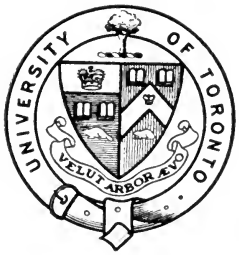

Books by Arlo Bates.

THE DIARY OF A SAINT. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

LOVE IN A CLOUD. A Novel. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

THE PURITANS. A Novel. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

THE PHILISTINES. A Novel. 12mo, $1.50.

THE PAGANS. A Novel. 16mo, $1.00.

PATTY'S PERVERSITIES. A Novel. 16mo, $1.00.

PRINCE VANCE. The Story of a Prince with a Court in his Box. By ARLO BATES and ELEANOR PUTNAM. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

A LAD'S LOVE. 16mo, $1.00.

UNDER THE BEECH-TREE. Poems. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

TALKS ON WRITING ENGLISH. First Series. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

TALKS ON WRITING ENGLISH. Second Series. Crown 8vo, $1.30, *net*. Postpaid, $1.42.

TALKS ON TEACHING LITERATURE. Crown 8vo, $1.30, *net*. Postpaid, $1.42.

TALKS ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE. Crown 8vo, $1.50.

HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO.
BOSTON AND NEW YORK.

TALKS

ON

WRITING ENGLISH

Second Series

BY

ARLO BATES

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge

Published September, 1901

PREFACE

THIS book is made up from material used in a course of lectures given in the Lowell Free Classes as supplementary to my previous "Talks on Writing English." It takes up many of the more delicate matters of composition which would have been out of place in the earlier and more general course, but repeats nothing except some few things which were needed to bring out fresh points more clearly. Teachers and others who heard the lectures have asked me to print them, and I do so in the hope that as what I have to say is the result of actual experience it may prove of use.

A. B.

CONTENTS

TALKS ON WRITING ENGLISH

SECOND SERIES

I

FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

WHAT besides pen, paper, and ink is needed for composition the student can understand fully only by actual experiment and experience. He is likely to discover quickly, if he is in earnest, that the attempt to produce ideas by rubbing pen and paper together is much like trying to evoke fire from the friction of a couple of sticks; it is a thing not entirely impossible, but it is always a tedious and generally an ineffectual process. That technique may be acquired he soon learns; it is only by degrees that he comes first to perceive and then to feel that technique is to be regarded as a means and not as an end. The learner must always keep in mind, in dealing with books which, like the present, have to do chiefly with the mechanics of composition, that, as Dr. Johnson has beautifully phrased it, "Words are the daughters of earth, and things are the sons of heaven." A phrase is good only in so far as it is a fair and adequate body for a

thought. The important thing is not to exhibit skill in word-craft, but to produce an effect, to convey a message; and no man writes well with whom the chief end is not the work rather than the workmanship.

For the production of an intelligent and intelligible composition three things are essential: thought; the realization of thought; the expression of thought. The thought embodied is obviously the reason for the existence of any work. The essential and first necessity in bringing this thought to expression is its realization. Here is the stumbling-block of most untrained writers. They do not comprehend that the real productive mood is that in which the brain is entirely clear in regard to what is to be imparted. They are apt to skip this second step, and to go at once to the third, that of endeavoring to give expression to that which they have not yet fully understood. The need of establishing connection between the mind and the pen they know, but they are ignorant of the equal necessity which precedes, that of establishing dominion of the mind over the thought. No good work can be done until all three of the necessities are appreciated and fully mastered.

The art of composition aims at giving to an intangible thought a tangible form. The realization of the thought, which is the first step, is to clothe it with those conventions of language which are the only means of communicating definite ideas, and which are no less the only means by which it is clearly apprehended by the mind of the thinker.

We hold thought firmly only when it is embodied in words. All training in rhetoric helps to this result; but the attention is too easily absorbed with outward forms, with mechanical structure, and with the shape in which thought is expressed on paper. It is wise to begin further back. The best training puts stress on the endeavor to phrase ideas in the mind.

This means that the student shall not consider what he is to write until he has discovered entirely what he thinks. He should ask himself when he begins work, "What am I thinking?" He must not be contented with a sort of hazy phantom of thought; he must know exactly what that thought is when clearly comprehended by being clearly phrased. He can write well only of that which really occupies his mind. If his attention is fixed by the figures in the carpet, it is about the figures of the carpet that at that minute he should write if of anything. It may indicate either a grade of intelligence which is rather low or a mind which is just then restless or vacant if the rug be the thing uppermost in the consciousness; but if this thing is uppermost, it is the only matter that can be adequately expressed. Any line that is worth putting on paper must be a record of a thought real and vital in the brain. This is merely a homely and practical application of Sir Philip Sidney's famous "Look in thy heart and write." No floating idea that is remembered or caught up for the sake of saying something will do; the thought must be vital and nascent in the inner consciousness.

The student is to insist with himself, then, that he does not think to write, but that he writes to embody thought; that he never for one instant falls into the pitiful imbecility of considering how he is to fill a given amount of paper. He must take his subject, whatever it is, into his mind; he must turn it over, examine it, look at it on as many sides as possible, and then demand of his inner man — the perverse and elusive creature in the back of his brain who forms his real opinions, but who will not reveal them unless held in fairly good subjection — exactly what ideas the subject awakens. The mind is not a milk-pan, from the surface of which is to be skimmed its richest part; it is a mine in which the jewels lie deep. It is the beginning of productive wisdom to cultivate the power and the habit of going to the bottom of one's own thought.

The writer will often be hampered and hindered by the fact that he knows a great many things that other men have thought on the theme which he is to treat. If into his mind an idea comes which he knows to be that of another, his first business is to decide whether this is what he, too, thinks. That some one writer has had a certain thought does not prevent all other men from thinking it. To know the thought first as that of another does make thinking it in any spontaneous way harder; but at this stage of the world's intellectual development no writer is expected to originate all knowledge. He is expected to appreciate, to judge, to fit together whatever ideas are not original, so that

while he writes they are his own. He is to make them essentially original by passing them through the alembic of his brain. I am of course not discussing here the question of plagiarism. I am merely pointing out that even thoughts which are not original in the sense of having their first inception in the brain of the writer must, if they are to be used at all, be made practically his by being completely assimilated and realized. Realization of thought in this, as in all else, is the first of the prime secrets of literary art.

Tangible ideas, however, are not the only object of literary expression. Emotions also are to be conveyed by written words. Written words will convey to the understanding reader what is in them, and it is as necessary to embody emotion as it is thought. In one case no less than in the other the first step is realization. Realization of emotion, however, is far from being as tangible as the realization of intellectual processes. For present purposes, and without going into subtleties of analysis, it is sufficient to say that what is wanted is to feel deeply and to be conscious of feeling.

He who desires to write effectively must cultivate the power of writing passionately. It may sound a little absurd to say that even exercises are to be written with passion, yet nothing less than this will do. Of course here passion means, as it does in Milton's definition of poetry, any feeling, great or small, which for the time being absorbs the consciousness. It is necessary to practice putting on paper those thoughts which we all speak of as

"taking us out of ourselves," — perhaps meaning thereby making us for the rare moment really know ourselves! — those emotions which take complete possession of us. In reading we are all conscious at times of being warmed or thrilled. The aim of the student of the art of composition should be to write so that his reader shall feel heart beat and cheek glow. We all have times when we feel stingingly the nobility of life, its joy, or its pain; we are artists when we have conquered the art of conveying that feeling to a reader. The half-trained man, as a rule, fails most signally just when he feels what he writes most keenly. It is important to cultivate the power of commanding technique in states of high emotional excitement. What is needed is to develop the artistic sense, that double consciousness which feels and at the same time embodies the emotion.

A word of caution must be added here. To write with passion does not mean to gush. Nothing could be worse than to fall into extravagances supposing them to be fine. The test of the genuineness of what is written is that it rather falls short of what is genuinely felt. Morbid confessions and hysterical self-examinations, with all other sentimentalities, should be shunned religiously. The abomination of desolation spoken of by Jeremy the prophet is cheerful compared with sloppiness and mooniness. The young woman who is traditionally supposed to devour chalk and slate pencils in order to become pale and interesting is the physical counterpart of the writer who indulges in covering his paper with

the things which he thinks that it would have been fine to feel. The word should be kept within the bounds of the realized emotion. The feeling may be imaginary, but it must be sincerely felt. When I say that the student should write with passion, I mean that he is to be bold in trying to express any emotion really experienced; he is to have simply and frankly the courage of his emotions, and this in itself will protect him from the temptation to set down sham sentiment.

One of the requisites of good artistic production is that the writer should be at once the producer and the critic. Mrs. Fanny Kemble is somewhere quoted as saying in effect: "Juliet must thrill with passion for Romeo as he stands beneath her balcony, but she must also remember that the balcony is a stage property on which it will not do for her to lean too heavily lest she be precipitated on her lover's head." The brain in artistic production must consciously or unconsciously always perform this dual function. The point is well illustrated by the story of Thackeray, who, when he was writing the scene in "Vanity Fair" in which Rawdon Crawley discovers his wife at supper with Lord Steyne, and had made Becky, detected, ruined, terrified, admire her husband for his rage and his strength, threw down his pen, crying: "That is a stroke of genius!" The consciousness that felt, that created, realized the emotions of the wretched woman, and thrilled; while the critical consciousness looked on with an appreciation of the artistic effect. One of the chief differences between

amateur work and professional, between work that is well meant and what is effectively done, is that professional work is watched and weighed by its creator in the very act of its production. It is the result not only of imaginative realization but of careful criticism; it is good because the author has conquered the secret of artistic double consciousness.

For the realization of thought it is not possible to lay down rules. The man who chooses to think will learn to think. He will be helped by tracing the thought of others in wisely selected books; but what he knows of his own mind will depend chiefly upon his determination to be acquainted with himself. What may be taught to a considerable extent is the art of expression, and with this the present book is concerned. Expression includes the embodiment in tangible form of the idea, the mood, and the relations; and after the understanding of what is in his mind it is to the task of embodying these that the writer gives his whole attention. The fault of a great deal of unsatisfactory writing is that the author has been endeavoring to inform himself as he composed. He has been feeling his way, and is really ready to begin only when he has ended. All this is to be accomplished first. When once the proposed work is clear in the brain, he may devote himself to the effort to get it safely and completely on paper.

The idea is of course the most obvious of the things which must be considered in expression; and when once the idea is realized it goes far to-

ward providing its own embodiment. Nordau whimsically remarks in "Degeneracy:" "In the highly significant Biblical legend even Balaam's ass acquired speech when he had something definite to say." No man can pour water from an empty pitcher; and the writer who has serious trouble in expression will do well to consider carefully whether the trouble may not be that he has really nothing to express. It is idle to conquer all forms and graces of speech if in the end one has no thought upon which to employ them; and always it is needful to keep in mind the fact which is so obvious as constantly to be ignored, that of all literary composition an idea is a prime essential.

The mood is in writing next in importance to the idea, and this includes all that in speech is conveyed by mien, gesture, circumstance, inflection, and the like.

By the relation of the idea is meant those indications by which what is written is made to take its proper place in regard to allied thoughts, and by which each portion of knowledge imparted to the reader is made to assume its proper value.

The clear and adequate embodying of the idea, and the indication of the mood of relative values are accomplished by an adequate mastery of technique. The measure of success is the effect produced. It is essential that the writer think and feel, but the worth of what is written is estimated by the extent to which thought and feeling are conveyed to the reader. Be the wisdom never so great or the emotions never so keen, they count for

only so much as is adequately and clearly imparted. It is with this fact in mind that the author determines upon his manner and his methods. Readers of old books may have stumbled upon Gwillim's "Display of Heraldry," where is this passage: —

> Whosoever will address himself to write of matters of instruction, or of any other argument of importance, it behoveth that before he enter thereinto he should resolutely determine with himself in what order he shall handle the same; so shall he best accomplish that he hath undertaken, and inform the understanding, and help the memory of the reader.

In a word, to do good work in literature as anywhere else, a man must know what he wishes to do and how to do it.

II

LITTLE FOXES

"TAKE us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines," says the Song of Songs; and a great deal of the acquirement of technique in any art is the learning to distinguish and to correct small common faults which injure the style. A number of errors are almost inevitable in the writings of insufficiently trained students, and to some of these I wish to call attention. Most of them are obvious enough when once they are pointed out, but they slip into all careless work as the little foxes glide into an unguarded vineyard.

A typical error of this sort is the assumption that a title belongs to the text. The name given to a composition is no more part of the body of the work than the library number on a volume is part of the book. The title is a convenience for identification, and is to be so considered. The trick of alluding to the heading is a journalistic device which when it was novel had a sort of mild effectiveness, especially in work of the semi-humorous variety. It has become so hackneyed now that it is hardly worth doing even in such writings.

IN THE SOUL OF FLIES. To the above it might be objected that flies have no soul. They are soulless insects at best, etc.

A Day at Sea. To many this will suggest thoughts anything but pleasant, but to me it brings up the long sunny hours, etc.

An Old House. It is fallen together like an old man; it is out at the elbows, so to say, and battered by the sport of years of storm.

These examples are from themes, and illustrate how easy it is to fall into this weakness. The last is the most objectionable.

A fault more subtle and more common is the needless change of the grammatical subject from clause to clause and from sentence to sentence. A grammatical subject, no less than a political, has rights which should be respected. The subject of a sentence sometimes needs to be altered, although except in subordinate clauses this is seldom absolutely necessary. The subject in a paragraph must often be changed; but broadly speaking, one subject for the opening and one for the close of a simple paragraph is frequently sufficient. Too close an interpretation of this principle would of course result in awkward stiffness; but it is always well to bear in mind that the subject should not be shifted needlessly.

The following examples from themes illustrate the point, and show how simple is in many cases the remedy of the fault: —

Ernest loved him, and his love was strengthened by Tom's stories. For he had an inexhaustible stock of stories, and an inimitable way of telling them, which completely captivated Ernest. He would listen as though enchanted while the stories beguiled the hours.

Ernest loved Tom, and loved him the more for his stories. The boy thought the stock inexhaustible, and was completely captivated by the inimitable way in which they were told. He listened to Tom as though enchanted, beguiled by the stories for hours.

The little girl had broken the cake, and a voracious appetite was disposing of it in a way none too elegant.

The little girl had broken the cake, and with a voracious appetite, etc.

These examples are from student work, and are not elegant in any form, but they are perhaps sufficient as illustrations. The logic of the matter is that each needless change of subject makes the reader's task more difficult.

The abuse of the rhetorical question is another fault to which young writers are especially prone. The abuse of the rhetorical question is the peculiar privilege of stump-orators. This form of speech is effective only when the reader is so surely swept along by the force or eloquence of the writer as to be constrained inevitably to give a certain reply. It follows that it can be used safely only in passages of high key. It must have great force or seem forced itself. It implies confidence on the part of speaker or writer that he has his audience completely under control. When properly used, it is of great dignity and impressiveness. It gives, for instance, solemnity to many passages in the Bible :

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

or the superb series of interrogations in Job : —

Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or

loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? Canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth? etc.

All interrogative forms are generally to be avoided. They are the inevitable resource of self-conscious writers who uneasily feel that they have not produced the impression they wish. The question is an appeal to the audience to be more interested or impressed. "Reader, why is this so?" "Shall we approach closer to this dread spectacle?" "Reader, hast thou ever been alone at night in the desert?" "Reader, do you not shudder at the thought?" The question is quite as likely to remind the reader that he does not shudder and has no inclination in that direction as it is to arouse him to feeling. Good in wise hands, the interrogation should rarely be indulged in by any writer not thoroughly well trained.

The use of the historical present is one degree worse than self-conscious interrogatives. The object of putting a narrative of past incidents into the present tense is to impart liveliness to the style; but it generally results in the loss of all repose and dignity. Certain cheap and facile novelists have carried the habit so far as to write habitually in the present tense, and have won for this the name of "the hysterical present." The trick is the easiest possible.

It is the four hundred and fiftieth year of the Christian era. The dread Attila with all his barbaric hosts is sweeping down upon Rome. The whole city is stirred

to its depth with fear and terror. There is horror in every face; no man dares think of the morrow. It is evening. Groups of Romans are gathered, etc.

The use of the tense is an assumption that the reader is so completely carried into the scenes dealt with that he seems to find them before his eye and mind. No writer may safely employ the expedient unless he is convinced that the reader is sure to be completely under the spell of the word.

The suppression of subject or predicate is another device much affected by flashy and slovenly writers. From its jerky and abrupt effect it is perhaps more irritating than either of the other faults.

Eastward, far as eye can reach, the sea. Never calm, never at rest.

A field, a tree, a bench. On the bench a girl. Beside the girl, a youth.

Noon in the desert. No shade; no breath.

A man. No, not a man; a monster. A monster ferocious. A monster horrible, deformed, obscene. Nearing him, a woman. A woman tender, true, pure, radiant. Sight for heaven; sight for mankind. Lesson of profound mystery and of unfathomable import.

The last of these examples gives the impression of an acute attack of mental indigestion after a gorge on a bad translation of Victor Hugo. The general effect is that here is an exercise in writing without verbs, and is about as soothing as to an invalid is a wall-paper in which the figures are unmatched.

Examples of the proper use of these constructions are to be found in the writings of good

authors; and the skill of the master makes them virtues. The exceptional custom of a great writer, however, is a precedent for his peers only.

Conventional phrases easily beset the pen of an untrained writer, and especially of a writer for the press. Newspaper phrases like "faded into oblivion," "duplicate the performance," "pale as death," "a vast concourse," "thunders of applause," "stopped as if he had been shot," and so on, haunt the thoughts of the hesitating reporter. They are the slang of composition, phrases once vital but now meaningless from unintelligent repetition. They are the common resource of writers too ignorant to speak with precision, and they inevitably impart to a style a strong flavor of illiteracy.

The misuse of the second person is the hall-mark of the amateur. To fall suddenly and inexcusably into the vocative is a fault which is almost never lacking in the work of crude writers. Examples are not wanting where really good authors have sinned by carelessness in this respect, but the amateur is as sure to drop into the second person as Silas Wegg into poetry.

The house was a low, tumbledown affair, standing by itself. Tall poplars stood before it. You could see in a moment that it was the house of a family in humble life.

