwise it will appear diminutive. It is by the impression produced that the work must be judged.

There is a certain amount of truth in this. It may be conceded that no great cause was ever won without enthusiasm, and enthusiasm always exaggerates. It is the natural corrective of apathy, which is just as far from the truth on the other side.

Is exaggeration, then, to be recommended? That

is another affair. You must remember that if you are in earnest, you will probably exaggerate enough without trying. The man who exaggerates deliberately is a charlatan, a puffer of spurious goods; besides he is almost certain to be found out. The accent of insincerity is easily detected, whether in speech or in writing. In rhetoric as in other things, honesty is the best policy.

The question of taste in the use of hyperbole is more subtle. This often arises when there is no question of moral truth or falsehood, of leading or misleading opinion. It is rather, as it were, an affair of dress; "expression is the dress of thought," and we may dress in quiet colours cut after the fashion of our time, or in glaring colours and eccentric disregard of both fashion and propriety.

The common ideal of good expression is that it should exactly fit the subject, keeping close to the proportions of things as they are; that descriptive phrases and epithets should present objects as they exist in nature, neither exaggerated nor diminished. It is an excellent ideal to aim at, and the principle holds absolutely good of scientific expression. But there are kinds of description in which it is quite possible to pursue this ideal in such a way as to defeat your own end, and distort and falsify what you wish to present to your reader's mind. Often what you have to describe is not an abstract object

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detached from all human emotion, but your own feeling about an object; and in trying to tone down your description in obedience to rhetorical precept, you may tone down the feeling and so change it that the description neither truly expresses your own feeling nor corresponds adequately to the feeling of your reader.

This is the danger of aiming at an elegant sobriety of expression. Even elegance and sobriety may be carried to extremes.

I have heard of a Professor of Divinity who advised his students after writing their sermons to go over them pen in hand and strike out all the adjectives. I believe this is not uncommonly considered a good way of correcting the natural tendency of youth to superlatives and hyperboles.

The advice seems to me to be essentially erroneous, and fatal to the acquisition of a style that shall really communicate your thoughts and feelings. It is good enough, perhaps, if the adjectives are heaped up out of the parrot memory without any reference to the subject. But it is bad in so far as it tends to fix attention on the words by themselves, and abstract it from the thoughts and feelings expressed, with which rather than the words the correction should begin. A really expressive style is not to be acquired by pruning and weeding out in cold blood epithets that have been applied in the heat of com-

position. One should learn rather to control the heat of composition. The best way, indeed the only sound way, of curing the tendency to extravagance of expression, is by reforming the habit of mind from which it proceeds.

This opens up a large subject, which I must leave with my reader's own intelligence, content if I have made him think of the fact that there is such a thing as a tendency to hyperbole, and that it needs correction. I should like briefly to indicate further another risk that attends any deliberate effort to correct it.

To correct this tendency was one of the persistent aims of the late Mr Matthew Arnold. According to him, the essence of culture on the intellectual side lies in learning to see things as they are. Read, for example, in his 'Essays in Criticism,' the paper on "The Literary Influence of Academies," where he traces certain extravagances of expression to their roots in narrow and limited habits of thought. By looking at things too exclusively from the point of view of our own village, or occupation, or sect, or party, or province, we are apt to attach an exaggerated importance to them, and to feel and speak of them fiercely and immoderately as if they were objects of vital concern to the whole world. To this narrow habit of mind Mr Arnold attached the nickname of Philistinism.

Mr Arnold's doctrine I believe to be in the main

most wholesome. I do not pretend to do more than roughly indicate it. You cannot do better as a student of style than give your days and nights to reading Mr Arnold himself. He is one of the most charming writers of his century, as well as one of the most instructive.

And yet I have often seen a grave error committed by men who tried to form themselves on his ideal of culture. Thinking it a mark of Philistinism to use strong language about merely local or sectarian concerns, they conceive it to be a mark of culture to adopt an indifferent, superior, fltering, or depreciatory tone towards everything in which they happen not to be interested themselves. Now this is not to see things as they are; this is not to be a man of culture, but a man of culture who has missed his aim, a prig or superior person. You may put yourself quite as much out of proportion by affecting a grand indifference as by taking a fierce and immoderate interest: to treat the affairs of Little Peddlington from a cosmical point of view may be as absurd as to treat them from a provincial point of view. If your writing is intended for Little Peddlington, or for men and women of your own occupation or sect or province, there is nothing gained by writing as if your reader were the Man in the Moon, or even "a calm strong angel surveying mankind."

Hyperbole carried to excess is stigmatised by such

names as rant, bombast, inflation, "tall talk," turgid magniloquence. But no formal rule can be laid down fixing the altitude to which you may rise without transgressing the bounds of good taste. In every community there is an unwritten standard; this is unwritten because it is unwritable. Each individual must find it out for himself in the reception given him by his readers.

*Irony, Innuendo, and Epigram.*

The next figure I shall deal with is Irony, which consists in saying something different from what you mean, leaving it to your reader's intelligence to apprehend your real meaning.

This is a very different literary weapon. The use of hyperbole—of "forceful sounds and colours bold"—is to stimulate torpid intelligence, to stir dull sensibilities, to drive impressions home by violence. In ironical writing something is left to the free action of the reader's wits. The quicker the intelligence of your reader, the more prosperous is likely to be your use of the figure.

"Irony," Quintilian says, "is understood either from the mode of delivery or from the character of the speaker, or from the nature of the subject; for if any of these be at variance with the words, it is apparent that the intention is different from the expression."

The danger obviously is that you be taken literally. This actually happened to De Foe. His 'Shortest Way with the Dissenters,' in which, ironically assuming the rôle of a Highflying Tory, he argued that Dissenters ought to be exterminated, by hanging and banishing whoever was found at a conventicle, brought him to the pillory. He afterwards admitted that perhaps he was justly punished for being such a fool as to trust his meaning to irony.

Goldsmith is another instance of a martyr to misunderstood irony. A good many of the tales told by Hawkins and even Boswell to prove his egregious vanity are merely samples of ironical jesting at his own expense. When, for instance, he turned away in apparent indignation when two handsome ladies beside him were attracting a great deal of attention, and exclaimed that elsewhere he too had his admirers, it is easy to see that the indignation was ironical. A practical hint may be drawn from this, that in writing you must remember that you have not the tone of the voice to point the irony.

Irony was a prevalent fashion in the age of Queen Anne. Swift, Pope, Arbuthnot, and Addison were all masters of it in various degrees of subtlety. The reason why the figure was so common among the eighteenth-century essayists probably was, that they wrote for a comparatively small audience which prided itself on its wit, and was consequently flat-

tered by indirect expression. A light, bantering, ironical tone was naturally preferred, and the strong, direct expression of strong feeling regarded as a waste of force. With a mixed audience at different levels of culture, irony is much more apt to be misunderstood. And perhaps this is partly the reason why ironical writing is much less practised in the present century. Writers address wider and much more miscellaneous audiences, and their irony runs greater risk of being misinterpreted unless it is so broad as to lose all literary charm.

A figure extremely common in modern American comic literature might be classed as ironical hyperbole, exaggeration for the mere fun of the thing. The test of good and bad is originality.

A variety of figures have been distinguished by rhetoricians all of which turn, like irony, on some contrast between the form of the expression and the meaning. The writer, as it were, plays with the medium of communication; there is a sort of game of hide-and-seek between him and his readers. We may put together under the general name of Epigram all those cases in which the writer constructs his statement so as to lead the reader to expect a certain meaning and then suddenly suggests another; all sayings in which the writer by some artifice of construction prepares a surprise for the reader.

What is technically known as the Condensed

Sentence is an example of this. "Heaven defend us from the Evil One and from metaphors!" A friend's advice to Mark Twain when in travelling he began to talk about private matters before some Germans: "Speak in German: these Germans may understand English," is classed as an instance of Innuendo. The Epigram proper is seen in such sayings as South's: "Speech was given to the ordinary sort of men whereby to communicate their mind; but to wise men whereby to conceal it;" or the Master of Trinity's rebuke to a Junior Fellow: "We are none of us infallible, not even the youngest of us."

The balanced form of sentence is often used to give point to an epigram, but the essence of epigrammatic writing is the surprise that lurks in the expression, by whatever art the ambush is contrived. It may consist in merely repeating a phrase after leading the reader to expect a reason, as in the classical epigram on Dr Fell.<sup>1</sup> The motto of the Marischal family—"Thay saye: Quhat say thay? Lat thame say"—is a genuinely epigrammatic expression of indifference to public opinion.