Style is the man, as has often been said. When you have grasped the style of a writer, you can hardly fail to have some sort of a notion of what his personality is.

A droll example of the effect of this habit is given

in an account of an English school examination, where in answer to the question, "What would you do to cure a cold in the head?" a girl wrote: "I would put my feet in hot water till you were in a profuse perspiration." Unless the whole composition is in the form of direct address, as for instance a letter would be, the use of the second person is a violation of the point of view. It is true that the absence of an impersonal pronoun in English, the loss from the tongue of the particle *man* in the sense of the French *on*, has given to the second personal pronoun plural an idiomatic use as a general impersonal. It is a makeshift of idiom and is exposed to the danger of misconstruction, but it has the sanction of usage which is extended, and as such must be allowed to be authoritative.

> Nowhere else is there such a picture of distracted paternal love, and of the battle between the voice of nature and the constant threat of society that you shall be left to rot by the roadside if you drop out of the ranks. — HENRY JAMES: *Honoré de Balzac.*

This is not only entirely legitimate, but it is idiomatic. The principle, however, is that this use of "you" is permissible only when the pronoun is deliberately employed as an impersonal: and as the genius of our language is seemingly rather unfavorable to the employment of impersonals, the construction is one to be avoided rather than sought. Certainly the abundant introduction of the impersonal "you" injures style, as, to my thinking, is shown in the following passage: —

There are no such pipes to be smoked as those that follow a good day's march; the flavor of the tobacco is a thing to be remembered, it is so dry and aromatic, so full and so fine. If you wind up the evening with grog, you will own that there was never such grog; at every sip a jocund tranquillity spreads about your limbs, and sits easily in your heart. If you read a book — and you will never do so save by fits and starts — you find the language strangely racy and harmonious; words take a new meaning; single sentences possess the ear for half an hour together; and the writer endears himself to you, at every page, by the nicest coincidence of sentiment. It seems as if it were a book you had written yourself in a dream. — STEVENSON: *Walking Tours.*

Apparently Stevenson used this frequent second person impersonal, as seemingly he used conjunctions at the beginning of sentences, to give a familiar quality to his style. Even with the skillful handling which he was able to give these constructions the result is hardly satisfactory, and in less accomplished hands it is almost sure to give nothing better than a flavor of amateurishness.

The employment of italics for emphasis is a fault more positive than the abuse of the impersonal pronoun. This is an open confession of a weakness of construction. To employ a particular type to mark emphasis is to show inability to bring out the relation of ideas by the arrangement of words. In dialogue, where the emphasis may be entirely arbitrary or whimsical, italics may be necessary; but in other work a temptation to italicize is always to be regarded as a danger signal. It shows that the

construction is so weakening under the hand that the mind is instinctively casting about for the means of strengthening it. It should lead the student to recast his sentence, since to italicize is at best but a clumsy and unworkmanlike expedient.

Recasting is necessary, too, whenever a pronoun, like an unruly sheep, shows a disposition to escape from its master. Pronouns and their relations to the nouns for which they stand are discussed in every work on rhetoric, yet the words are constantly misused. Not only school themes but printed books are too often mere foundling hospitals for pronouns with no legitimate antecedents. A pronoun is as instantly discredited by any doubt about what it represents as is an ambassador. Indeed, at the risk of being a little vulgar, one is tempted to say that a doubtful antecedent is as fatal to a pronoun as to a sausage. Every writer should feel a moral obligation to see to it that there is never any possible doubt what his pronouns stand for. Students will do well to go over work with exclusive intention of examining the pronouns and participles, — both elusive and both requiring the most careful supervision to prevent their establishing with other parts of speech relations which cannot for an instant be allowed without scandal. To go through an entire composition for the sake of scrutinizing a single part of speech may seem too laborious, but there is no drill in its line more excellent, and in no other way are pronouns so likely to be brought to proper decorum.

Small words, whether pronouns or not, are apt

to be carelessly used.[1] To err in the use of particles is as easy as to contract small vices. Little foxes of the verbal sort, such as *and*, *now*, *it*, *but*, *there*, *just*, and *very* have spoiled the vines in many a literary vineyard. With the careless writer *and*, *it*, and *but* are sure to be besetting sins; they settle on his page as motes fall from dust-filled air. In the same way that penmen of the commercial college sort are apt to be unable to begin to form a capital letter without waving the hand in a complex preliminary flourish, many writers can hardly begin saying anything without first getting a start with a superfluous *it*, *now*, or *there*.

There is a fast mail train which passes the junction at four o'clock.

There was a large tree leaning over the wall, and there was a rustic seat at the foot of it.

There is a nail in the wall, and it is strange to see how instinctively he goes to it and hangs up his hat there, although it is easy to see from his motions that there is no sight in his eyes.

A writer may more easily prevent his work from having anything approaching trigness by his misuse of particles than in any other way short of actual solecisms. A too great fondness for the pronoun *it* may inelegantly be said to put a wooden toothpick between the lips of the muse. Here is an extract from a magazine article on "Poetry as a Fine Art," which may serve as a warning in more ways than one: —

[1] See chapter vi.

It is well in the first place to define. Indeed, it is necessary. In the first place it is to be understood that poetry has its place among the fine arts; and it is important to realize that it is by no means the least that it is the custom to honor.

The round half dozen of pronouns in this are as superfluous as the "ers" in the speech of a bashful lover, and have not even the advantage of being the result of feeling.

What may be called the "and habit" is perhaps even more general. The simple expedient of dropping half the *ands* in a composition will often improve it amazingly. As a practical working rule, the student will do well to adopt the principle of using the conjunction only when it cannot be spared without noticeable intention. The "and habit" is like dram-drinking: it grows with indulgence, and destroys health and vitality. The habit of beginning sentences with *and*, *but*, or *for* is not unlike the oral trick of opening remarks with "Well," "Say," or "Now." Some writers employ it much; even those generally careful of their style may fall into the vice. It is one of the weaknesses of Stevenson, who, however, was of taste and ear so good that he almost manages to make even this rather slovenly mannerism pass muster.[1] The student will do well to avoid the adverbial use of conjunctions at the beginning of sentences, refraining from indulging in the weaknesses of writers of distinction until he has mastered their virtues.

To young students I have sometimes given a

[1] See p. 66.

doggerel couplet dealing with this matter, and the advice is not inapplicable to many whose formal student days are far behind them.

> Of these four words beware :
> *And, it, but, there.*

Examples of almost all the faults mentioned in this chapter are to be found here and there in writers of reputation; but no student who really cares for his work will care to follow a precedent of faults.

III

COMPOSITION AND REVISION

COMPOSITION and revision are processes made up of the same ingredients, so to say, but of these mixed in different proportions. In composition the stress of thought is upon what is to be said, while yet steadily is kept in mind the manner of saying; in revision the matter of what is said is still considered, but for the time being is less dwelt upon than perfection of expression. In both must the double consciousness of creator and critic exist in the writer, but in composition it is the creator who is in command, and in revision the critic.

The first assumption in writing is a reader. This might seem too obvious to need to be said; but the case is not unlike that of dear old ladies whose missing spectacles are on the top of their white-haired heads. The fact is obvious even to absurdity, yet it is necessary to mention it. Untrained writers seldom consider the reader; and many men of no small reputation not unfrequently go on for page after page without the smallest notion of the person addressed. They are pleasing themselves by saying things, but they are not considering any reader who will be compelled by irresistible interest to heed these when said. Only the best trained

writers may be counted upon always to have in mind and to realize a definite audience.

One of the first things taught to any class in composition should be this necessity of realizing who is to read. Students should be instructed to write every sentence of theme or composition with the idea that it is to be read by some definite person. Nor should this person, except in rare cases, be a teacher. The pupil should write for his peers. The letters of young persons are often notably better than their compositions. In part this is due to the fact that in letters they write spontaneously and from genuine interest; but quite as largely is it due to the fact that they are addressing a definite reader. In the early composition work Johnny and Katie should be told to try to think what they set down is to be read by Billy and Sally; Jimmy Smith should be instructed to write his account of the school baseball game to be read by his cousin over in the next county. If this can be effected, a great advance will have been made toward clear, consistent expression.

We are none of us likely soon to get beyond the necessity, or at least the advisability, of selecting in writing some definite persons, some club, or body with which we are familiar, and of addressing whatever we write directly to this audience. To writers learning their profession the habit of writing for an actual, human, definite reader is invaluable. Too much that is printed has the appearance of being mere memoranda for the use of the person putting it down. No reader has been assumed in

the writing, and no person feels like claiming it for his own in the reading. Amateurs are apt to write either for themselves or the universe — sometimes not seeming sure that the two are not identical; and perhaps one fault is as bad as the other.

When once the reader is selected, composition resolves itself into an attempt to say with complete clearness whatever is to be said, so that it shall be apprehended by the person addressed. Giraldus de Barri, a Welshman of the twelfth century, wrote certain words of wisdom which may well be heeded to-day: —

> Since words only give expression to what is in the mind, and man is endowed with speech for the purpose of uttering his thoughts, what can be greater folly than to lock up and conceal things which we wish to be understood in a tissue of unintelligible phrases and intricate sentences? . . . Is it not better, as Seneca says, to be dumb, than to speak so as not to be understood? The more, then, language is suited to the understanding . . . the more useful it will be.

Composition, it should be remembered, is not the art of pleasing one's self by putting words on paper, but of communicating ideas to others.

The whole vigor of the writer is necessary to good work. If the mind rouses to an idea with the sluggishness of a sleepy schoolboy unwillingly waking in the morning, it is evident that no worthy result can be obtained until this languor is overcome. A student theme so admirably expresses a general feeling in regard to composition that it may be given entire, just as it was written: —

It is hard to write about something when your mind is as void and blank of subjects as the white canvas before the stereopticon picture is thrown upon it. If a subject does not come to me as soon as my pen is ready for the sheet, I have to deliberate so long that the final theme will be as cramped and crooked as the streets of Boston. I believe that any subject on which a writer can even hope to write well should come to him with such a crash and a bang that it will force itself on the paper and be self-supporting until it is exhausted. Instead of writing a theme every twenty-four hours, the ideal way would be the impractical one of writing whenever a subject presents itself.

The thing which the student of composition endeavors to do, what, indeed, the student of composition must do, is to subdue his mind to his will, so that it shall give itself up to any given work. The charm of a theme which forces itself upon paper is of course great, but the writer who gives himself up to moods never accomplishes much if anything of value. John Wesley may be said to have combined something of this giving himself up to the mood of the moment with sound common-sense revision. He said of his method of work: —

I never think of my style, but just set down the words that come first. Only when I transcribe anything for the press, then I think it my duty to see that every phrase be clear, pure, and proper; conciseness, which is now as it were natural to me, brings *quantum sufficit* of strength. If after all I observe any stiff expression, I throw it out neck and shoulders.

The power of giving one's whole self to composi-

tion is of enormous importance. Professor Morley aptly speaks of Richardson as in "Clarissa Harlowe" by "the giving of his whole mind to his work with a complete faith in his own creation," being able "to produce the effect of a work of genius without the aid of genius in producing it;" and the lesson is one to be laid to heart. This power, however, is not, as the writer of the daily theme just given imagines, a matter of impulse and accident. It is to be cultivated, and made subservient to the purpose of the worker. In writing, the more verve the writer has the better; and after that, as Wesley shows, comes revision.

The first act in revision is to take the attitude of the reader assumed. The untrained writer is unlikely to consider the necessity of looking at his work from the point of view of the one addressed. Not having an audience clearly in mind in composition, no more does he have one in revision. The double consciousness of all productive work is here marked by the dominance of the personality addressed. The consciousness which represents the reader considers what has been written, and when this consciousness is dissatisfied, the consciousness which represents the author comes forward to set things right.

That this sounds dreadfully like an attempt to be psychological I am painfully aware; but it is really simple enough. All of us are constantly taking on a sort of double consciousness. When we wish to please a person we are as if with one intelligence expressing ourselves, while with another

intelligence we are watching the effect, weighing the weight of what we say, and observing how he is affected. The self-critical man is he who has learned to do this sort of thing consciously and deliberately, and to make the standard definite by having a clear conception of what he is trying to bring about. The thing is after all a matter of everyday experience.

A practical suggestion may well be made in regard to the value of rewriting, — that is, making a completely new copy. The personal equation comes in here as everywhere else, and what is the best method for one may not be for another; but I am convinced that nothing can take the place of actual and complete rewriting. A certain amount of correction may be done and of course should be done both before and after this copying; but it is wise, it seems to me, to put the whole work back into the ink-bottle, and let it recrystallize.

The philosophy of this laborious method is that any sentence on paper has a certain persistency of form. When it is merely corrected it is tinkered, and shows it; when it is completely rewritten it is if need be recast, and at any rate is flexible in the author's hand. The great secret of the effectiveness of rewriting is that here the writer has his whole sentence or paragraph before him, and may shape it as a whole. Readers of Stevenson's letters will recall the rewriting which he thought necessary, and the voluminous posthumous manuscripts of Hawthorne illustrate strikingly the same point. Composition that is done well is not child's

play, but work, and work for persevering, resolute men.

The chief danger in revision is that of over-doing, and of allowing the marks of the work to show. Composition that is manifestly over-elaborated, over-polished, over-corrected, is probably more respected by the reader than that which is careless and slovenly; but often the spontaneous quality of the latter makes it on the whole more agreeable reading. The style of Walter Pater is an example in point. The elaborate method by which this conscientious writer polished his sentences, took them up one by one and filed, scraped, rubbed, and burnished, is well known. The result was prose which all of us respect, and by which most of us are secretly a little wearied. The mind yawns over the monotonous succession of well-groomed phrases, until in memory rises the story of the old deacon who was so good that he would have been perfect if only he could once have been tempted to steal a horse. Style is not attractive which is "icily regular," and it is perhaps but fair to warn the student that too much reconstruction and polishing may end in making a composition "splendidly null."

The danger that the ordinary student — or the extraordinary one either — will elaborate the life out of work is not, however, in practice very great. In the first place, he has not the necessary knowledge or sensitiveness, and in the second, he generally lacks the indefinitely extended patience without which over-revision is most improbable. The lazy-minded may make of the alleged fear of depriving

work of spontaneity an excuse for not polishing, but such evasions are unworthy of the serious student of the art of writing. Any difficulty in the way of overdoing revision lies very far along the road toward a perfect technique.

The secret of revising properly is that of knowing clearly what is the effect desired and appreciating acutely what has been put upon paper.[1] Learning what has been said is on the whole more difficult than learning how to say; but of course the two cannot be separated. Lessing, in "Emilia Galotti," makes a character say: "On the long journey from the eye through the arm into the brush much leaks out;" and with the thought complete in the mind it is not easy to appreciate that what is on the canvas or on the written page is not the whole. It is necessary to realize vividly what is to be expressed, or vagueness is the result; but on the other hand, the more sharply the mind feels a thing the more easily is it persuaded that a really imperfect form represents the whole. The thought is to the writer so clear that the merest hint seems enough to convey it. A little friend of mine, who had arrived at a limited knowledge of letters, but not yet at a mastery of syllables, brought to his mother a paper on which he had written roughly: "mnt otm." He announced with triumph that he had written a letter to a lady of his own immature years, and when asked to read it declared that it said: "Dear Mabel, I love you; and when I see you I will give you a red apple." To him the six letters did mean all

[1] *Talks on Writing English*, pp. 13, 14.

this tender message, because he knew so clearly what he wished the note to say. So to the amateur the thing which he has written speaks eloquently the thoughts which burn within him; and he is often blissfully unaware that to others his page no more conveys his meaning than would the boy's note carry his greeting to his small sweetheart. He must revise his work until he is sure of what it says to the reader otherwise ignorant of its thought.

Revision must above all else apply to a work as a whole. It is not enough to file separate sentences until each is as glossy as a shark's tooth; the relation of parts, the proportion of paragraphs, the relative value of each part as compared to its importance in the complete scheme, must all be weighed and perfected. Too many early works are not unlike those old-fashioned drawings in which languishing beauties were pictured with eyes and mouths of the same size; and as a general rule what is easy is elaborated in amateur work while what is difficult is slighted. The student should cut down ruthlessly and expand with patience if the proportion of parts to the whole require; and not until he knows when and how to do this has he begun to master the important principles of revision.

IV

PARTICIPLES AND GERUNDS

THE finesse of style may be said to depend largely, and indeed chiefly so far as word-forms are concerned, on the use made of participles, particles, and parallel construction. This alliterative combination may seem to savor a little of comic opera, and indeed there is a certain likeness in the exercise which either these rhetorical matters or the lyric drama may offer to human wit. The vaudeville is nothing if not an exercise in mental adroitness, and something of the same dexterity is needed in acquiring a complete mastery of these subtleties. So important is each that each deserves separate and somewhat minute consideration. Some grammatical technicalities are involved, and I am conscious of running the risk of being false to my avowed purpose of being practical rather than theoretical. I can only say that I shall touch upon nothing which does not seem to me instantly practical; and at least the reader will agree that delicacy and refinement of expression are things of so much merit as to be worth seeking at whatever cost.

The participle is the most delicate part of speech in the language, and as such is the one most fre-

quently abused or misused. Even the grammarian has grievously mistreated it; and although any adequate study of English grammar has long since been carefully excluded from the American system of education, some pains has still been taken to muddle the heads of students in regard to the nature and functions of the participial form of the verb.

In the first place the grammarian in some unexplained way became greatly afraid of the word "gerund," and huddled that form of the verb in with participles or with nouns by extending too widely the use of the phrase "verbal nouns." The good name of the gerund, a well and classically descended form, has been taken away, and terms applied which fixed upon it the undeserved stigma of mongrelism. In the best of recent grammars this error has been righted, and the gerund is given its proper recognition.

The participle and the gerund have come in the development of the language to have the same form, although formerly they were distinguished by different endings. Now they both end in *-ing*, and are separated only by their functions. Community of form has brought about a confusion of use, but in character these two parts of the verb are entirely distinct. Participles are to be defined as words in which the office of the verb is combined with that of the adjective; gerunds, as those in which the office of the verb is joined to that of the noun. '*Shouting* to him, I ran forward' shows the participial use of the common form; the gerundive use is illustrated in the phrase, 'I frightened him

by *shouting*.' We have participles in the expressions, 'I saw a man *reading*;' 'John stood *trembling*;' 'the snow, *falling* softly, covered all.' Gerunds are used in the sentences, 'I learned the truth by *reading* the letter;' 'by *trembling* he showed his fear;' 'the vase turned over in *falling*.' The matter is complicated by the fact that the common form in *-ing* is shared by certain words which are nouns pure and simple. *Shipping*, *paring*, *gathering*, *covering*, may serve as examples of words which have recognized standing as nouns independent of their use with the same spelling as verbs. The orthography of the English language is as difficult as virtue, and almost as unreasonable; and there is no better illustration of the way in which it confounds the unwary than the fashion in which it confuses careless writers by the complication of words in *-ing*. Only the fact that the proposed phonetic spelling systems are the wildest midsummer madness prevents the unhappy victims of participles, gerunds, verbal and participial nouns from rushing over to the camp of the dissenting orthographists. With a little patience and care, however, it is possible to distinguish the different classes of words, and difficulties vanish with a clear conception of differences of function.

The management of the participle is a subject which could be exhaustively discussed in nothing short of a volume, and here it is not possible to do more than to touch upon some of the more important points. Of these the first is that since it is a dependent word, to obscure its connection is to

obscure its meaning. Being a verb, the participle affirms a state or action about something named by a substantive. If the verb were in a finite form this substantive would be its subject; and the writer must take pains to insure that what this subject would have been is unmistakable. This is the word which in its adjective force the participle modifies. The participle does not embody a complete idea, but expresses its meaning as related to some other term. Few errors are more common, even with writers who intend to be careful, than that of leaving the relations of participles uncertain or impossible. A participle which has lost the word upon which it should properly depend is like a helpless child lost in a crowd. These examples illustrate: —

To be properly revised, a theme must be revised with a particular reader in mind. Rewritten without this precaution, the writer does not see his faults.

The only meaning grammatically possible here is that the writer is rewritten. The relation intended between 'theme' and 'rewritten' has been completely obscured.

Being so much in earnest, it is a pity to treat him slightingly.

Common sense shows that the 'he' implied by 'him' is the person who is in earnest, but this is not what is said. Obscurity of the relation of participle frequently comes from the attempt to make the participle modify a substantive which is not expressed, but which is implied by a possessive

pronoun. In the sentence 'Not feeling like going to the lecture, my attention wandered,' 'going' in meaning modifies the pronoun 'I' implied by 'my.' 'Turning quickly, her attention was caught by a strange sight,' is a characteristic example of this error; what is meant obviously is, 'Turning quickly, she saw a strange sight.' The error is the same if the participle is understood.

Not [meaning] to give offense to those who believe otherwise, our opinion is that the law is unjust.

Some participle, as 'meaning,' 'wishing,' or 'intending,' is understood, and is obviously meant to modify the 'we' implied in 'our.' This fault of obscurity in the use of participles has increased of late, nourished by the newspapers, and by the general opposition to the systematic study of grammar which is one of the weaknesses of modern ideas of education. "Obscure participles," remarks Professor Hill, "abound in all authors except the very best; but they can and should be avoided." Their use is the vice of the literary sloven.

The absolute or independent use of the participle is one of those constructions which, while entirely well supported by authority, yet seem somewhat out of harmony with the idiomatic spirit of the English tongue. Probably all writers of standing sometimes employ this form.

The very chin, modestly speaking, as long as my whole face. — ADDISON.

Generally speaking, the figurative use of a word is derived from its proper sense. — KAMES.

What contemporary . . . will ever forget what was somewhat vaguely called the "Transcendental Movement" of thirty years ago? Apparently set astir by Carlyle's essays, . . . the final and more immediate impulse seemed to be given by "Sartor Resartus." — LOWELL.

Judging from many traditionary anecdotes, this peculiar temper was hardly less than a monomania. — HAWTHORNE.

Being seated at dinner the next day, off the cold leg of mutton that Smithers had admired so the day before, and Gus as usual having his legs under the table, a hackney coach drove up to the door. — THACKERAY.

The last quotation begins with an ungrammatical obscure participle, but the use of 'having' in the line below may be taken as a typical example of the use in English of the absolute construction. Often the participle in this use is coupled with a phrase or a sentence.

To leave the lovers by themselves seeming to me kind, I went to walk.

To call this construction the independent participle, it may be said in passing, would perhaps be better than to employ the term 'absolute,' which is so identified with the Latin ablative absolute. The form is one which is by the best authors used rather sparingly; when it is employed, the chief thing is that the writer shall be sure that he is entirely aware of the use to which he is putting the participle.

The position of the participle is a matter to which

attention should be paid. A modifying participle generally follows its substantive, as an adjective generally precedes. It is seldom well to keep the understanding of the reader in suspense by an inversion of words. 'Turning away, he hid his face,' is not effective, as the reader cannot realize the action of the verb without knowing what turned. The difficulty of course does not exist where the context has already supplied the substantive. 'The king was deeply moved. Turning away, he hid his face.' In the following examples the ill effects of the misplacing of the participle are evident: —

Three men were walking across Harvard Square. Turning back as if to see whether they were being followed, and glancing around with the air of not wishing to be overheard, one of them addressed his companions.

The reader inevitably supposes 'turning' and 'glancing' to modify 'men' until he comes to 'one of them,' and is obliged to correct his impression.

Amid the confusion of parties in New York it is possible to observe certain distinct tendencies. Looming up more and more conspicuously, to the satisfaction of the friends of good politics, and of all those who look hopefully to the people to purify politics before they come to be too evil to be endured, the determination of the better element shows itself.

"What is that?" I asked, getting curious. Then, holding up the roses to the light, she said, etc.

The disadvantage of such arrangements is obvious. Occasionally, however, the participle is placed before its substantive as a means of arresting and intensifying attention.

Fading, fluttering, flying, falling, the leaves of autumn come down.

Making his way through the crowd with giant strides, the great, burly giant of Tomson's show was seen in open noon, to the amazement of all beholders.

When the participle, especially in the absolute construction, is placed at the beginning of the sentence, care must be taken that the expectation of the reader in regard to the grammatical form of the sentence be not disappointed.

The boy having thrown off his ragged clothes, stuck his toes into the water to try the temperature, for the stream came down from the hills, and was not likely to be over-warm, the dog came frisking down to the bank to go in with him.

The reader naturally expects that 'boy' is to be the subject of the sentence, when without warning the dog takes his place. "It cannot be said that this is a trifle," comments Professor Earle on this point; "it makes all the difference between the writing which is and that which is not Readable; it makes all the odds between Art and Bungling."

The position of the participle in relation to its substantive may be made to bring out either its adjective or its verbal force. 'A fighting man' makes of 'fighting' almost an adjective; while 'a man fighting' brings out strongly the force of the verb. This is of course largely a matter of simple emphasis, but it is worth notice.

Participles may be used with charming effect to throw into relief a substantive, as in the examples: —

The clouds moved slowly across the sky, drifting, sailing, delaying, brooding, in the wide blue heavens.

For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upward, singing as he rises. — JEREMY TAYLOR.

Professor Earle, from whom I have borrowed the second illustration, says enthusiastically of this construction: —

Gathering round the chosen subject as a focus and radiating from it in all directions, this Part of Speech produces the effect of a medallion, or a cameo, or a star, which gives a fine illumination to the narrative. — *English Prose*, ch. v.

The position of the participle and of the clauses containing it, while of less importance than the correct use of this form of the verb, is still of much effect in the finish of style. Just as an obscure participle ruins the sense, so what is called the 'dangling participle' ruins the sound. A dangling participle is a sort of "grass widow" of language, hanging to the edge of the sentence as ladies to whom is applied the slangy phrase cling to the fringes of society. It trails along at the conclusion, bringing up the rear lamely and inelegantly, as in the following examples: —

The girl was an adventuress, having come to the city to seek her fortune.

He cast off in a moment his air of kindliness, his eyes grew fierce, his mouth took on a stern cast, his brows contracted, showing the true enemy at last.

He believed for an instant that he was in the house of

the dead, and he did not dare to move lest these corpses start up, squalling and squawking. — *The Red Badge of Courage.*

This fault is generally the result of a want of foresight on the part of the writer. If he grasps the sentence as a whole before he begins to write it, he is not likely to have at the end a stray scrap of thought to tack on in the form of a dangling participial clause. These subordinate matters he will naturally introduce in the body of the sentence.

The gerund is distinguished from the participle by the fact that it has the quality of a substantive. It possesses no adjective function, and although both end in *-ing*, it need not be confounded with its participial sister. As a verb the gerund may take an object, while as a substantive it may itself be subject or object of another verb, be a predicate or an appositive, or the object of a preposition. Each of these cases is illustrated in the following examples, in the order named : —

Swimming the stream was a pleasure.

I will stop *asking* for pity.

His delight was *rambling* over the hills.

The great feat, *breaking* the rope, was still to be accomplished.

At *hearing* the news he broke out in a rage.

By far the most common use of the gerund is as the object of a preposition.

Memories are a fairy gift which cannot be worn out *in using*. — STEVENSON.

There is a vast difference *between teaching* flight and

showing points of peril that a man may march more warily. — ID.

Moral sentiment . . . has the power *of invigorating* the hearer. — EMERSON.

Examples might easily be multiplied, but every reader will find them abundantly; and if he choose to look for it, he will find the distinction between the gerund and the participle — except in rare cases — sufficiently clear.

The gerund and the participle alike are used to denote continuing action. Here the reader may find a test for his own sensitiveness to expression. The writer who clearly realizes the exact shade of meaning which he has in mind, for instance, will not indifferently write 'I abhor being in debt,' or 'I abhor debt,' and assume that one sentence means the same as the other. The latter expression declares dislike for debt as an abstract thing; the former speaks of a continuing experience. The gerund in this case has also a certain personal flavor which the noun lacks entirely. 'His delight was a ramble over the hills' is not the same as the gerundive expression quoted above, and a different force would be given to the line from Stevenson if for 'in using' were to be substituted 'in [by] use.' The same principle holds in the choice between the infinitive and the gerund or the participle. If instead of the gerund in the quotation from Emerson above be substituted the infinitive 'to invigorate,' the change from the continuous action to the single effect is subtile, but it is real. If the infinitive in the sentence 'I saw him [to]

enter' be replaced by the participle 'entering,' the meaning has been altered from 'I saw the act of his entrance' to 'I saw him while he was in the act of entering.' This point I do not wish to dwell upon lest I seem tedious. The writer who is sensitive to word-values will easily carry it on for himself, and learn not to employ participles or gerunds unless with the deliberate purpose of expressing state or action which is continuous.

The gerund is in close relations with the infinitive as well as with the participle, and, indeed, is by some grammarians styled the 'flexional infinitive.' When it is used as the object of a preposition the particle does not become so closely wedded to it as does the 'to' which is the sign of the infinitive mood; but there is something of the same objection to separating the gerund from its governing word that there is to a cleft infinitive. To insert modifying words in the middle of an infinitive is a crime punishable with a quick death; the similar dismemberment of the gerundive construction is a sin perhaps venial. The following quotation from Matthew Arnold is given by Professor Earle as an extreme example of this fault: —

> Its business is, as I have said, simply to know the best that is known and thought in the world, and, *by in its turn making* this known, to create a current of true and fresh ideas.

Certainly this is detestably awkward, and the construction is generally objectionable. It is sometimes, however, necessary. A negative modifying a gerund comes properly after a governing preposition.

This resulted from his not hearing me.

The pleasure of not feeling cold.

The adverb, moreover, must have this place when otherwise there might be doubt or difference in regard to the word it modifies.

I commended him for really trying to learn.

I commended him for trying really to learn.

The meaning in these sentences varies by the difference that in the first the adverb modifies the gerund, and in the other the infinitive. The general proposition remains sound, however, that cleft gerunds are to be avoided.

The fault most common in relation to the use of the gerund is that of confounding it with the verbal noun. A verbal noun is a word identical in form with the participle and gerund in *-ing*, but naming an act or state instead of representing its transpiring or continuing. In the two examples following, the word 'living' is a verbal noun in the first and a gerund in the second.

> How good is man's life, the mere living.
>
> BROWNING: *Saul.*

> That we devote ourselves to God, is seen
> In living just as though no God there were.
>
> ID.: *Paracelsus.*

In the phrase 'living as I do in the city,' precisely the same word is a participle. In the following examples there is no force of the verb, and the italicized words are therefore verbal nouns: —

> The moan of doves in immemorial elms,
> And *murmuring* of innumerable bees.
>
> TENNYSON: *The Princess.*

To keep my hands from *picking* and *stealing*. — *Book of Common Prayer.*

His early *training*, his bright *beginning* of life. — MEREDITH: *The Egoist.*

The same words in these passages are gerunds: —

I will move him by *murmuring*.

Gleaners who are intent only on *picking* up the ears of grain. — MEREDITH: *The Egoist.*

He foiled her by *stealing* the letter.

By *beginning* while the dogs were young, and *training* them patiently.

To aid further the reader's understanding of this delicate matter, — I trust not to complete his mental confusion, — it may not be amiss to add examples of the same words used as participles: —

The fiend . . . fled *murmuring*.
MILTON: *Paradise Lost.*

Picking up the oars, he went down to the shore.

Time comes *stealing* on by night and day.
Comedy of Errors.

I went on, *training* with the troop.

Pleased me, long choosing and *beginning* late.
Paradise Lost.

As verbal nouns, these words are the mere names of processes; as gerunds, they express action, taking on a substantive quality by naming a state of action; as participles, they still express action, but gain an adjective flavor by becoming descriptive of a person or thing performing that action. The

distinction between the gerund and the verbal noun is most difficult to see clearly. The connection between the two is so close that it is possible to change the verb into the substantive by the simple expedient of preceding it by an article. The word then becomes a verbal noun, and is no longer capable of governing an object. It is allowable to say, 'He enjoyed making puns,' or, 'He enjoyed the making of puns;' it is not proper to say, 'He enjoyed the making puns.' By the insertion of the article, 'making' becomes a noun, and can no longer take an accusative after it. If before a transitive gerund be placed an article, a preposition must be introduced to govern the word which might have been the object of the gerund. This is the point which for practical purposes it is most necessary to keep in mind; and this should be carefully attended to.

This transformation of the gerund into a verbal noun naturally affects the nature of the modifiers. A gerund takes adverbial modifiers; those of the verbal noun must be adjective. It is grammatical to write: 'For properly doing this;' or, 'For the proper doing of this.' The one exception to this is the idiomatic use of the possessive noun or pronoun to modify the gerund. Despite the fact that some authorities allow or authorize such phrases as 'I object to him doing it,' and the other fact that authors of standing use the construction occasionally, the best use is against it. Certainly common sense condemns it as not saying what it is meant to express. This form came into the lan-

guage in the sixteenth century, but it has never been general in literature. In America, where the best writers have perhaps shown a tendency to be more conservative than in England, the accusative before a gerund has always been rare. Nesfield, in his grammar, quotes these English examples: —

We have no right to be hurt at a girl telling me what my faults are. — THACKERAY.

Don't fear of me being any hindrance to you. — DICKENS.

Would you mind me asking you a few questions? — STEVENSON.

Of the first of these examples one is reluctantly forced to say that it is so discredited by its slovenly confusion of pronouns that it can hardly claim to be authority on any question of English. The other two seem to have been taken from dialogue, and if so, are to be regarded as mere colloquialisms. In any case, these writers may be quoted against themselves.

If I ever hear of your putting your name to stamped paper. — THACKERAY: *Sketches and Travels.*

Insists on your swallowing two glasses of sherry. — DICKENS: *Our Parish.*

With my stepping ashore I began the most unhappy part of my adventures. — STEVENSON: *Kidnapped.*

To multiply examples would not be difficult.

Till the day of his showing unto Israel. — *Luke* i. 80.

His going forth is from the end of the heaven.
Ps. xix. 6.

Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising.
Ps. cxxxix. 2.

Of his neglecting to gratify these there is little danger. — MATTHEW ARNOLD: Preface to *Poems*.

My leaving Guido were a kind of death.
BROWNING: *The Ring and the Book*.

Good use has certainly most clearly established the principle that the gerund shall be preceded by the possessive. The grammatical reason for this idiom seems to be that the gerund in its substantive sense names an act or condition which belongs to the person indicated by the possessive, and in its substantive character takes a modifier as if it were a noun. The reason in common sense is that the objective pronoun with a participle as a modifier does not express what is actually intended. 'Would you mind me asking you a few questions,' given above, does not convey the idea which the writer evidently has in mind. 'Asking' is the real object of 'mind,' not 'me.' The question is not whether the person addressed would mind 'me,' doing one thing or another; but whether he would mind being questioned by me; and this sense 'me asking' does not convey. That the sense intended may readily be inferred is no more a sufficient defense of the construction than it would be of the crass error 'he done.' Idiom and accuracy of expression alike demand the use of the possessive. The men who made the King James Bible, that "well of English undefiled," to borrow Spenser's well-worn praise of Chaucer, felt with exquisite sensitiveness the difference of force between the

possessive with the gerund and the objective with a participle. Instances of the former are given above; here is an example of the latter: —

> Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me. — 2 *Cor.* xiii. 3.

The idea which is meant to be objective after 'proof of' is here contained not in 'speaking,' but in 'Christ;' and the construction is chosen accordingly. The clear realization of what is to be said settles this matter as it does most others connected with the art of composition.

An admirable instance of the vitality which is obtained by the use of the gerund is the following:

> Truth . . . is poured into his mind and is sealed up there in perpetuity, by propounding and repeating it, by correcting and explaining, by progressing and then recurring to first principles. — NEWMAN: *What Is a University?*

No substantives could convey the sense of action, of processes going vitally forward, that is expressed by the vivid force of these verbs.

Participles and gerunds cannot of course be treated exhaustively in space so brief as this, and I have attempted little more than to touch upon such leading characteristics as most commonly confront a writer. These forms of the verb furnish a most interesting subject for study to any one interested in the structure of language; and they are of importance so great that they command the attention of any earnest student of composition.