The aim of the witty epigrammatist is generally satire or harmless pleasantry, and we are here con-

<sup>1</sup> "I do not love thee, Dr Fell.  
The reason why I cannot tell:  
But this I'm sure I know full well,  
I do not love thee, Dr Fell."

cerned primarily with the usefulness of figures in conveying knowledge. In this respect the value of the epigram is simply that it sticks better in the memory than plain expression. Truth is not made more luminous by being put in an epigrammatic form, but it is made more striking and memorable. The reader's own wits have to be exercised; and what the epigrammatist suggests or insinuates comes to him with something of the charm of a discovery. Most of us have read without emotion the ordinary grammatical statement that "the verb to be is a verb of incomplete predication;" when this is put by Hegel in the epigrammatic form "being is nothing," how much more striking it is! Some people even think it profound, though it means nothing more than this, that to say that a thing is, without saying what it is, is as good as to say nothing at all about it.

### *Similes and Metaphors.*

The exact sense of the word Simile as a figure of speech was acutely defined by Dr Johnson in a criticism of Addison's poem, "The Campaign." The poet compares Marlborough issuing his orders in the thick of the fight to an angel that "rides on the whirlwind and directs the storm." The critic raises the question whether this is technically a simile, and decides that it is not, but a mere exemplification,

because the things compared are similar in kind. That a poet's verse flows like a torrent, or that his fancy wanders about like a bee in quest of honey, is a simile; but that the Thames waters fields as the Po waters fields, or that Horace polished his verses as Isocrates polished his orations, is a mere exemplification or plain comparison. "Marlborough is so like the angel in the poem that the action of both is almost the same, and performed in the same manner."

The point of this is, that before language can be called figurative, it must be a departure from the ordinary. Our ordinary way of thinking is to compare things that are the same in kind—one river with another, one general with another; it is a departure from this ordinary course of our thoughts to detect resemblances in things that are different in kind—a diplomatist and a fox, a child and an opening flower. It might be argued that Addison's comparison is figurative after all, inasmuch as it compares a battle to a storm.

When the form of comparison is dropped, as when a man is simply called "a lion," or "an ape," or "a steam-engine in trousers," the figure is known as Metaphor. A metaphor is merely a condensed simile, a double figure, inasmuch as you not only compare things different in kind but assert identity when you mean only partial likeness.

The uses of similes and metaphors are various. Similitudes, comparisons, are the chief instruments of expression for all purposes. They may be purely ornamental, decorative, pretty, fanciful, "rhetorical" in the narrow sense; or they may be "poetic" in the strict sense, imaginative, transfiguring a subject with light borrowed from some image of grandeur or beauty or profound feeling; or merely illustrative, serving as a help to the understanding in exposition. On this last comparatively humble use there are some precepts that are obvious enough but yet are sometimes neglected.

The cardinal precept, which applies to all comparisons, plain as well as figurative, is that the thing to which the comparison is made should be more intelligible than the subject of the comparison.

"Metaphors," Ben Jonson says in his 'Underwoods,' "far-fetched, hinder to be understood; and affected, lose their grace. . . . As if a privy councillor should at table take his metaphor from a dicing-house, . . . or a justice of the peace draw his similitudes from the mathematics, . . . or a gentleman of Northamptonshire should fetch all his illustrations to his country neighbours from shipping, and tell them of the mainsheet and the bowline."

When Mr Disraeli spoke at Glasgow as Lord Rector of the University, he seemed to remember that he was in a great commercial centre, and made

an effort to adapt his figures to his audience. "A civilised community," he said, "must rest upon a large *realised capital* of thought and sentiment; there must be a *reserved fund* of public morality to draw upon in the exigencies of national life." The merchants of Glasgow probably understood him easily, but these figures must have been as Sanscrit to the average undergraduate.

I have heard a preacher of a scientific turn illustrate moral states by reference to crystallisation, polarisation, and deflection! This to a country congregation. We are all apt to take for granted that what is familiar to ourselves is equally familiar to others.

Many an apt illustration, really fitted to enlighten, is spoiled by being over the heads of the audience,—not over their heads intellectually as being beyond their grasp, but as being beyond their knowledge. The teacher's besetting sin is to overrate the knowledge of his hearers and to underrate their intelligence.