V

PARTICLES

PARTICLES are in the sentence like tiny crystals in a watch; they may either be jewels in which the wheels are pivoted, or they may be grains of sand impeding and marring the works. The "whole cloud of word-dust which is vaguely indicated by the term Particles," is the way in which Professor Earle speaks of these forms, — the small parts of speech so fine as constantly to elude the critical attention of the writer, yet so important as constantly to determine the effect of the sentence as a whole. In this class are included articles, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, and a good many adverbs. Upon the proper use of these even more than upon participles and parallel construction which I have classed with them depend the finish and finesse of style.

The examination of all these parts of speech at length would require far more space than can here be spared. Some of them I have taken up already,[1] and here I can do no more than briefly to add some consideration of particular points connected with the article, the conjunction, and the preposition.

[1] Flat adverbs, *Talks on Writing English*, pp. 50, 51; final particles, Ib., pp. 51–53; conjunctions, Ib., pp. 53, 54; pronouns, etc., ch. ii. of this book.

Savagery must have begun its invention of speech by affixing names to things; in other words, by adopting conventions of sound to represent definite objects. The substantive would thus in all probability be the beginning of language. The verb and the adjective would seem naturally to follow next, and these three parts of speech might well serve most of the needs of savage life. The development of the power of thought, the appreciation of abstract ideas, of finer shades of difference, would make necessary the devising of pronouns, adverbs, articles, conjunctions, and prepositions. Without in the least meaning to present this order as an actual summary of philological development, I think that we may assume that the need and consequently the invention of particles belong not to primary conditions of human society, but to a grade farther advanced toward civilization.

These forms of speech made necessary by increased mental power and mental sensitiveness naturally require especial skill in the using, and many a writer has come to grief through the error of assuming that words insignificant in size were of comparatively small consequence. Professor Earle quotes this admirable example of the effect of small words: —

> So long as it was proposed to reward Sir Humphry Davy for '*the* invention of *his* safety-lamp,' no objection could be taken; but when the subscription was described as a reward for '*his* invention of *the* safety-lamp,' the case was altered, and Stephenson's friends proceeded to assert his claims. — *The Times*, September 9, 1856.

The whole force of the following sentences depends upon particles: —

The soil out of which such men as he are made is good to be born on, good to live on, good to die for, and be buried in. — LOWELL: *Garfield.*

That Jesus was *a* prophet sent from God is one proposition; that Jesus was *the* prophet, the Messiah, is another; and though he was certainly both *a* prophet and *the* prophet, yet the foundations of the proof of these propositions are separate and distinct. — WATSON: *Apology*; quoted by Goold Brown.

The object of this book does not of course include an exhaustive examination of the possibilities of either the use or the dangers of particles. With the aim to be as practical as is possible goes the general exclusion of theoretical considerations. The more important peculiarities of these small but important words, however, and still more the difficulties connected with their use must be considered.

The article is too commonly neglected by the student, as if it were abundantly able to take care of itself, or as if it were too insignificant to work mischief. The sentence just quoted illustrates the fact that it may be of prime importance; any careful examination of its uses brings this out yet more strongly. In the four expressions, '*A* man with *a* long stick,' '*The* man with *the* long stick,' '*A* man with *the* long stick,' '*The* man with *a* long stick,' the meaning is distinctly different in each. The first is entirely general; the second specifically indicates a particular man and a particular stick; the third is indefinite in regard to the man

but particular as to the stick; the fourth defines 'man' but leaves 'stick' general. If I write, 'He is a better sailor than fisherman,' I say one thing; I say quite another if my sentence read, 'He is a better sailor than a fisherman.' In the first sentence I have spoken of one person; in the second of one as contrasted with a class. By the use of the definite article the following statement is made general, so that it includes all things which are impossible with men: —

> The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God. — *Luke* xviii. 8.

The declaration would be limited to some portion of these things if 'the' be dropped: 'Things which are impossible with men, are possible with God.' Another good illustration is the difference between the Biblical phrase "he shall run like the lightning" and the colloquial "run like lightning." This may all seem somewhat primary, but the carelessness with which writers misuse the article is sufficient excuse for my dwelling a little upon the effect which this particle may have on meaning.

The general principle which governs the use of the article is implied by the names 'definite' and 'indefinite.' Where 'the' is used the writer, consciously or unconsciously, has limited the substantive to a specific and definite meaning; equally the use of 'a' or 'an' marks the significance as general. This is simple enough, and this everybody supposes himself to know. In the sense of having had the fact externally applied, it is something that every-

body does know; and if every writer put in practice all the principles he has heard, neither this chapter nor this book would have any excuse for being. The difficulty is that writers do not always stop to realize whether they mean a noun to be definite or not.

The proper use of articles is one of the peculiarities of language which is almost sure to be learned from conversation with educated persons. The possible combinations are not so numerous that they are likely to be wanting in practice, however little they are theorized about. We all understand, for instance, that if we wish to particularize a species of animals we must with the singular use the definite article. 'Whatever is true of other animals, the cat is treacherous;' we know also that a form of less emphasis but broader generality is the use of the plural indefinitely without the article, as to say, 'Cats are treacherous.' This we all learn from common speech. There are, however, one or two points to which I wish to call attention here, because both in writing and in common speech they are so often neglected.

Where two words are used in close connection, the one requiring an article and the other not, the one without the article should be written first. For instance, "Darwin shows a close connection between the bees and clover-fertilization," should be, "Darwin shows a close connection between clover-fertilization and the bees." In the original arrangement there is a natural inference that a definite article is understood before 'clover-fertilization,' whereas

none is intended. The difference in this example, which I heard in a lecture, is not great; in the following it is more serious: "The ceremonies and superstition of the people have the closest connection." The context in the book from which this is taken makes it evident that the author did not mean 'the superstition of the people,' but superstition in general; that what he should have written to express his thought was, 'Superstition and the ceremonies of the people have the closest connection.' By exposing the wrong word to the influence of the definite article the writer said what he did not mean. A good example of the proper construction is this: —

Monks and the servants of great lords hold high wassail. — STEVENSON.

The question of repeating or omitting articles before the nouns of a series is a matter which troubles many students. It is decided entirely by the need of discriminating between the terms. To repeat the article is to individualize each noun. This individualism is made necessary when the nouns have different adjuncts or dependence, or where they are contrasted. 'She did not envy the wealth, but youth of her rival,' blurs the sense by omitting 'the' before 'youth,' which is contrasted with 'wealth.' Dryden wrongly omits 'the' before 'knowledge' in the following, the difference of adjuncts preventing its sharing the article with 'use.'

Before the use of the lodestone or knowledge of the compass.

An excellent example of the correct use of the article, and therefore an excellent example also of the force of the article, is this: —

Whether it was a stormy night, a shepherd's collie, a sheep struggling in the snow, the conduct of cowardly soldiers in the field, the gait and cogitations of a drunken man, or only a village cockcrow in the morning, he could find language to give it freshness, body, and relief. — STEVENSON: *Some Aspects of Robert Burns.*

This is instructive in its omission of articles, as before 'cogitations,' as well as in its use of them.

In a series of adjectives the article is omitted if all belong to one substantive, but must be repeated if the qualities expressed apply to different things.

The true, strong, and sound mind is the mind that can embrace equally great things and small. — DR. JOHNSON.

A brick and a stone house stood by the road.

Instances of incorrect use of articles before adjectives, errors which make the writer say something which he is far from meaning, are easily found.

It is proper that the vowels be a long and short one. — *Murray's Grammar.*

To distinguish between an interrogative and exclamatory sentence. — *Ib.*

Into a dark and a distant unknown. — CHALMERS.

There is, however, another and a more limited sense. — ADAMS: *Rhetoric.*

The first example makes 'one' both long and short; the second declares a sentence to be at once interrogative and exclamatory; the third provides

for two unknowns; the fourth indicates two senses, 'another' and still another which is 'limited.'

An error which is common in conversation and in the work of untrained writers is the misuse of the definite article before words which have not been defined and which have no proper definite quality. 'After walking a short distance, they came to the field' is correct only when the place has been before indicated. This fault is allied to the frequent and stupid colloquial misuse of 'this.' 'We were walking, and met this man,' for instance, instead of 'a man.' A student theme begins, "John was walking in the street. The man that he saw coming toward him," etc. A very little care is all that is needed to prevent this.

It is perhaps not superfluous to give a few examples of effective use of the article. The following seem to me worth attention: —

Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. — *Proverbs* vi. 10; xxiv. 33.

The Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire. — *Exodus* xiii. 21.

A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature. — EMERSON: *Friendship.*

The danger of a little knowledge of things is disputable; but beware of the little knowledge of one's self. — MEREDITH: *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.*

A wise scepticism is the first attribute of a good critic. — LOWELL: *Shakespeare.*

The effect of any article in these is best appre-

ciated by dropping or changing it. In the last example, for instance, 'Wise skepticism is the first attribute of good critics' would lack the definiteness which is given by the specific force of the articles, and would be removed into the region of rather vague generalities.

Over-use of the article is to be avoided, as is the needless repetition of any other part of speech. This familiar line from Tennyson, for instance, falls through too many articles into commonplace jingling — possibly intended to be onomatopœic — which is far from poetry: —

But the jingling of the guinea helps the hurt that honor feels. — *Locksley Hall.*

The Rhine, the Danube, the Tanais, the Po, . . . like many hundreds of similar names, rose, etc. — MURRAY: *History of European Languages.*

In the latter example the article is not only tiresome, but incorrect. Too many articles buzz in the ear like gnats, and spoil sense and sound alike.

The difference in meaning between the expression which has the article and that which does not have it must decide whether one or the other is to be used in a given place. If we wish to convey the idea that of a company only an insignificant remnant is left, we may say, 'Few men remained.' If we desire to give the impression that although those left were not numerous, they were still to be considered of some importance, the phrase is, 'A few remained.' The same principle decides whether we say, 'He fled in fright,' or 'He fled in a

fright;' 'He was crushed by terror,' 'He was crushed by a terror,' or 'He was crushed by the terror.' The whole matter is one of being vividly aware of what we wish to say and of what a given form of words will express.

The advantage to sense as well as to sound of self-restraint in the use of the article has been well put in the following: —

> The rare and judicious use of the article in English is one of the points in which its beautiful simplicity is best shown. In its proper omission, especially, whenever the sense of the noun is not limited or determined, lies an excellence of English over even Greek, where it is often used without giving additional weight or conferring a clearer meaning to the noun which it accompanies. This beauty becomes the more striking yet, when we compare with it the use which the nearest relative of English, the German, makes of the article. Its almost insufferable repetition there mars often the most beautiful periods, encumbering them sadly, and thus depriving the language of the brief and impressive energy of her English sister. — SCHELE DE VERE: *Studies in English.*

English is unrivaled in the avoidance of merely formal words. It is wonderfully free from terms idiomatically essential but in meaning needless. Particles in English have functions as definite, as necessary, as little superfluous as those of the most exalted parts of speech. From this results the high degree of conciseness which may in our tongue be combined with accuracy and elegance; from this no less arises the great care which must be exer-

cised in the use of the little words of which the article is a marked example.

Conjunctions follow next in the study of particles. The development of the language has provided idiomatic distinctions by which may be expressed the subtlest differences of meaning, and this is no less true of the use of conjunctions than it is in regard to parts of speech in themselves more important. Although the conjunction is but a humble member of the family of words without the changes of form which come from inflection, although in its functions it is restricted to the expression of some sort of connection between words or groups of words, it has a varied and well-developed use; and this use is so extensive that it requires careful study.

Connection in composition, it may be well to remark in passing, is not confined to conjunctions. It may be effected by any one of a number of means, and a good literary workman is at once to be recognized by his handling of connectives. The devices which may be employed are so numerous that they afford much opportunity for variety of effect. Connection, for instance, may be by conjunctions:

Goethe's sage mind *and* Byron's force. — MATTHEW ARNOLD.

For the literary architecture, *if* it is to be rich and expressive, involves *not only* foresight of the end in the beginning, *but also* development *or* growth of design in the process of execution. — WALTER PATER: *Style.*

by prepositions:

The great safeguard *for* a correct use is to catch the grammatical character *of* the word. — EARLE: *English Prose.*

by conjunctive adverbs:

When neither order nor constructions will serve to make unmistakable the relations between the parts of any composition, we should use connectives with scrupulous precision. — WENDELL: *English Composition.*

by pronouns:

Nature is a mutable cloud *which* is always and never the same. — EMERSON: *History.*

by participles:

At that time I had a dislike to being seen, *feeling* that I should be despised if I were noticed. — JEFFRIES: *The Story of My Heart.*

by repetition:

Man is not the creature of *circumstances. Circumstances* are the creatures of men. — LORD BEACONSFIELD: *Vivian Grey.*

His sense of his own unworthiness I have called *morbid; morbid*, too, were his sense of the fleetingness of life and his concern for death. — STEVENSON: *Thomas Stevenson.*

by parallel construction:

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! — *Hamlet*, ii. 2.

Of these different forms each has its place and its use; but of them all the most frank and obvious is naturally the employment of the conjunction.

The varied office of conjunctions is well illustrated by the way in which coördinates[1] are made to indicate the comparative importance of terms which they couple. Two terms of equal value are united simply by 'and,' 'but,' or 'or,' according to the sort of union; if a closer union is to be emphasized, the writer has at his service the cumulatives 'both . . . and:' 'Both John and Luke were Apostles.' When values are unequal and it is desired to emphasize the first term, this office is performed by 'as well as:' 'Luke as well as John was an Apostle.' If it be the second which is to be emphasized, another conjunctive form is ready, and the phrase is 'not only . . . but' or 'but also:' 'Not only John but Luke was an Apostle.' This is a typical example of the richness of English in the means of varying expression by a discriminating choice of connectives.

Conjunctions are to style very much what mortar is to a wall. The firmness and durability of the coherence of the whole depend largely upon them. They are not able to create a relation between ideas, and so limited is their power that they are in reality not able even to establish a connection where it does not exist. They can only express a relation which belongs to the ideas or thoughts which they join. In other words, the connective is justified by the thought, not the thought

[1] Coördinative, which join sentences of coördinate (that is, of *equal*) rank, or words that stand in the same relation to some other word in the sentence. — NESFIELD: *English Grammar Past and Present.*

by the connective. The stability of a wall, to carry the figure a little farther, depends upon the balance and poise of the stones, and if these are ill adjusted it cannot maintain itself by the strength of the mortar. Coherence is the result of a firm and proportionate adjustment of ideas, held in their places by connectives, but producing a structural whole by their own character and relations. A conjunction is misused which is not supported by internal connection.

Errors in the use of conjunctions are generally not so much the result of ignorance as of carelessness pure and simple. In the following sentence, for instance, the author knew that his use of 'and' where he meant 'or' made him state what he did not mean: —

> The definite article 'the' may agree with nouns in the singular *and* plural number. — MURRAY: *Grammar.*

Here is a gross example of the danger of not realizing what is written. An article does not agree with anything, because it is not an inflected part of speech; it may limit a noun in the singular or a noun in the plural, but not both, as is stated by that unlucky 'and.' The point is so obvious that it is entirely needless to multiply examples. The matter is summed up in the doggerel verse which is quoted by Goold Brown from one Robert F. Mott:

> The current is often evinced by the straws,
> And the course of the wind by the flight of a feather;
> So a speaker is known by his *ands* and his *ors*,
> Those stitches that fasten his patchwork together.

Superfluous 'ands' or 'buts' are to written composition somewhat the same thing as are "ers" to speech. Needless and without meaning, they detract from clearness and destroy elegance.

Two errors in the use of 'and' are so common and so illiterate that they should perhaps be condemned by special mention. The first is the employment of the conjunction to connect a relative with its antecedent. The relative has itself a connective force, and admits no other connective between its clause and that upon which it depends; with its antecedent it is connected by grammatical structure.

The boy had a stick between four and five feet long, and which he flourished about his head.

Two relative clauses may, however, be connected, and in that case the 'and' may properly stand before the 'which.'

The house which you saw, and which you passed this morning, is mine.

The second error is the substitution of 'and' for the sign of the infinitive mood when the infinitive follows another verb. 'Try and do this,' 'Be sure and go,' 'I thought I would endeavor and get in,' are examples of this colloquialism. Such a use of 'and' for 'to' has a flavor of peculiar vulgarity, and is besides one of the most insidious falsehoods of style.

That care must be taken as to the placing of conjunctions is one of those principles so obvious as to be constantly neglected. The best literary

art gains variety by the effective position of its conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs. A writer may say, for instance: 'He is my guest, and therefore it is my place to see to him;' 'and it is therefore my place;' 'it is my place therefore;' 'my place it is therefore;' 'my place therefore it is.' Consciously a selection must be made from these forms, and the decision will affect the finish of the style. Any of the conjunctions which need not stand at the beginning of a clause present this necessity of choice. It is necessary also that corresponding conjunctions be placed with the words which they are to connect. 'I neither sang too loud nor too long' should of course be, 'I sang neither too loud nor too long.' 'He not only read the letter but the book accompanying it.'

Lothair was unaffectedly gratified at *not only* receiving his friends at his own castle, *but* under these circumstances of intimacy. — LORD BEACONSFIELD; quoted by Professor Hill.

This is the fault of not realizing what is said. Another fault depends largely upon a lack of training in the ear. To put a conjunction in a place of emphasis, and especially to break the construction in this way, betrays the writer not sensitive to the sound of what he has put on paper.

Another as good *as*, if not richer than he.

He was a treacherous-looking rogue, the smile on his face *notwithstanding*.

There is abundant precedent for the construction

which the former of these examples represents, but it is rare that it is so managed as not to offend the sensitive ear.

The placing of a conjunction with the force of an independent adverb at the beginning of a sentence, or even at the beginning of a paragraph, is exceedingly common with all careless writers. No schoolboy composition is likely to be without instances. The work of writers of distinction affords abundant precedent, yet the construction is more often a fault than a virtue; and it is probably, even in the style of good writers, more often a carelessness or a habit than a deliberate effect. Of modern authors of recognized merit perhaps the most marked instance is Stevenson. With him it is a mannerism which seems to be due to nervousness; and personally I must confess that I find his continual introductory 'ands' and 'buts' not unlike the wearisome and teasing burr which accompanies the utterance of a telephone. In four pages of the essay called "Some College Memories" are eleven sentences and one paragraph beginning with 'and' or 'but.' Here is a bit from that otherwise charming essay which illustrates the effect: —

> To-day, again, they have Professor Butcher, and I hear he has a prodigious deal of Greek; and they have Professor Chrystal, who is a man filled with mathematics. And doubtless these are set-offs. But they cannot change the fact that Professor Blackie has retired.