For merely intellectual purposes a simile cannot be too familiar and homely. It is a principle of artistic effect that it should be in harmony with the tone of the subject. A homely illustration, such as the comparison of a man struggling with difficulties to a fly in treacle, may be perfectly graphic and yet grotesquely offensive in a serious composition.

Writers with a passion for exactness often fall into the error of pushing a comparison into too much detail. This leads to what is technically called "straining" a metaphor or simile. You should be content generally with a bold, broad resemblance.

### *Metonymies.*

To complete our account of the leading kinds of figurative language, we shall advert next to various ways of describing things not plainly and directly by their own names, but allusively or circumstantially or symbolically. Consider, for example, how the following differs from plain speech:—

"If the French army under the great Napoleon was inspired by the belief that a possible marshal's baton was in every soldier's knapsack, so the belief that the child of the log cabin may become the Chief of the White House penetrates the lowliest American homes, and adds to the dignity of the home without subtracting from the honour of the presidency."

Such expressions as "every soldier carries a marshal's baton in his knapsack," for the plain every soldier may become a marshal; "the child of the log cabin," for a poor man's son; "Chief of the White House," for the President of the United States, are technically known as Metonymies or Metonyms. The word has never, like "metaphor," found its way into the common vocabulary, but some such word is needed in the interest of exact criticism. Metony-

mic expression is quite as important an instrument of effective style as metaphoric, and it depends upon a different principle. The principle of metaphor is resemblance; the principle of metonym is accidental connection of some sort, accidental but yet distinctive, so that the circumstance named suggests the thing or person intended. It is an accident that the residence of the President is known as the White House; nevertheless, the Chief of the White House is a sufficient description. Similarly, any distinctive peculiarity of dress, such as a white tie, a shovel-hat, a smock-frock, a red coat; or of implement, such as pen, sword, trowel, baton, paste and scissors; or of residence, cottage, villa, palace,—in short, any significant part, property, adjunct, or collateral, may be made the basis of an allusive name.

All such allusive substitute-names are loosely known as metaphors. There is no reason against this in the etymology of the word; both metaphor and metonym imply the idea of transference of meaning or allusive suggestion. It was only for scientific convenience that the old rhetoricians applied the one word to cases where the suggestion is through a link of likeness, and the other to cases where it is through an accidental connection. Scientifically, the distinction has some value, because a writer may be rich in metaphor and weak in metonym, and conversely; wealth in the two means

of expression depending upon different faculties—the one upon a keen and quick sense for resemblance, the other upon a strong memory for details and collateral circumstances.

Practically, however, the distinction is of less consequence; that is to say, a knowledge of the distinction will not help a writer much in allusive description. He may use either tool or both freely, without being able to name them with accurate precision.

Some thirty varieties of metonym, as we have defined it, have been distinguished by rhetoricians. The number will not appear at all surprising when you remember that the principle of metonymy is simply to substitute for the plain name of a thing a name or phrase based on something connected with it. Many of the figures classified by rhetoricians are really so common that they can hardly be called figurative; they are part of the common speech. Thus, to describe a rich man as a man “with a long purse,” or to say that “New York was thrown into a state of great excitement,” when we mean the inhabitants of New York, is technically to use the metonym of putting “the container for the thing contained.” But such artifices are so common that it takes some thought to see wherein they depart from plain speech.

Instead of enumerating the varieties of metonym,

it is more to our purpose to distinguish the objects with which they are used. One obvious object is picturesqueness, vividness, animation, colour. A "red-coat" is a more picturesque word than a soldier; it calls up a picturesque circumstance to the mind's eye. Whether the intention is contemptuous or respectful, it is more effective to indicate a thing by some striking circumstance than by a plain name: an "oil king," a "cotton lord," a "carpet-bagger," a "quill-driver," "the blind old man of Chios' rocky isle,"<sup>1</sup> "the seer of Chelsea,"<sup>2</sup> "the glorious dreamer of Highgate."<sup>3</sup>

Another object is to make the expression more vague and dignified. The plain name for disagreeable things is apt to become too suggestive, and sometimes cannot be used without harshness or coarseness. Our meaning must then be delicately hinted at, decorously presented under a veil to hide its repulsive features. This is technically called Euphemism.