This is not admirable, even when done by Stevenson. More is needed to give ease to style than

promiscuous conjunctions at the beginning of sentences, and students who without difficulty copy this mannerism are as far as ever from the qualities which give charm to the work of genius. In the diction of the Bible 'and' is used as an independent adverb, so that 'And it came to pass' has the same grammatical value, and practically the same meaning, as 'Now it came to pass.' This usage may be urged in defense of the adverbial use of 'and,' perhaps even to a less degree of the use of 'but.'[1] The conclusion of the whole matter is that

[1] The difficulty seems to be that logically a conjunction standing at the beginning of a sentence implies an ellipsis. Although grammarians generally speak as if 'and,' for instance, might connect sentences as well as parts of sentences, they make no provision for the somewhat awkward conclusion which would follow. If 'and' or 'but' may unite sentences, then any complex sentence in which the members are connected by either of these conjunctions may be made into two by the simple introduction of a period. To allow this would be to consider a complex sentence a matter not of structure, but of punctuation merely. The connective force of 'and' cannot logically extend back over a period, and if this word stands at the beginning of a sentence, an ellipsis is implied. If this ellipsis be a mere repetition of what has gone before, the period placed before the conjunction is wrong.

"However great may be the advantages of travel to some forms of culture, it undoubtedly weakens, if not destroys, individualism and nationalism in art. And the time of national literatures is certainly passing, but that of the complete unity of man and the cosmopolitan literature is yet to come. But cosmopolitanism, when it achieves the largest life the world has ever seen, will blossom into the greatest of literatures, and travels will be no more."

This is all one uncouth sentence, and the two periods cannot make it other. To change the second member to a complete sentence, it is necessary to suppose an ellipsis of something like "Individualism and nationalism are being destroyed by travel."

while a writer may find authority in precedent for starting a sentence with 'and' or 'but,' he follows it with the sacrifice of what Emerson calls "superb propriety."

The general tendency of the best modern prose has been steadily toward the diminished employment of conjunctions. As the art of prose has developed, the attainment of greater compactness of structure and of a more intimate relation of the parts of sentences, both through construction and by meaning, has lessened the need of formal connectives. The prose of three centuries ago, as notably that of Richard Hooker, fairly bristles with connectives. That of Emerson, to take an extreme example of our own time, has very few. The student who wishes to follow the models most in harmony with the development of language will learn to be both particular and sparing in his employment of conjunctions, and to take advantage of the variety of form and of meaning which is

In the example from Stevenson given above, the 'and' of the second sentence is not a conjunction, but an independent adverb. The period before 'but' is wrong, because from 'and' to the end of the quotation is really one sentence. Stevenson perhaps unconsciously got his fondness for 'and' as an adverb from his early familiarity with the Bible. Examples are plenty, but are seldom from writers of much standing. In the volume from which the example in this note is quoted is an essay of twenty-two paragraphs, three of which begin with 'and' and three with 'but;' another essay of seven paragraphs has three beginning with 'but' and one with 'and.' The former essay has about thirty sentences opening with one or the other of these conjunctions. The claim of the author to be considered an authority is sufficiently indicated by the fact that he seriously employs the phrase "I trow not."

afforded not only by this part of speech, but as well by other forms of connection.[1]

The preposition is of all the particles the most complicated in its uses. It expresses connection, but it has its chief office in the indication of relations of one sort or another. Of all the well-nigh innumerable relations, for instance, in which an action may stand to a material thing, the preposition distinguishes with fidelity, as may be illustrated with any common verb. It gives a distinct difference of meaning to each of the following phrases: —

Go *aboard* the boat; go *about* the house; go *above* the beam; go *across* the line; go *after* the carriage; go *against* the enemy; go *along* the path; go *among* the people; go *around* the pool; go *at* the problem; go *before* the magistrate; go *behind* the curtain; go *beneath* the shelter; go *between* the posts; etc.

It may equally be used to express the relations between the act of going and immaterial things.

Go *about* your business; go *against* a prejudice; go *beyond* orders; go *by* instinct; go *notwithstanding* opposition; etc.

Equally well may it be used to show different relations between the same ideas.

Go *above* the bridge; go *across* the bridge; go *along* the bridge; go *around* the bridge; go *beyond* the bridge; etc.

[1] An excellent chapter on the common misuse of conjunctions is given by Professor A. S. Hill. *Foundations of Rhetoric*, pp. 152–158.

Go *against* his wish; go *beyond* his wish; go *by* his wish; go *with* his wish; etc.

The preposition has, then, so intricate and so comprehensive functions, that accuracy must depend largely upon its skillful use.

A writer should certainly have sufficient respect for his meaning to make it unmistakable. If he leave this doubtful, he is like a parent who sends out into the world twins with a common Christian name, to be forever received with some uncertainty in regard to identity. He has in establishing clearness no more helpful part of speech than the preposition, and he in no way more surely produces confusion than by carelessness in its use. If he write, "A proper place was allotted for John," he may mean 'to John,' but equally he may mean that a place proper for John was set apart. He has not cared enough for his idea properly to phrase it, and he has produced only confusion.

Besides these obvious principles which govern the choice and use of prepositions is another which is of more importance still. The preposition is the part of speech in which idiom is most clearly and most constantly shown. It follows that the individual flavor of the language depends to a very considerable extent upon the nicety with which prepositions are used. What prepositions of several which have allied meanings shall follow especial words is purely a question of idiom, and definitely distinct meanings are associated with constructions which might to a foreigner seem to be selected arbitrarily. Men 'fall into an error,' yet by a

delicate discrimination which makes quite another thing of it, they 'fall in love.' A person may be 'sick with a fever,' but if the disease prove fatal, he dies not 'with' it but 'of' it. Distinctions of this sort are learned partly from text-books,[1] but readiness and accuracy in their use are attained only by familiarity with correct writers and by practice in exact writing and conversation.

Niceties in the use of prepositions indicate clearness of thinking. First, of course, comes correctness, which has not always been attained by men of high reputation. Cobbett, in his amusing and sometimes crotchety grammar, gives a number of errors from Dr. Johnson, and declares that he has a long list of others. On one passage in "The Rambler" he makes a comment which is worth quoting: —

If I am not commended *for* the beauty of my works, I may hope to be pardoned *for* their brevity. — *R. No. I.*

We may *commend* him *for* the beauty of his works; and we may *pardon* him *for* their brevity, if we deem the brevity *a fault;* but this is not what he means. He means that, at any rate, he shall have[2] the *merit of* brevity. "If I am not commended for the beauty of my words, I may hope to be pardoned *on account of* their brevity."

Second, and of only slightly less importance, is the following of idiomatic construction. Third, the

[1] A very good, although not exhaustive, list of the prepositions which idiomatically follow particular words is given in *English Grammar Past and Present*, by J. C. Nesfield. Modern books of synonyms generally include this information.

[2] I am afraid that Mr. Cobbett meant 'will have.'

nice distinction of intention which determines the choice among several prepositions of allied meanings. The writer has, for instance, to determine whether he means 'to think of a thing,' 'to think about a thing,' 'to think over a thing,' 'to think upon a thing,' — phrases of meaning so close that at first thought they seem identical. Yet the 'of' carries no more than the idea of identifying the subject of thought, as we try to think of a forgotten name; the 'on' or 'upon' perhaps intensifies this; the 'about' conveys the idea of meditation: and 'over,' that of examination. I do not mean to insist too strongly on this exposition of the difference in meaning of these prepositions; I wish only to draw attention to the fact that such differences exist.

George Meredith is an author who makes the most of prepositions. The abundance of these particles in his work is one of its characteristics.

The reproaching of Providence by a man of full growth comes, to some extent, from his meanness, and chiefly from his pride. — *Sandra Belloni.*

He told me once that he thought one's country like one's wife: you were born in the first, and married to the second, and had to learn all about them afterwards, — ay, and make the best of them. — *Adventures of Harry Richmond.*

Let it be some apology for the damage caused by the careering hero, and a consolation to the quiet wretches dragged along with him at his chariot-wheels, that he is generally the last to know when he has actually made a start. — *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.*

Jealousy of a woman is the primitive egoism seeking to refine in a blood gone to savagery under apprehension of an invasion of rights. — *The Egoist.*

I do not mean to imply that it might not be easy to match this showing, for any idiomatic English must deal pretty freely with prepositions. It does seem to me, however, that of this fact, and of the peculiar quality which this part of speech imparts to style, Meredith is an excellent example.

To give examples of the effective use of prepositions is perhaps hardly necessary, but two or three may illustrate the characteristic flavor which comes from the judicious employment of this part of speech : —

Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season. — *Job* v. 26.

From this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health. — *Book of Common Prayer.*

The soil out of which such men as he are made is good to be born on, good to live on, good to die for, and to be buried in. — LOWELL : *Garfield.*

Expressing himself in the temper which of all imaginable was most hostile to their dogmatic faith in the damnable wickedness of human nature. — BARRETT WENDELL : *A Literary History of America.*

That government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth. — LINCOLN : *Gettysburg Address.*

In less than a score of words Lincoln has phrased admirably, and to all appearance finally, a senti-

ment which clever writers had for well-nigh a century been trying adequately to express. The whole secret lay not in nouns or verbs, but in prepositions; three little particles, properly used, do the work of pages.

That all this is sufficiently primary, I am entirely aware. Perhaps, too, it falls between the two stools of saying too little and saying too much: between simple grammatical statement and exhaustive discussion of all possible functions of prepositions. The former of these, however, is outside of a book which aims to have as little to do with etymology and syntax as possible; the latter is outside the range of a talk which is meant to be practical. What I have been saying has had for its object the calling of attention to the part in our language which is played by prepositions, and the delicacy and idiomatic richness which they may impart to style. In this whole chapter, indeed, little more has been attempted than to turn the reader's thoughts in a particular direction, and to impress upon him the need of acquainting himself thoroughly with certain niceties of the language. Articles, conjunctions, and prepositions are so often neglected by the student and even by the instructor, that especial emphasis needs now to be laid upon them. In a modern rhetoric I read with some amazement: —

> Concerning the use of conjunctions or phrases which serve as such, there is not much to be said — they come to the pen naturally enough; the chief task here is of criticism rather than of construction.

This is true in a sense, but it is true only of the writer already trained. To the pen of the untrained writer all sorts of particles 'come naturally enough,' and, indeed, only too naturally; the difficulty is that they are as apt to come of a sort and in a way more likely to injure than to improve the style. It is still necessary to correct nature, and in composition this is nowhere more strictly true than in the matter of the accurate, the effective, the idiomatic use of particles.

VI

PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION

PARALLEL construction is a term with which all students of composition are so familiar that there might seem to be no need of taking up here the form which it names. The difficulty is that the phrase almost always represents to the mind of the learner something formal and marked; something which, if not actually rising to the dignity of a regular rhetorical figure, at least is to be distinguished from common, every-day prose. The examples given in text-books perhaps foster this error, as they are generally chosen with a view to their bringing out strongly the parallelism which they illustrate. A passage like the following, for instance, shows markedly the effect of parallel construction when it is most evident: —

He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools. He looseth the bonds of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle. He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty. He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged. — *Job* xii. 17–20.

Temple was a man of the world amongst men of letters, a man of letters amongst men of the world. — MACAULAY: *On Sir William Temple.*

Of this use of parallel construction it is neither

necessary to multiply examples nor to speak further here. What does need some emphasizing is the importance of this literary device when it is so unobtrusive as hardly to be noticed. Even then it remains one of the most important characteristics of delicately effective work.

Delicacy of effect is one of the most enduring as it is one of the most artistic qualities of style. It is less surely secured by obvious than by unobtrusive means; so that it has less to do with parallel construction in the elaborate form of old-fashioned prose, than with the principle which underlies this verbal form, the principle that similarity of grammatical or of rhetorical form in related expressions conveys an idea of equality in importance. The converse is no less true. Differences of grammatical form necessarily convey some sense of variation in importance, and differences in rhetorical form also produce an idea of a lack of closeness of connection.

The effect of differences in grammatical form will be better understood if we consider the relative importance which belongs to various forms of the verb. If we take the sentence of Macaulay, "A fashion indeed it was, and like a fashion it passed away," and alter the verb, we may have 'Being a fashion, like a fashion it passed away,' or 'A fashion indeed it was, like a fashion passing away.' It is at once evident that in each of these the relative value of the phrases is different. In the original the two statements have equal rank; in the second the first, and in the third

the second phrase is rendered relatively unemphatic by being made participial in expression. The same sort of effect is produced, though perhaps less strikingly, if the infinitive is employed: 'It was a fashion, like a fashion to pass away;' the finite verb as before asserts its supremacy. To use a verb in one of the finite moods — indicative, subjunctive, imperative — is to give to the idea expressed more force than it would have if phrased in the infinitive mood; to put it in the infinitive is to give to it greater force than it would have if expressed by the aid of a participle. The differences may be further illustrated as follows: —

He called at the house, saw her, and invited her at once.

Calling at the house, he saw her, and invited her at once.

Calling at the house and seeing her, he invited her at once.

Calling at the house, he saw her, inviting her at once.

He called at the house, seeing her and inviting her at once.

He called at the house to see her, and invited her at once.

He called at the house to see her, and to invite her at once.

He called at the house to see her, inviting her at once.

Calling at the house to see her, he invited her at once.

Seeing her, he called at the house to invite her at once.

The changes possible are not all given, but these are sufficient to show the effect of altered verb-

values. The student will do well to examine them carefully, with a view of learning to appreciate what in each case the effect is. This may seem like a recommendation to return to the school-benches of youth, but even so extreme a measure would harm few of us.

An illustration or two of the errors which arise from a failure to make the form of the verb correspond to the evident intention of the writer will help to make the force of what has been said clearer.

Being interested in writing, I wish to take English 12, increasing my efficiency in expression.

The idea of increasing his efficiency is here evidently the one to which the writer should give most stress, and it should therefore be expressed by a verbal form of more force: 'I wish by taking English 12 to increase,' etc.

The shell is got rid of in this way. The steel ejector is pressed back when the breech-block is closed behind the cartridge, but when the block is thrown back, *pulling* the cartridge-shell from the gun, this pressure is released, and the ejector *shoots* out against the cartridge, *throwing* it into the air clear of the gun.

The writer is endeavoring to explain how the shell is 'got rid of,' and manifestly what he should have written is: —

When the block is thrown back, it pulls the cartridge-shell from the gun, this pressure is released, and the ejector, shooting out against the cartridge, throws it into the air clear of the gun.

Everything depended upon our understanding each other, and I watched eagerly for a chance to draw him aside, disclosing my plan.

Manifestly this should be 'that I might disclose my plan.' Another mistake which is common is the giving to a relative clause the place which belongs to a participle.

The illustration, which is of minor importance, should be in smaller type.

Here instead of the relative clause should stand the participial, 'being of minor.' The intention of the writer determines the form in this as in other details of composition, and it is of the first importance that the writer be sharply aware both of what his intention is and of how far it is fulfilled by what he sets down. Only by the utmost care is one able to deal successfully with the delicate matter of correct discrimination in using the forms of the verb according to their respective values.

The variations of meaning in the examples given may seem to the uncritical reader to be hardly more than trivial. The point is that they are real; and any real variation in expression may become of importance. The difference between the mediocre and the good style is chiefly a matter of delicate exactness of expression. What we call distinction in style is largely an affair of shading produced by precisely these seemingly trivial means. It is as hard to write interestingly of these technical details as to make the rule of three attractive to a lover; but to the practical worker, both arithmetical intri-

cacies and the minute possibilities of verbal changes are often of the utmost importance.

From the fact that participles are the least emphatic of the forms of the verb it follows, in the first place, that making a clause participial marks it as subordinate. In the second place, that excessive use of the participle renders a style weak. The following vigorous passage, for instance, may be made as tame as tepid milk and water by altering the verbs.

In this character of the Americans, a love of freedom is the predominating feature which marks and distinguishes the whole; and as an ardent is always a jealous affection, your Colonies become suspicious . . . when they see the least attempt to wrest from them by force, or shuffle from them by chicane what they think the only advantage worth living for. — BURKE: *Speech on Conciliation with America.*

In this character of the Americans, a love of freedom being the predominating feature marking and distinguishing the whole; and an ardent being always a jealous affection, your Colonies become suspicious . . . seeing the least attempt at wresting from them by force or shuffling from them by chicane what they think the only advantage worth living for.

It follows, in the third place, from the inferior rank of participles that participial clauses should not as a rule be allowed in emphatic positions. This applies especially to parenthetical expressions.

In running, it is impossible not to breathe quickly.

Talking all the while, Sylvia, queen of the day, led him on.

To push the participles into the places of emphasis is to subordinate other parts of the sentence. The use of the participle instead of a modal verb is a confession of the inferior rank of the idea thus expressed, and to place the clause in an important part of the sentence is manifestly inconsistent. It is seldom well to begin a sentence with a participial clause, and yet more seldom is it well to end with one. At the beginning of a paragraph a participial clause is apt to be intrusive; at the end of a paragraph it is generally inexcusable.

The relation of this matter of the relative values of verbal forms to parallel construction is easily seen. To alter the form of the verb in a succession of clauses is to establish a difference of importance. To make a clause participial when a corresponding clause has a finite verb is to show that the latter is of more emphasis than the former. This point is illustrated sufficiently in the examples already given, perhaps, but an example or two more may do no harm.

Hawthorne's mental sight in discerning souls is marvelously penetrating and accurate, but he finds it so difficult to give them an adequate physical embodiment that their very flesh is spiritualized, and appears to be brought into the representation only to give a kind of phantasmal form to purely mental conceptions. — E. P. WHIPPLE: *American Literature.*

Here the ideas of equal rank are coupled by the verbal form. 'Is penetrating' and 'finds it difficult;' 'flesh is spiritualized' and 'appears;' 'to be brought' and 'to give.'