Undoubtedly the most prevailing motive for the use of metonymies, as for all figures of speech, is the mere love of variety. To call a spade a spade is a good enough rule, useful to remember when you are tempted to over-elaborate and superfine allusiveness; but too close an observance of it would result in a very bald and poverty-stricken diction. A news-

<sup>1</sup> Homer.

<sup>2</sup> Carlyle.

<sup>3</sup> Coleridge.

paper editor who consults the popular taste is obliged to proceed on an opposite principle. You may call a spade a spade once or twice or three times in the course of an article, but if you have to refer to it oftener, you must find some metonym for the humble instrument, even if it is nothing better than "this oblong implement of manual husbandry." An agricultural labourer may be introduced as such, but as the article proceeds the changes are rung on plain synonyms such as husbandman and peasant, and familiar metonyms such as Hodge, son of the soil, smock-frock, chawbacon, clodhopper.

It is the craving for variety that fosters the periphrastic fine English at which critics have often directed their laughter. It is under this influence that the barrister becomes a "gentleman of the long robe," the doctor "a disciple of Æsculapius," the angler a "follower of Izaak Walton" or "a brother of the gentle craft," a smoker "a lover of the Nicotian weed."

To seek to banish such variations in plain language is a foolish enterprise on the part of criticism. They are founded on a natural instinct. The critic may pitch out some that have become, in Dr Johnson's words, "easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting," but others will come in their stead. The merit of a metonym, as of other figures, lies in its originality or comparative novelty; when they have reached a

certain pitch of commonness, they are dropped by all writers with any self-respect. You must make your *index expurgatorius* for yourself, remembering that the fear of vulgarity is a very cramping sentiment, and that straining after originality has its own dangers. If the coining of new metonyms does not come easy to you, you are better not to attempt it.

## CHAPTER IV.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS.

I BEGAN by quoting the opinion that the best way to acquire a good style is to think as little about it as possible. I do not altogether agree with this, but perhaps some of my readers do, after following me thus far and observing how many contradictory considerations arise when we begin to think on any of the means of expression. Better never begin thinking about expression at all if it is so difficult to hit the right use of the various instruments.

The study of rhetorical principles in the abstract probably does paralyse rather than help the judgment. They should be thought out in connection with the practice of good writers, and then they should help you, if they are sound principles, in deciding for yourself whether what you read is good writing or not. If it impresses you, interests you, enlightens you, it is good writing for you. My object

is to help you in analysing the effect produced on yourself, and studying how it is done as a guide to your own practice.

Nothing is to be gained by studying style out of relation to the subject and the persons addressed, if you really wish to use words as a means of communication. Some people say that it is enough to be full of your subject and in earnest about it. They are so far right that this is indispensable; you cannot have effective writing without knowledge and earnestness. The most effective speaker is the man who is in earnest. But what does earnestness mean? It means that the speaker is determined to get a certain conviction home, to pass it from his own mind to another. But is this enough? Are we to suppose that the powerful orator never thought for a moment beforehand what he was going to say and how he was to say it? That there was no premeditation, no previous preparation? If he did pause to think before he spoke, then he thought about style, only it was in the right way, about style in connection with the subject and the persons addressed.

I may quote from a great master of popular style, Mr Spurgeon, some sensible remarks which have a bearing on this:—

“I know a good minister who prepared very elaborately. He told me he got tired of the hard work, and one day

preached a simple sermon, such as he would have preached in his shirt-sleeves if he had been wakened up in the middle of the night. The people were far more impressed than by his usual discourses. I said, 'I'd give them some more of that.' But I should not say so to you, young man. This was an elderly man, full of matter. Whatever he said in course of conversation was good."

The reason why speeches carefully studied and written out are often ineffective is, that the writer in his study loses touch with his audience. A practised speaker who has learned by experiment what tells, who knows and is known to his audience, is often more effective off-hand than when he has made elaborate preparation, because then he is apt to diverge into more abstruse trains of thought. To keep an audience before the mind's eye, and follow its moods as if it were actually present, needs a vivid imagination.

In writing, the nature of the subject and the audience have to be studied at least as much as the mere expression. They must be taken all together. What rhetoricians call the "intellectual qualities of style," such as impressiveness, simplicity, perspicuity, precision, are really decided from the effect produced on the reader by matter and manner, together. It is this joint effect that we judge from when we call a composition impressive, or simple, or perspicuous.