Speaking only of his command over language and metre, I have a right to reaffirm, and to show by many illustrations, that he is the most sovereign of rhythmists. — E. C. STEDMAN: *Victorian Poets.*

The relative value of the clauses is admirably indicated by the forms of the verbs, and a parallel construction binds together the two of equal rank. To substitute 'him to be' for 'that he is' would be to destroy the consistency of the sentence.

A great oak at a short distance was one resort, and sitting on the grass at the roots, or leaning against the trunk and looking over the quiet meadows toward the bright southern sky, I could live my own life a little while. — RICHARD JEFFRIES: *The Story of My Heart.*

The writer who realizes the relative value of the ideas he expresses has for imparting this to his readers a method delicate but admirably trustworthy.

The voice of the verb as well as the mood is to be considered. The following instance from a theme is an extreme example of a violation of parallel construction in the voice of the verb.

I need a hundred dollars at once because my room needs to be decorated, a few books to be bought, my room rent paid, and, last but not least, to buy some wearing apparel.

From 'needs to be decorated' the writer goes to the simple infinitive 'to be bought,' then to the infinitive with the 'to' understood, and lastly makes a leap from the passive to the active voice. The effect speaks for itself. Here the question is

not so much of the relative importance as it is of intimate connection. The four things enumerated as needing to be done — decoration, book-buying, rent-paying, clothes-getting — are all subordinate to one idea. They should be grouped as closely as possible, and any variation of construction seems to separate them. The unsatisfactory character of such a sentence as this in its present form is easily recognized, and it is well to realize wherein the fault lies.

While parallel construction is most strongly shown in the choice of forms of the verb, it has a general application. It governs, for instance, the repetition of the article, and a neglect of it renders the following incorrect: —

Along the ridges in the bed of the lathe slide a head-stock, tail-stock, and rest.

Parallel construction in the use of the article gives to these examples, on the other hand, their force: —

Meanwhile, whether as a man, a husband, or a poet, his steps led him downward. — STEVENSON: *Some Aspects of Robert Burns.*

That I might have the inner meaning of the sun, the light, the earth, the trees and grass. — JEFFRIES: *The Story of My Heart.*

The omission of the article in the following is a neglect of parallel construction: —

The capture and sack of a town one can fairly conceive; the massacre, outrage, the flaming roofs, the desolation. — J. C. MORISON: *Edward Gibbon.*

The same thing is easily illustrated with the preposition.

God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. — *Matt.* xxii. 32.

By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, we all quote. — EMERSON: *Quotation and Originality.*

In the following example the omission of the pronoun before the second verb seems to me a mistake.

I have the best of openings awaiting me after graduation, and wish to be fitted for it by the best means.

Since the second statement is of at least as much value as the first, the sentence, to my thinking, should read 'and I wish to be,' etc. Examples and illustrations which should include other parts of speech might be easily collected: but since almost any compound sentence affords some instance of the application of the principle, it is hardly necessary to go farther. Once the attention of the student is directed to the matter, he cannot fail to find it appealing to him at every turn.

The omission of words in similar phrases, I have already said, is a matter belonging to this consideration of parallel construction. For the sake of avoiding monotonous repetition we constantly omit, for example, a subject which is common to several verbs. Instead of writing, 'John went home, John took a bath, John dressed himself, and John went to the party,' we say simply, 'John went home, took a bath, dressed himself, and went to the party.' The thoughts here are all

practically of the same value, and theoretically should be expressed in the same form. Whatever importance belongs to the last is easily secured by placing it, as it stands, at the end of the sentence. The question of relative values in this case is, however, of so little importance that it is best sacrificed to quickness and the avoidance of tiresome repetition. That something is sacrificed is evident at once when the greater distinctness of the separate ideas in the first form of the sentence is compared with the second. The point is trifling in an instance of this sort, but it is of interest because it indicates the means of securing distinctness and equal value when we wish for it.

A brilliant example of the use of parallel construction in the more delicate sense in which I have been employing the term is to be found in Cardinal Newman's "What is a University?" The passage which follows I have abridged somewhat, but not a great deal.

A University is a place of concourse whither students come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge. . . . All the riches of the land, and of the earth, are carried up thither, there are the best markets, and there the best workmen. It is the centre of trade, the supreme court of fashion, the umpire of rival talents, and the standard of things rare and precious. It is the place for seeing galleries of first-rate pictures, and for hearing wonderful voices and performers of transcendent skill. It is the place for great preachers, great orators, great nobles, great statesmen. In the nature of things, greatness and unity go together; excellence implies a centre. And such . . . is a University.

The effectiveness and value of parallel construction are evident from the fact that oral eloquence is impossible without it, and oral intelligibility most difficult. The ease with which varied ideas are apprehended if conveyed in the same form gives to a group of similar constructions a clearness and lucidity hardly to be attained by any other means. The rather comic-opera flavor of the phrase 'participles, particles, and parallel constructions' does not change the truth of the statement made some pages back, that upon these depend chiefly distinction and delicacy of style. The beginner who is still in the region where he needs to be urged by all considerations of morality not to join a plural verb to a singular subject is apt to find such discussion as that of the last few chapters both vague and trivial, and above everything dull. The student who has advanced far enough to appreciate the fact that any style worthy of respect conveys the more subtle and intimate impressions rather by rhetorical form than by direct statement knows that the good workman can find nothing trivial which will aid him in perfecting his technique.

VII

THE TOPIC SENTENCE

THE Topic Sentence is what might seem at first thought a purely mechanical device, and as such likely to cramp rather than to assist any attempt at vital production. Even were it so considered, there would still be room for some claim to usefulness, since mechanical devices are often an admirable help in preparation and construction. No work is to be done without tools, and any building which goes much above the ground is likely to require the help of a scaffolding. In truth, however, the topic sentence is not merely arbitrary; it is more fairly to be considered structural; it is no more than a frank recognition and a formal phrasing of the central thought which must underlie every composition which has unity.

Arbitrary laws for work are dangerous, because no two individuals are likely to be able in creative production to proceed upon precisely the same lines, or with advantage to follow identical methods. The father who disinherited his left-handed boy because the lad could not use a knife as his father did, and in after years came begging at the factory of a wealthy machinist only to discover that the clever and rich man was the son he had cast off, was much in the position that we who write books

on composition might find ourselves, if we insisted too strenuously upon our pet ways of doing things. The great in literature would probably be able, if they chose, to retort with scorn that they had never done things that way, and had got on very comfortably without our infallible processes. Literature has worth in direct proportion as it has originality, and every writer has ultimately to work out his own salvation.

What has proved helpful to one worker, however, especially if it seem to be founded upon sound principles, may well be offered to the consideration of the learner. It may not be suited to his particular need, and if so is easily neglected; but on the other hand it may prove of benefit either in aiding him directly, or it may assist him indirectly by bringing to light his power and his weaknesses. The topic sentence will be held by many to be too formal, and although this will in many cases really mean too much trouble, I have no quarrel with those who regard it in that light. I look upon it as an excellent device to aid the learner in gaining the habit of seeing his work as a unit, and to help him to give symmetry both to his thought and to its expression.

The topic sentence is the statement in a single sentence, as clearly and succinctly as may be, of the chief idea which a composition embodies. In actual work it will of course not always be easy or even possible so briefly and lucidly to summarize a piece. Impossibility in the subject, however, less often brings this difficulty about than a writer's

incapacity. The untrained writer seldom knows exactly what he is driving at, or at least is not often clear enough about it to make a crisp statement. If the topic sentence can be used, it at least gives the author the advantage of knowing what he is aiming at. It not only nourishes the habit of formulating at the start what is to be the core of a composition, but throughout serves to the writer as a test of the fitness of his work.

This testing of fitness is most evident in exposition or argument. In description or narrative a summary is less easy, and indeed is sometimes so nearly impossible that to bother with it would be a mere waste of energy. Yet even in a story or a picture there is or should be some prevailing sentiment, some æsthetic or ethical truth which is the essential point, and for the writer clearly to recognize and realize this is the greatest help in making it plain and effective for the reader. In exposition or argument the controlling thought is generally evident to any writer who seeks for it. In argument this is of course the thing to be proved, which must be explicitly understood or there can be no reasoning upon it; in exposition the central thought which is to be expounded is generally quite as definite if not at first sight so obvious. In either case the use of a topic sentence at any stage of composition is evident. The disputant continually says to himself, "Does this fact or theory or syllogism which I mean to introduce help me toward the establishment of this proposition?" Equally in an exposition the writer

has before him, in the topic sentence, the mental conception which he is endeavoring to impart, and at every step may and should ask himself if what he is setting down aids in making his presentation of that conception more clear and forcible.

When notes have been made, when the writer has gathered and sorted his material, when he has, as Bede says of Cædmon, ruminated on it as a clean animal ruminates over her cud, when he has thought of it, looked at it from all sides, satisfied himself what he ought to think and what he does think, then he is able to arrange his matter by referring everything to some central purpose. In no other way has he power to produce an organic whole. Nothing in connection with the technical side of composition is of more importance than this point. If the writer make clear to himself what is to be the central motive, the controlling thought, and keep this fairly before him, well stated and definite, he cannot but give to his work directness and force.

"The just composer of a legitimate piece," Lord Shaftesbury rather quaintly put it long ago, "is like an able traveler, who exactly measures his journey, considers his ground, premeditates his stages and intervals of relaxation and intention, to the very conclusion of his undertaking, that he happily arrives where he first proposed at setting out." The topic sentence is in a sort the itinerary, or at least it is the statement that the writer of a 'legitimate piece' is entirely aware what he is endeavoring to do.

The beginning and the end of whole composition, — paragraph, sentence, or clause, — as has been said by so many instructors so many times that there begins to be ground for fear that students may disbelieve from sheer weariness of hearing it, are the most noticeable and hence the most emphatic portions. It may easily happen, therefore, that the thought expressed by the topic sentence will appear explicitly in the opening or closing sentences of a composition, or divided between the two. As a formally made sentence is likely to have its most emphatic idea at its close and the idea next in importance at its beginning, the topic sentence, representing the main thought of the whole work, would theoretically begin with the idea which should introduce that work, and end with what is properly the conclusion of the whole. A couple of examples from Stevenson which chance to be formally exact in this particular will make the matter more clear.

It must not be imagined that a walking tour, as some would have us fancy, is merely a better or worse way of seeing the country . . . [ten pages] . . . To-morrow's travel will carry you, body and mind, into some new parish of the infinite. — *Walking Tours.*

That Stevenson in planning this essay wrote deliberately a topic sentence may be doubted, and is very likely improbable, although it almost seems as if he must consciously have phrased to himself before beginning the central thought in these very words: —

A walking tour is not merely a way of seeing the country, but a traveling, body and soul, through the parishes of the infinite.

In any case, an analysis of this sort gives a hint for the proper synthesis by which a student may gain symmetry and force. In a second example from Stevenson the topic sentence is found complete merely by the omission of thirty pages of the essay.

Victor Hugo's romances occupy an important position in the history of literature; . . . to what other man can we attribute such sweeping innovations, such a new and significant presentment of the life of men, such an amount, if we merely think of the amount, of equally consummate performance? — *Victor Hugo's Romances.*

Throughout either essay the central thought as stated in the topic sentence is kept constantly in view, and it is enforced upon the mind of the reader by the importance which it receives from the emphasis of position.

Examples in which the topic sentence is made so evident are not of course abundant, but they are less rare than might be thought.

If life is not always poetical, it is at least metrical . . . [six pages] . . . ruled by the law that commands all things — a sun's revolutions and the rhythmic pangs of maternity. — ALICE MEYNELL: *The Rhythm of Life.*

The psychological moment at which "*The Sonnets from the Portuguese*" were composed was one of singular importance. . . . [fifteen pages] . . . This cycle of admirable sonnets . . . is built patently and unquestionably on the union in stainless harmony of two of the most distinguished spirits which our century has produced. — EDMUND GOSSE: *The Sonnets from the Portuguese.*

When, a few months ago, Anthony Trollope laid down his pen for the last time, it was a sign of the complete extinction of that group of admirable writers who, in England, during the preceding half century, had done so much to elevate the art of the novelist. . . . [thirty-five pages] . . . A race is fortunate when it has a good deal of the sort of imagination — of imaginative feeling — that had fallen to the share of Anthony Trollope; and in this possession our English race is not poor. — HENRY JAMES: *Anthony Trollope.*

In any of these cases, or in others like them, it may be probable that this easy sentence-making from the opening and close of an essay means nothing more than that the writer has naturally and as a matter of good workmanship put the most emphatic ideas in the most emphatic places, the beginning and the end; but the fact remains that what they have done, however they did it, gives a hint for a useful working device which may help the student to excellence of effect.

Where the relation of end and beginning to the topic sentence is not so evident or so close verbally as thus easily to be brought into one symmetrical expression, the fact that the writer has clearly comprehended what he intended to do, has realized perfectly what he meant to make the central thought of his work, is likely to bring these two emphatic portions together so that there is little difficulty in deducing from them a topic sentence which indicates the drift of the whole. Here is an example from Henry James. He begins with the sentence neither very compact nor very elegant: —

Flooded as we have been in these latter days with copious discussions as to the admission of women to various offices, colleges, functions, and privileges, singularly little attention has been paid, by themselves at least, to the fact that in one highly important department of human affairs their cause is already gained — gained in such a way as to deprive them largely of their ground, formerly so substantial, for complaining of the intolerance of man. In America, in England, to-day, it is no longer a question of their admission into the world of literature: they are there in force. — *Miss Woolson.*

He closes with this: —

They all have the stamp which I spoke of at first — the stamp of the author's conservative feeling that for her the life of a woman is essentially an affair of private relations. — *Ib.*

It is not doing violence to this to say — and the essay bears out the statement — that the topic sentence would be something of this sort: —

Despite all the discussion over the entrance of women into public life, here is one of them admitted to literature . . . who steadfastly held that the life of a woman is essentially an affair of private relations.

It would not be of value to multiply examples, since every student may if he choose find them for himself. A great many essays will not conform to the test, for the simple reason that they are more or less loosely fringed out at either end like towels; and as in the case of towels, it is only fair to add, this fringing is often ornamental. To no formal rule of any sort does every trained writer conform, and fortunate is it that this should be so. Literature

made on any system of theories would be intolerably monotonous. The only thing which I am endeavoring to do is to impress upon the student that the particular principle of the use of the topic sentence is one which affords an admirable guide to a writer in the course of his composition, and a means of producing an effect which is likely to be both clear and vigorous.

The making of a topic sentence is of much value, even if it is not to be structurally used in its original form. This wording of the central idea makes clear at the start what is to be done; it provides the writer with a definite purpose and goal; and it is of great value in securing the important organic advantage of which we shall speak later, a proper and evident relation between the end and the beginning. For all these reasons it is certainly advisable in practice work, and even in actual, practical composition it is a most admirable rhetorical expedient.

VIII

END AND BEGINNING

From the chosen beginning, every organic work goes on in a definite progression. Before a composition can be given form, its end must have been decided. The end, indeed, is the thing which in the conception of a work is likely first to shape itself clearly; and after it has become firm in its outline, the beginning is chosen with direct reference to this predetermined conclusion.

Before a line of the composition is written, the writer must be aware where he is to end. Material is to be collected, notes to be made, especial passages set down, if so the writer please, in the very phrases in which they are to stand permanently. All this is part of the process of mastering the subject. No firm grasp of the theme as a whole is possible until the writer has an intimate knowledge of the entire matter; and the point to be aimed at cannot be perceived clearly until the subject is grasped in its entirety firmly and securely. When once the end is clearly discerned, however, then is possible the organic growth of the whole. From the first line to the last there may and should be as sure progression as in the current of a stream flowing inevitably to the sea.

The conclusion is fixed upon as the best last

word from the point of view of a desire to bring out a definite meaning. The writer makes up his mind what he wishes most to enforce; what view of his subject he wishes most to emphasize; and with this in mind, he decides where he most effectively may end, what last word will best serve his deliberate purpose.

The conclusion, it should be remembered, is in a manner the justification of the work as a whole. The effect chosen is deliberately aimed at from the first line to the last, and the last line is to be written as soon as the purpose decided upon has been secured. Nothing is more futile from a technical point of view, and unhappily few things are more common, than internal evidence in work that the writer started out with a simple trust in time and the chapter of accidents to make clear to him just what he really was driving at. Sometimes this faith has failed early, sometimes it has held out to what he fondly considered to be the end. To stop writing does not make an end, any more than to stop playing wins a game. The stopping of the pen may bring a composition to a mechanical close, but unfortunately it does not provide an ending which is in any proper sense a conclusion. Not even to have put down all that one had to say on a subject gives a fitting close. When all that the unskillful writer can think of has been said, even when he may have brought together all that could be said on his subject, the real end of the composition as a literary work may actually be in the middle, like the sting of a scorpion self-destruc-

tively buried in its own body. "A conclusion in which nothing is concluded" makes a proper finish nowhere outside of "Rasselas;" in an artistic or even an orderly composition it must be the organic outcome and ending of all that goes before.

In regard to this as in regard to other matters, I am especially desirous not to seem to be setting down mere theories. If a book of this sort is not practical, it is naught. It should give working directions available for everyday use; and this is exactly what I am endeavoring to do. The reader may at first feel that the idea of formally selecting a conclusion and keeping it in mind is either an impossibility or a sure means of producing stiffness; that it must destroy all appearance of spontaneity; and that at the best it is one of those things which a pedagogue says because they sound as if they would be good could anybody carry them out. No student of composition can go far, however, without realizing that the difference between organic and inorganic work arises just here. Unless the writer is clearly and strongly conscious of a defined purpose, the best he can do is to present to the reader a number of thoughts more or less closely related, but which can have serious and organic continuity only by some miracle of the doctrine of chances. To offer to a reader the reflections which have arisen in the mind in the consideration of a subject, but which are not arranged in a logical sequence leading up to a definite end, is to tender more or less disorganized material from which the reader is expected, if he be able, to produce a com-

plete work. There is no complete work until it is organic; it is organic only when it has a well-defined motive, toward the working out of which all parts make orderly contribution. It is because of this fact, and the relation to it of these technical details concerning beginning and end, that I look upon this matter as so thoroughly practical.

Practical is it, in the first place, to consider the mechanics of the close. The final sentence should be a definite end, both to sound and to sense. Too many times it is so written as to leave on the inner ear the unsatisfactory sound of a broken or distorted cadence, or in meaning to produce on the mind an effect analogous to that one gets from a piece of cloth torn from the web, and fringed with dangling ravelings.

> The last word should be the last word. It is like a finishing touch given to color; there is nothing more to add. But what precaution is needed in order not to put the last word first! — JOUBERT: *Pensées.*

The conclusion should generally be in the same key as the opening. It is often well, if I may use a musical figure, to modulate into another key for a passage in the body of a work, but in the end the natural course is to return to the key of the beginning. The reason is one of simple common sense. At the start the writer has taken a certain position, and has invited the reader to consider the subject from a defined point of view. In the end the reader should be allowed to see that that point of view has been kept, or, if left for a little for one purpose or

another, has been regained. The opening is in a sense a hypothesis, and the close should show that it has been held to. A feeble opening cripples, a feeble close goes far to destroy. From the point of view of practical technique, moreover, it is generally well to make an ending especially concise. There are compositions, as, for instance, oratorical pieces, which may best conclude with the roll of greatly rounded and proudly swelling periods, as a symphony may finish with the full strength of horns, strings, wood-wind, cymbals, and all the drums. If this is to be done, it should be done deliberately, and with a full recognition that it is a tacit assumption that the whole composition has made so great an effect that nothing less than this final outburst can be in proportion. More modest efforts should take leave of the reader more simply; and any writer who desires to leave a clear impression on the mind will find his account in brevity and conciseness. The departing wedding-guest takes with him with ease and surety the neat package of cake, whereas he would perforce leave behind a parting gift of turtle-soup or chicken-salad. A brief, well-balanced, clearly phrased end remains in the reader's mind; it enforces the effect of the composition as a whole; it is one of the simplest and most practical means by which a skilled literary workman produces conviction.

The effectiveness of a concluding sentence or paragraph is tested in no way better than by reading aloud. What is written is addressed to the sense of hearing; to the sense of hearing reached

through the imagination in many cases, it is true, but none the less to human susceptibility to combinations and modulations of sound. The reader hears with the mind, and in most cases he is unlikely to realize how he is affected. Even though he does not consider it, the fact remains that one of the high charms of style is the appeal to the ear. A conclusion abrupt and ill-sounding leaves the reader dissatisfied; while, on the other hand, a crisp or smoothly flowing end, however little the reader understands why it is pleasing, exercises a charm. The writer should by his physical hearing test that which he addresses to the mental hearing of the reader.

To the opening of a composition is applicable most of what has been said of the close. There are other points, however, to be considered, since the functions of the two parts of the work are necessarily different.

The beginning should be an appeal, direct or not as the case may be, to the attention; it should always be deliberately designed to arouse the interest of the reader. Either directly or by implication it should give the point of view.[1] It is generally well, as has long ago been pointed out, to begin with a short sentence, and except in very rare cases it is imperative to begin with a clear sentence. The writer is interested in his subject, is informed concerning it, and accordingly is prepared to plunge in at once and anywhere; the reader may know little and care nothing, and he is certainly sup-

[1] See page 127.

posed to be less well informed. The reader must be interested, must be aroused, even if need be must be beguiled into giving attention. He must be informed of the point of view and have everything made easy for him in order that he may the more readily give himself up to the writer; he must be afforded every aid to overcome the disadvantage of ignorance under which he naturally starts.

The opening sentence, or at least the opening as a whole, should have a definite relation to the ending. The more obvious this relation, the more likely is the composition to produce an effect as a whole. This evident connection of the beginning and the close makes clear to the reader what is the thought which the writer intends to make dominant, what is the chief proposition, what holds together all the particular parts which may have come between. The opening, for instance, shows the point for which the reader is invited to set out; the end, that this point has been reached. The opening is, so to say, an invitation, and it should be worded with thought for the end, the thing to which it invites.

The opening should not, in making evident its relation to the close, weaken the latter, but strengthen it. It should awaken curiosity or arouse interest; it should not satisfy the one or surfeit the other. The end and the beginning are the two handles by which the reader is to seize and carry away what is written; they must not be put in the same place, like two handles on one side of

a cup. Together the end and the beginning may be regarded as forming a summary of the whole composition. In planning any theme the student will do well, as was said in the last chapter, to make a Topic Sentence, and this may form the beginning and the end of the theme.[1] The inexperienced writer is constantly in danger of unconsciously putting this sentence at the beginning. His mind is full of his subject, and he gives to the reader at the start not only the proper beginning but the proper end as well. He should remember not to state his whole thought at the outset without deliberate purpose.

In argument he will need early in the work to state the proposition which he undertakes to prove; but in most work the topic sentence, the statement of his entire purpose, cannot be given at the start without weakening the effect as a whole of what he writes.

An example of extreme simplicity sometimes best serves to make a thing clear to the student, and so the following bit of genuine student work may be useful. It was intended as a paragraph skeleton of an essay on the public park system. Each heading was written as the summing up of a future paragraph.

A. The park systems now being built in so many cities will do more than anything else toward promoting the general health and welfare of the masses.

B. Cheap car-fares and the cheapness of bicycles destroy the old objection that the parks were for the rich,

[1] See examples from Stevenson, etc., in the last chapter.

as they were the only ones who could afford to go to them.

C. Band concerts are held in many of these parks, affording opportunities of hearing good music to those who could not otherwise enjoy it.

D. The properly managed parks should offer amusement to all.

The first fault to be found with this is that it begins by dealing with one topic, and ends with another. The first paragraph has to do with the effect of the park systems. The same thought dominates the second paragraph and the third. The fourth, the closing paragraph, which should sum up or at least complete the whole, offers to consideration a fresh subject, the proper management of parks. Thus the theme concludes, with the effect that the beginning and the end distinctly injure and weaken each other.

In the mind of the writer the first consideration should be what he is to write about. The title of this theme was given as "The Benefit of Parks to the Poor." The closing stress, if the title fairly represents the main idea, should be thrown on the fact that parks are a great benefit to the masses, or upon the method by which this benefit may best be increased. Taking the former, as being that which seems more clearly expressed in the plan before us, we might rewrite the closing paragraph upon somewhat the same lines as those now followed in the first. If we then rearranged the whole to correspond, we should have: —

A. The park systems now being built in so many

cities will inevitably have a marked effect upon the masses.

B. The old objection that parks were for the rich, because only they could afford to go to them, has by the cheapness of car-fares and bicycles been completely overcome.

C. Band concerts are held in many of these parks, so that those who before had no such opportunity have now the privilege of hearing good music.

D. The frequenting of the parks by the masses will do more than anything else toward promoting general health and welfare.

This is by no means a model. It is poor and thin in thought, and needs substance. There might be a paragraph introduced between B and C dwelling upon the effects on those who are generally stived in the slums of the wholesome air of the free spaces. A paragraph might follow speaking of the fact that those who are healthily employed in harmless pleasure-seeking in the open are taken away from the temptation to dangerous or unlawful acts. Another might touch upon the possible influence of the beauty of nature. Certainly there should be more matter making clear how the parks are beneficial. Taking the plan, however, as it stands in the revision, we have at least a definite conclusion, and a conclusion which so links itself with the beginning as to give unity of effect. The opening in the original weakens the end if the subject is that announced by the title. The topic sentence of the plan as first written would seem to be:

The park systems now being built . . . should offer amusement to all.

This is not, however, what the body of the theme is about or what the student meant to write of. In the revised version the end is strengthened by the beginning, and as rewritten the skeleton shows that the writer was clear in intention and thought of the theme as a whole.

The paragraph sentence which in the original stood last, I omitted in the rewriting. It did not belong to the theme as planned, not because it entirely lacked connection with the subject, but because in the mind of the student this relation had not been clear, and therefore had not been properly brought out. If the topic sentence given in the last paragraph were the one really intended, and the work held to this throughout, the omitted paragraph might belong where it was first placed.

A. The park systems now being built in so many cities afford opportunity for the recreation of poor and rich alike.

B. The objection, etc. (*as before*).

C. Band concerts, etc. (*as before*).

D. The properly managed parks should offer amusements to all.

The material used here is very nearly the same as that in the other, but in the first the impression as a whole is that parks benefit the poor, while in the second the central idea is that they must be kept attractive to all classes. The difference in the plan is due wholly to the change in beginning and end; the main idea is, as it should be, conveyed and made clear by the opening and the close. The preponderance of this idea throughout the body of

the work could to a great degree accomplish the same end, but unless the first and the last stress enforce the thought, the impression is likely to be blurred and unworkmanlike.

The plan as originally written illustrates also the danger already alluded to of getting the whole topic sentence at the beginning. The first paragraph sentence as it stands in the original represents what the writer had in mind as the central thought of the theme. It needed to be separated, so that its parts should stand at either end of the complete work. The error is one which almost always marks a student's first experiments in making a skeleton. Broadly speaking, the first statement which comes to the mind is likely to be this general summing up of the whole composition; and in such a case it is to be regarded not as a paragraph, but as a topic sentence, and as such divided. The matter is a question of the writer's knowing clearly his own intention, and making his plan express his deliberate purpose.

This matter is one of so much importance that I venture to give one more illustration from student work. The principle is the same when applied to narration as to abstract subjects. We all know how in beginning one of the novels of Scott we have an impulse to see how much of the first chapter we may skip without blurring our understanding of the story. No other writer of equal merit ever began books so badly as did Scott, and the result is that half his books are injured by the clumsiness with which they get under weigh. The following

brief story, to compare small things with great, labors under the same disadvantage.

The battle of Bull Run is now so far in the past that to the present generation it is but a name. To the men who still remember that rout and disgrace the bitterness of the memory has been softened by time; the ultimate triumph of the Union arms has made less humiliating the old shame; a fresher war has rendered the old unreal.

For days the country was full of distorted account of the battle. The newspapers hardly dared to tell the truth, and indeed but half knew it. The friends of soldiers were in an agony of suspense, not knowing what troops were engaged; who had fallen of those who were in the fight.

The Widow Colby had lived through three horrible days of suspense, but no news had come to her from her only son. When she had let him go to the front she had extracted from him a promise that after any battle he would telegraph to her of his condition. Now she was sure that he was dead. He could not have failed for so long to keep his promise. She had listened to her friends when they told her that it would be difficult for him to telegraph at once. She had invented excuses; she had even said to herself that he might be slightly wounded, and wished to be able to report that there was no real danger. To-night she abandoned hope. Three days she had endured; now she could hope no longer.

She sat alone in the gathering darkness of the July day, too agonized to weep. Her eyes were hot and dry; her heart a burning pain within her breast. She heard a step, and a knock at the door. She did not heed. It was some new comforter. She should be grateful for the kindness that tried to lighten her grief, to delude

her with false hopes; but she was conscious only of a desire to be left alone; to be allowed to brood over her sorrow until she died of it.

"Mrs. Colby," a voice cried, "it has come! Here is the telegram. Tom is safe!"

She sprang to her feet. Her hot eyes stared in the dusk at the neighbor hardly seeing him.

"Safe!" she echoed.

She swayed as she stood, and fell back into her chair. She felt suffocating, burning, going mad. Then in a wild rush the tears sprang from her eyes. The floods of joy seemed to sweep about her. They were tears of joy.

This tale is not much at best, but it is made to seem less from the inexpert manner in which it is told. It has possibilities which the writer probably felt without being skillful enough to bring them out. The two paragraphs which stand first have not a very close connection with the story, and certainly do not belong at the beginning. What they contain that is pertinent should have been introduced later to explain and heighten the suspense and grief of the mother. The reader's sympathies for the widow should first have been aroused. If the conclusion is to stand as it is, the beginning might appropriately enough have been something of this sort: —

If the Widow Colby could have wept, she might have found some poor alleviation of her agony. For three horrible days of suspense she had waited tidings of the fate of her only son, etc.

The idea is hackneyed enough, but if it is to be

used at the end, it should be made to count for all that it is worth. In any case the end and the beginning should hold together.

The practical test of what has been said by examination of almost any volume of essays is likely to make the principles laid down appear rather theoretical than practical, or at least to make them seem of rare application even in the work of admirable writers. Comparatively few works give examples of a union between the end and the beginning so obviously close as is shown in the examples above. Many compositions reveal after a little examination that the principle has been observed, although this is more or less concealed by the form in which one passage or the other is put. Many excellent works lack this regularity of structure; or, to speak more exactly, seem to lack it altogether. They often are carelessly begun. The end is generally effective, but the opening of essays or narratives otherwise good may be bungling. Frequently there are two or three weak sentences before the work really begins at all. Such a composition lacks crispness of attack. In any case it is so much the worse for the effect of the whole, if advantage has not been taken of the natural relations of end and beginning.

If students incited their minds to new effort by emulation of the virtues of great writers as generally as now they excuse their faults under plea of the shortcomings of geniuses, mighty would be the progress of education. There are few faults known to grammarian or rhetorician which may not sometimes be found in work otherwise good. The rela-

tion of end and beginning is perhaps one of the principles most frequently ignored; but the effect of a proper application of the principle remains sure. The student may excuse himself from taking the trouble to follow the rule, by the plea that great writers have frequently neglected it; but he is simply weakening by so much his work without possessing the merits of great writers to atone for the weakness.

The custom of finished writers, moreover, is in this matter more careful than at first sight appears. Examples would here take up too much space; but those who choose to look will find in many cases a genuine and effective relation where on a casual examination none was evident. This organic relation produces its effect although not proclaimed on the surface. Nothing that I have said is intended to give the idea that the bringing together end and beginning is necessarily to be formal or mechanical. The principle, broadly stated, is simply that strong writers are sure to be entirely clear in regard to the effect they wish to produce, and that from the very start they move forward deliberately toward a predetermined close.[1]

[1] See quotation from Walter Pater: *Talks on Writing English*, p. 90.

IX

PARAGRAPHS

THE paragraph, as has often been pointed out, is a modern invention. Its great effectiveness as a help to the understanding has certainly not been realized until recent years. All great prose writers have of course had a more or less well-developed appreciation of the need and the functions of paragraphing, but the theory of paragraph-construction has been developed only by recent stylists.

Students are apt to regard this theory as rather a vague matter. They seem to feel, when they are called upon to study the subject, that they are required to grasp an abstraction. This is much like the terror of a child in the dark. The principles which determine the division of a composition into paragraphs are no more vague than those which determine the division of a paragraph into sentences. In the one case we measure by the unit of a single idea, and in the other by the unit of a group of ideas. The sentence, in other words, is the unit of idea; the paragraph the unit of thought. Into a sentence we put the expression of one idea, if that word may here be used to express the single members of a full thought. All the ideas which must go together to make up that complete thought are then gathered into a paragraph. The process

may sound artificial, but it is really definite and practical.

When we are preparing to write upon any subject, we set down the thoughts which seem to us to belong to that subject. Each of these thoughts is likely to be divisible into separate portions, to which, somewhat arbitrarily, I have just given the name ideas. The thoughts are the substance of future paragraphs; the ideas are the germs of sentences which are to form these. Professor Wendell, in his book on "English Composition," remarks: —

> Except in rare cases we do not deliberately plan our sentences; we write them, and then revise them. Except in rare cases we do deliberately plan our paragraphs . . . ; and if we plan them properly, we do not need to revise them much, if at all. Words and sentences are subject to revision; paragraphs and whole compositions are subject to prevision.

This does not mean, of course, that the formation of paragraphs is arbitrary. The writer does not say to himself, "Go to; I will have a paragraph of four lines at the top of one page, and one of ten lines in the middle of the next, because the breaks will be agreeable to the eye." In examining the material the writer perceives that certain ideas belong together to make a thought complete. Those ideas he therefore deliberately puts into a single paragraph. Paragraphs are thus the result of intelligent judgment, which sorts out material into proper groups upon the principle of having each group complete and organic.

The whole theory of paragraphing is implied in those words 'complete' and 'organic.' The principle is expressed sometimes by the expression 'a chain of thought.' The phrase is hackneyed, but it conveniently serves to indicate the individual completeness and mutual interdependence of the paragraphs which make up a whole composition. Each is complete in itself, and each is yet an essential part of the whole. The planning of paragraphs is the arranging of material into groups which, in the chain to which the finished composition may be likened, shall represent definite and entire links.

The office of paragraphs is twofold. They serve one definite function in the composing of the work by the writer and another in its comprehension by the reader. The latter is of greater weight, since it is more important that a work be comprehensible than that it has been easily accomplished. The prime consideration in composition is that whatever is written shall be understood both by writer and by reader.

Any composition is the better understood which is marked by a proper arrangement of thought. A dissected picture is readily appreciated when it is put together in order, but with the parts in any other relation it merely confounds eye and brain. In any written work the paragraphs represent the proper sequence of thought and carry the mind on from one consideration to another. This progression may be swift or slow, calm or dashing, direct or winding, as the case may be; but it must actually move from one part to the next, and so on from

beginning to end. Any composition, then, is shown by its paragraphs to have a conscious and organic progression from a definite opening to a predetermined conclusion.

That such a continuous movement is of the highest advantage to a reader is evident. The sense of weariness which one instinctively feels in looking at a book with paragraphs unreasonably long is entirely logical and reasonable. The attention during the reading of a single paragraph is necessarily taxed to keep the entire section in mind. The beginning must be vividly felt to the very end, so that the thought may be taken as a whole. The mind wearies of the concentration demanded by very long paragraphs, and such is the mental restlessness of the age that this fact seems to become steadily of more general application. If the paragraphs be not unduly long, and if they have been so arranged by the author that the understanding naturally passes from one thought to the next, the exertion of reading is reduced to its minimum, and to effect this result is the most useful office of the paragraph.

The writer as well as the reader is aided, since, by the very fact that he consciously and carefully forms the links in his chain of thought, he is forced to look at his work as a whole, and to test it also at every point.

To paragraph in single sentences is the hysterics of style, and in its way is as bad as to paragraph in cyclopean masses. Writers who have recently begun to read easy French, or in translations have

come upon pages where paragraphing goes in this fashion, —

> Nothing unusual is seen.
> The wide expanse is tranquil.
> Yet the noises increase.
> The dialogue becomes more audible.
> There is something beyond the horizon.
> Something terrible.
> It is the wind.
>
> VICTOR HUGO: *Toilers of the Sea.*

— are often possessed of the notion that this hiccoughing style is wonderfully impressive. The reader who is impressed must indeed be of callow mind. To read such a performance — and my conscience urges me to confess that I produced in my teens more than one thing of this sort! — is like riding over a corduroy bridge in a cart without springs.