A mistake often made by writers on style is to speak of simplicity as if it were something abso-

lute,—as if a particular form of expression were absolutely more simple than another. Simplicity is really a relative term. An expression is simple or abstruse according as it is familiar to the reader or the reverse.

We are often told that we should use the Saxon part of our vocabulary rather than the Latin, because it is simpler. The late Dean Alford raised the cry, and it is often heard. "Latin," says Mr Spurgeon, "is turf; Saxon is stone, good to pelt sinners with." But it all depends upon whether the Saxon words are in common use. We have retained in our speech the Saxon words for many common things and primitive feelings, but others have been superseded by Latin words, and a word may be of Saxon origin and yet be far from simple. "Gainsay" is not so simple a word as "contradict." "Yeasay" may be a prettier word than "assent," but it is not so readily understood. "Inwit" is a good Saxon word, but we have to explain it by the Latin "conscience." We may, if we like, use "forewords" instead of "preface," to gratify a sentiment or carry out a theory, but it is pedantic or affected, and not simple English. The simplicity of a word depends entirely on whether or not it is in common use.

It is a mistake, again, to suppose that simplicity depends entirely on choice of words. It depends at least as much on structure. Take a passage in any

old author, and you will find that though the words separately are simple enough, you have often to read twice and think, because the syntax, the turn of phrase or sentence, is unfamiliar to you. Mr Spurgeon's simplicity is due as much to the colloquial form of his sentences as to his homely diction. In a thoroughly simple style the words are familiar, the cast of sentence is familiar, and the illustrations are drawn from familiar sources. It must be added that the ideas also are familiar.

It is often impossible to express new ideas in simple language. When Burke was said to be a less simple speaker than Fox, and this was charged against him as a defect, De Quincey repelled the charge on the ground that Fox was merely the mouthpiece of an accredited party policy, whereas Burke was trying to connect the events of the moment with high general principles. "Who complains of a prophet," he asked, "for being a little darker of speech than a post-office directory?"

It would, doubtless, be a hard thing to insist that every thinker on every subject should strive to make himself level with the comprehension of the meanest capacity and the most indolent intelligence. The amount of effort that you require of your reader must be regulated by circumstances. You may purposely choose to address a limited audience. A treatise on the Appreciation of Gold, or the Philo-

sophical Presuppositions of Experience, cannot be made as simple as Hints on Marriage or a story of the adventures of a cat. There are abstruse subjects that have something like a dialect of their own, and nobody can blame you if you write for those who have learned the dialect, and if you shrink from the labour of trying to be intelligible in common speech. The same holds good to a certain extent of feelings ; your language may be purposely veiled and mystical, addressed only to the initiated. It would be a waste of words to advise anybody not to adopt the oracular style. Carlyle says somewhere that no great writer was ever understood without difficulty. If a man takes this as an encouragement to be wilfully obscure, he does so at his own risk. If he is not a genuine mystic, but a bogus mystificator, he may at least afford some amusement to those who have the patience to read him.

One of the things that the beginner is generally advised to aim at is perspicuity or lucidity. This is not quite the same thing as simplicity, which is attained by couching simple ideas in simple language. Perspicuity is more a matter of arrangement, of order and connection, and may be achieved when neither the ideas nor the language are simple. Herbert Spencer, for example, is a remarkably lucid writer. Most of the hints I submitted in connection with sentences and paragraphs have for their aim per-

spicuity. This virtue can seldom be attained without some sacrifice of simplicity. In order to be lucid you have to keep to a point, and connect your ideas clearly; and as the natural tendency of the simple man is to wander, he is conscious of a certain effort under this process.

Precision, exactness, is another of the virtues to which the beginner is generally exhorted. To combine this with extreme simplicity is next to impossible, for a reason that is obvious upon a little consideration. The more simple a word is, that is to say the more frequently it is used, the more vague and inexact it tends to become. A much-used word is like a much-used coin: the superscription gets worn off. Try to define any common word such as "good," "wicked," "just," "crime," "health," "education," "culture," "progress," and you will find that the ideas you attach to such simple words are far from exact. Socrates amused himself by going about among the people of Athens and asking the meaning of such words, professing to be himself a very stupid person who could not understand them. Everybody was ready at first with an answer. "Not know what virtue means! Why, every fool knows that." But the most confident were brought to confess that though they knew the meaning perfectly well, it was not easy to put in precise words.

Precision is not a popular quality. Socrates fell

a martyr to it. Other great propagators of new ideas have gone on a different plan, taking words in common use, employing them in a sense of their own, and leaving the reader to guess the meaning. This is often the cause of the difficulty of understanding great writers. It is so in the case of Carlyle himself, and Emerson. One often hears readers of Matthew Arnold ask what he meant by culture. The word is a common one, but he used it in a sense of his own; only it is fair to say that Arnold did attempt to give as exact a definition of his meaning as the subject admitted of.

I have not touched on the question of "purity" of style. It is a negative virtue: we say that a style is pure when it is strikingly free from foreign idioms, provincialisms, slang, obsolete words and phrases, new and affected expressions. Generally speaking, when a style is such as to win the praise of being classical English, there is something stiff and old-fashioned about it.

There is no point of style about which so much has been written, there is none on which people are so ready to dogmatise, as this question of purity. The corruption of the Queen's or the King's English has been a common subject of lament among critics for the last three hundred years. At any time during that period there have been purists who thought the language complete, and wished to shut the door on

new words and phrases. Swift had a project for fixing the language, and to many of his contemporaries it appeared a most judicious proposal. But a good many words and idioms have become obsolete since the days of Queen Anne, and a good many new ones have been added.

Most people now recognise that you can no more stop the growth of a language than you can stop the growth of a tree. Is there, then, no standard of good English? There is, but it is not a very definite one, and it is continually shifting. The standard is simply usage, the usage of the time.

But who fixes the usage? It is supposed to be the peculiar province of the grammarian and the lexicographer to ascertain the usage, but nobody can be said to fix or settle what is essentially unstable. There is nothing constant in a language but its mutability. The grammarian is not a lawgiver; words and idioms often make good a place in the language in defiance of the law of all the grammarians.

Who coins new words? He would be a wise man who could answer that question. The parentage of very few words can be traced. Isaac Disraeli claimed the honour of being the first to use the word "fatherland," but Dr Fitzedward Hall produced a quotation from Sir William Temple, more than a century earlier. Many similar claims have

been similarly rebutted. Somebody must use a new word for the first time, but the child goes out into the world and its parentage is forgotten. If fathered at all, it is generally fathered wrong upon some eminent name. A new meaning is in the social air; somebody finds a word for it; and the word is caught up and becomes current because of its fitness to express the meaning.

A common advice to beginners is to follow the usage of the best speakers and writers. That is fairly safe advice. You are not likely to go far wrong if you follow it. But if a word exactly expresses your meaning, and if it is current among the people for whom you write, you have the best of justifications for using it. The meaning may be one that you should not express, but that is another consideration.

Of course, grammarians are right to try to keep new formations within the analogies of the language. A word coined in defiance of analogy is a grammatical monster, and they are right to try to extinguish it. Often perhaps they might as well let it alone; it will die of itself if it is not fitted to survive. And some of them are apt to forget that present usage is the ultimate test for a living language, and that change of usage is not necessarily debasement and corruption. There is often a subtle reason in popular forms if we have the patience to

trace it. Why, for example, do we so often see the irregular expression "*one-roomed* households"? As a mere descriptive epithet "*one-room*" would be more accurate; it is in accordance with analogy to use a noun as an adjective without any formative suffix; *-ed* is the termination of the past participle; there is no verb to "one-room." Yet popular instinct has reason and grammatical analogy on its side; it has a verbal force to express in "one-roomed"; it prefers to say "one-roomed households" because it thinks of them as being made so,—not merely existing as indifferent facts, but forced into a certain dimension by social pressure. But the casuistry of grammatical correctness is a wide and intricate field.

In concluding these remarks on style, I cannot but feel that I have only skimmed the surface of the subject. I have tried to keep to the main lines, and have resisted many temptations to diverge. My object has been to set the reader thinking for himself on principles.

One remark only it remains to add, but it is an important one. The old rhetoricians laid great stress upon the character of the speaker as an element in the effect of his words. This is no less so now than it was in the days of Aristotle and Quintilian. They gave precepts for the education of the orator from the cradle to manhood. The modern rhetorician would be going beyond his allotted province

if he lectured you on character. It is none the less important. And I may be permitted to remind you that there is one useful character within every man's reach, a character for knowing what he is writing about.





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