A paragraph is a mechanical contrivance for grouping together sentences which are dominated by a single thought. Had Victor Hugo been writing in English, he would have been expected to acknowledge the difference between the function of the paragraph and that of the sentence by putting the seven sentences above into one group. The test for the inclusion of a sentence is whether it is part of the thought expressed or indicated by the summing up of the paragraph. The whole matter is simply a practical application of the plainest doctrine of Unity. It is important that whatever is needed to make the central thought complete and intelligible be included; equally im-

portant that nothing else be brought in. Sins of commission are perhaps more easily guarded against in making up a paragraph than sins of omission, but either fault is to be avoided. The writer must see to it that he is equally alert to admit every sentence which is needed to the completeness of his paragraph and to omit whatever does not belong there.

In the work of shaping paragraphs the student should bear in mind all the principles which have been set forth in relation to the end and the beginning. These apply no less to the parts than to the whole composition. The paragraph should generally end with the idea upon which most immediately depends the thought of the whole. It should begin with that portion of the thought which best introduces the central topic of the paragraph, which very commonly will be the idea next in importance to that chosen for the end. The beginning and end of the paragraph will remain the most effective portions whether the writer wishes or not. Something in the middle may be so striking that it will most strongly hold the attention, but this is exceptional, and even then this striking sentence will lose in force by its position. All this is connected naturally with the fact that in a well-wrought paragraph a sentence may generally be made of the beginning and the end which with tolerable exactness will sum up the thought of the whole.

The opening of any piece of work is a pretty accurate indication of the firmness of the writer's grasp of his subject as a whole. The first words

of a paragraph generally show how completely he has that paragraph in his mind as an entity. It makes evident how clear was the thought in his mind before he began to put it on paper. If he was vividly aware of what he wished to do, he will begin crisply and tellingly; whereas the writer who is feeling his way goes with a halting and uncertain step, betraying in each line uncertainty and uneasiness. To know the end and the beginning of each paragraph is an essential condition of the production of work structurally effective. A paragraph is like a dagger; the two things which count in producing the effect are the handle and the point: by the one it is grasped; the other strikes. The difference between poor and good work is practically dependent upon whether the writer makes the paragraph or the paragraph makes itself.

By way of illustration I have written this chapter with somewhat more formality than usual, and the opening paragraphs may easily be summarized by taking the first and last words of each.

A. The paragraph is a modern invention . . . its theory developed by recent stylists.

B. Students are apt to regard this theory as rather a vague matter; . . . but it is really definite and practical.

C. When we are preparing to write . . . we sort out material into proper groups upon the principle of having each group complete and organic.

D. The whole theory of paragraphing . . . is that of groups which, in the chain to which the finished composition may be likened, shall represent definite and entire links.

Paragraphs will not as a rule bear so literal an application of the principle as this, yet in most cases a little examination shows any careful work to exhibit these peculiarities to a greater or less degree.

This analysis obviously gives a hint for the synthesis of paragraphs. In arranging material a writer naturally sets down the main heads of his train of reasoning. If each step is indicated by a clear, properly emphasized sentence, that sentence may usually be so divided that its beginning will serve as the opening, and its ending as the close of the paragraph into which that portion of the subject is to be expanded. Suppose that in planning this chapter, for instance, I had set down the following sentence as summing up a paragraph to come in here: —

To be organic a paragraph must have a regular structure.

When it came to filling this out, the sentence might be divided, and the paragraph written in this manner: —

To be organic a paragraph must have . . . however, more than a proper beginning and end. An effective close and a proper opening give in themselves a certain force and form; but this must be completed by a systematic arrangement of the remaining portions. There must be no looseness of construction, since the whole as a whole must . . . have a regular structure.

The next paragraph-sentence in the original plan might be: —

To possess vitality a paragraph must show progression throughout.

Expanded by the inclusion of the ideas needed to make this thought clear, the finished result would read: —

To possess vitality a paragraph . . . must in structure be more than well contrived in form. An animal is organic without the breath of life; yet all the refinements of cleverly adapted parts go for nothing unless the result is motion and action. The paragraph should not only be well ordered, well proportioned, well planned as regards beginning and end; it must show a distinct movement of the thought onward. The mind must be led from opening to close by a logical succession of ideas. To have life, the paragraph, in a word, . . . must show progression throughout.

However artificial this synthesis may at first glance appear, in the finished result the means would not be evident, and it is in reality a method of work which is both natural and practical.

In a previous chapter was given the plan of a school theme dealing with the park system.[1] This was rearranged with a view to the proper emphasis of the whole composition. At the same time, although attention was not called to the fact, the paragraph-sentences were altered with a view to the emphasis of each. In the original the sentence which summed up a paragraph stood thus: —

Cheap car-fares and the cheapness of bicycles destroy the old objection that the parks were for the rich, as they were the only ones who could afford to go to them.

This was rewritten: —

[1] Page 104.

The old objection that parks were for the rich, because only they could afford to go to them, has by the cheapness of car-fares and of bicycles been completely overcome.

The emphatic point is that the objection has been done away with, and this thought should be brought out. The sentence is not entirely admirable, but it may easily be made to serve its purpose in furnishing the two ends of a paragraph.

The old objection that parks were for the rich, because they only could afford to go to them, . . . had much force and not a little justice. The parks were necessarily distant from the parts of the cities occupied by the poorer classes; to reach them on foot required far too much time and too much strength; the old means of transportation were too expensive for those whose pockets were not at least moderately well filled. The almost universal introduction of electric railways and the general use of the wheel now put the journey within the means of all but the absolutely penniless. The difficulty which the poor once had in reaching the pleasure grounds of the cities . . . has by the cheapness of car-fares and of bicycles been completely overcome.

I do not believe that a reader whose attention had not been called to the deliberate method of synthesis by which the examples given were made would think of them as being formal or artificial. The thought in the last is not very profound, but it does not seem less so for having been arranged with a view to its being made to tell for all that it is worth.

Progression, of which I have spoken, is the result of various things. Mechanically it is especially

dependent upon the proper use of connectives. Of connectives, that is, in the broadest sense of the term. Coherence, the careful employment of conjunctions and all connective words, connection by parallel construction and by repetition, all play their part here. Of even more importance is the arrangement of ideas in a natural and inevitable sequence. The ideal is an order in which each thought seems to grow out of what has gone before; and the more nearly this is approached, the more surely and easily is the mind of the reader led onward. The great secret is that of a logical order.

Progression as applied to single paragraphs naturally suggests that from one paragraph to another. The same laws govern the whole composition as govern the paragraph. What is true of the sentences in their relation to the paragraph is true of the paragraphs in their relation to the whole. The paragraphs should be arranged as logical steps onward from the opening to the conclusion. The end of a paragraph is written with the double sense of its relation to the beginning of that paragraph and to the beginning of the one which is to follow; the beginning, with the double sense of its relation to the end which precedes and the end which follows. Throughout the reader who has succeeded in seeing his work as a whole will naturally find that here, as in arranging sentences, the secret is logical order, only that here he is dealing with the broader matter of a logical sequence of paragraphs.

Compositions on so large a scale that simple advance in a direct line is not possible present more

difficulty. Here the question becomes in turn one of groups of paragraphs. The rather clumsy device known as a 'transition paragraph' is sometimes necessary, although generally the transition from one division of a subject to another is better made by some deft turn of phrase, if the writer will but take the trouble to find it. Mechanical methods of change are easily found anywhere. These examples are taken almost at random: —

Turning now to another phase of the subject, we see at once, etc.

Closely allied with the fact just considered is another of equal importance.

The third great cause in the shaping of the policy of Spain was, etc.

The treaty to which allusion has more than once been made must now be considered in detail.

Both the last talkers deal much in points of conduct and religion. . . . Indirectly and as if against his will, the same elements appear from time to time in the troubled and poetic talk of Opalstein. — STEVENSON: *Talk and Talkers.*

Another example is given at the beginning of the paragraph before this. The writer will always do well to make such transitions as little noticeable as possible. When he finds himself writing such phrases as 'But to return to our first consideration,' he will generally do well so to remodel his work as to get rid of the expression. He should at least strive to make the departure from the main subject to a group of paragraphs on a special topic and the return to the original line of thought seem

so natural as not to attract attention. The secret is still that of an easy and consistent sequence of thought.

This natural sequence is what saves the effect of what might seem an artificial process from producing an artificial result. I have taken no pains to avoid the appearance of treating paragraph-making as an almost mechanical matter. Any method must in the learning affect the student as artificial, but a craft once mastered becomes irresistibly natural. A carpenter once said to me: "It takes a good workman to know where he ought to slight his work." It takes a good literary workman to know when it is wise to depart from theoretical excellence. Objections to practicing rules and theories in constructing paragraphs generally come down in the last analysis to disinclination to labor. The whole matter was frankly and naïvely summed up in a daily theme which was written by one of my pupils.

I dislike to try to write a good paragraph, because it requires too much thought and the application of too many of the elementary principles of composition. The paragraph must be about one idea, and that one idea must be clearly developed. There must be no digressions. It must be possible to sum up the whole paragraph in a single sentence. All these rules and many others begin to perplex me the minute that I attempt to write a paragraph. Just when I have got a paragraph written and am sure I have one of the principles correctly carried out, I find that I have violated some other principle of equal importance. Then I try again, and

this time violate some other rule which I had forgotten. Thus I go on, until I am ready to give up writing a paragraph as a bad job.

I sympathize with this, but I know no way of learning to write well but that of writing with the most painstaking and untiring patience. The reward comes in the pleasure of doing things well, and in finding that after all the labor, which has at times appeared to be so mechanical and lifeless, the result comes at last to be organic, vital, and full of expression.

This organic structure, this vitality which renders the work of the master alive, this fullness of expression which makes the delight of the writer and the pleasure of the reader, all are at once the result and the proof of a single principle. In that principle are the theory and the practical rules which underlie this difficult and important branch of composition. All that has been said here, and much more that might be said, may be summed up in the statement that the great fact to be remembered is that the paragraph is essentially not a mere mechanical device, but a structural necessity.[1]

[1] Ideas in regard to paragraphing are often confused, and frequently a little surprising. Not long ago I contributed an article to a magazine of standing, and to my amazement found in the proof that my paragraphs had been altered. I remonstrated, and the editor replied in part as follows: —

"I am sorry that you did not like the way your article was paragraphed. It is necessary for us to have some regard for the appearance of the page. . . . *These details must be left to the editorial office, otherwise no uniformity of style could possibly be maintained.*"

The italics are mine.

X

THE POINT OF VIEW

THE Point of View is a matter of so much importance and a matter at the same time so scantily discussed by writers on composition, that despite the fact that I have written of it at some length already,[1] it seems to me to deserve further consideration. The violations of this principle are so common and so easy that a writer should bear it in mind not only when he begins revision but at every stage of his progress. That a work shall be well started is not enough; that it is given at the outset a definite and clear point of view is much, but care should be taken to see that the selected point of view is strictly held to throughout.

To maintain the point of view is the common honesty of composition; yet the ordinary writer seems to find it as difficult to do this as the sinner to live up to the traditional New Year's resolutions. The man who searches the ceiling for things to put on paper, instead of trying sincerely to set down what he thinks, is sure to collect ideas which are incongruous. Only when the writer is really in earnest, only when the mind is absorbed in the work, is the point of view likely to be naturally consistent throughout. The writer who is wrapped

[1] *Talks on Writing English*, pp. 90–96.

up in saying exactly what he thinks and feels is generally kept consistent by his personality and his earnestness.

The Point of View is the attitude of the reader toward the subject of a composition. This should be determined beforehand by the author, and explicitly or implicitly indicated at the very beginning. Explicitly the point of view is given in cases like the following: —

I climbed the dark brow of the mighty Helvellyn;
Lakes and mountains beneath me gleamed misty and wide.

SCOTT.

There is a certain small class of persons in the history of literature the members of which possess, at least for literary students, an interest peculiar to themselves. — SAINTSBURY: *Crabbe.*

Comedy is a game played to throw reflections upon social life, and it deals with human nature in the drawing-room of civilized men and women. — MEREDITH: *The Egoist.*

Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen, etc. — STEVENSON: *Treasure Island.*

In the following the point of view is indicated by implication: —

The French in general do their duty to their great men; they render them a liberal tribute of criticism,

commentary, annotation, biographical analysis. — JAMES: *Honoré de Balzac.*

When Farmer Oak smiled, the corners of his mouth spread till they were within an unimportant distance of his ears, his eyes were reduced to mere chinks, and diverging wrinkles appeared round them, extending upon his countenance like the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun. — HARDY: *Far from the Madding Crowd.*

"We are all the children of the Puritans," Mrs. Herman said, smiling. "Of course there is an ethical strain in all of us." — *The Puritans.*

They had good reason to be proud, and better reason to be afraid, all twelve of them; for though they had fought their way, game by game, up the teams entered for the polo tournament, they were meeting the Archangels that afternoon in the final match, and the Archangels men were playing with half a dozen ponies apiece. — KIPLING: *The Maltese Cat.*

The last of these examples proves, as the reader advances in the story to which it belongs, to be unsatisfactory, as it gives no hint that the point of view is that of a team of polo-ponies. Before he has found this out, the reader has accepted the implication which is inevitable, and supposes himself to be expected to be in sympathy with the players. This illustrates a fault which is exceedingly common, that of neglecting to give the necessary point of view at the outset. This leaves the audience in the dark for a time, and in so far not only exposes the writer to the danger of wasting the effect of the opening, but also of having later

to correct a false impression. The reader will inevitably, if often unconsciously, take a point of view or make one. If one is given to him, he will receive it; if not, he must establish one for himself.

The writer who does not at the outset give the reader the point of view is like an untrained actor. The amateur is constantly unconscious that he is assuming an attitude, while the professional knows what he is doing and counts upon it. The real actor has learned that he is producing some impression or other all the time that he is in sight of the audience; the amateur is apt to be naïvely unaware that he has any effect except when he has some special thing to do or to say. The accomplished writer is entirely conscious that from the first word he writes he is making upon the mind of his reader some kind of an impression; the untrained goes innocently on until absolutely obliged explicitly to state what is the mood desired. The artist realizes the fact that the reader must at the very beginning infer some sort of a point of view, and that if left to himself he may hit upon the point of view which the author intended, but is equally likely to get instead the one most incompatible or undesirable.

The following is from a college theme: —

The effect of college life upon a Freshman is so widely extended, so various in its working, so enduring in its results, that it is necessary to approach the subject with all the powers of the mind alert. The youth comes to Harvard as into a new world, and here he is so completely transformed that to understand the change would

be impossible without a study of his character on all sides. I shall therefore confine myself to the effect that college has upon the social habits and possibilities of a student.

Here one in reading naturally takes at the start a deep breath, so to say, and arouses all the powers of his mind, as he seems to be directed to do. He can hardly fail to suppose that he is to grapple with the whole complex subject of the influence of college life upon the student. The writer, serenely unconscious that this point of view has been established, surely thinks, good easy man, that the reader is waiting for the point of view until it shall be given to him specifically labeled. The trouble is that no man can read a line without having assumed some sort of mood which seems to him to be suggested by the text.

This instance is not so bad as it might be, since it calls for the restricting of the attention from the whole to a part. It is a little like setting a man to lift what seems to be a very heavy stone, but which proves to be only a painted block of wood. The writer has belittled his subject. The reader, prepared to deal with a broad matter, is apt to regard the lesser as somewhat more trivial than it really is. This, however, is less objectionable than if he had been forced to turn his attention to an altogether different consideration.

This example, also from a theme, will show what I mean: —

Football is in these days of so much importance among college sports that the physical effects of the game and

of the training it requires should be most carefully studied. Young men in our leading colleges are now devoting themselves to this sport with a vigor not unlike that with which the old athletes must have prepared for the Grecian games. Of even more importance is the moral result of football, and upon this I wish to say a few words.

One thing is by implication introduced as the subject of the theme, and then the reader is practically told that he is mistaken if he is so foolish as to suppose that he is to read about that. It hardly improves the matter that here a subject generally attractive is made to give way to sermonizing. The writer of this was probably endeavoring to be engaging; he unconsciously gives instead the impression that he is trying to steal a march on the unwary reader. Nothing more surely antagonizes any audience than the idea of a false pretense; and this guileless passage from the physical to the moral side of football is sure to alienate at the start.

The nature of the point of view decides the necessity that it shall be clearly determined at the beginning, and so expressed that it shall be unmistakable. It should be made definite before any impression which may be conflicting can possibly have been given to the reader. In conversation this principle is constantly recognized, and pains taken to make the mental attitude understood. The lounger in a country store beginning a story takes pains to give his point of view to the hearers. He says: "Did I ever tell you how Tom Billymarly

made a fool of himself at the Fair last week?" "It's amazing how sandy Jake Tobey was at the fire yesterday;" "I never supposed Widow Thurston was stingy till I heard about the way she treated that Dow girl." Some preliminary device of this sort is constantly used in talk, and furnishes a hint upon which any writer of tales will do well to act.

When the point of view is changed, the careful writer takes pains to make this plain to the reader.

To birds of the more soaring kind Casterbridge must have appeared on this fine evening as a mosaic work of subdued reds, browns, greys, and crystals, held together by a rectangular frame of deep green. To the level eye of humanity it stood as an indistinct mass behind a dense stockade of limes and chestnuts, set in the midst of miles of rotund down and concave field. — HARDY: *The Mayor of Casterbridge.*

For convenience we may speak of the point of view as of various sorts, although of course it should be remembered that divisions are largely arbitrary, and except for ease in handling are of no importance. Any word which would describe a possible attitude of the mind of a reader might be used here, but it will be sufficient for purposes of examination and illustration to speak of the point of view as being Physical, Chronological, Personal, Intellectual, Emotional, or Ethical.

The Physical is the most obvious. It is that which is instantly presupposed whenever visual images arise in the mind of the reader. It indicates the place — the position in space, one

might broadly call it — from which the writer is supposed to look. 'Glancing out of my window, I saw;' 'From my station on the side of the hill, I could see Sherman's cavalry charge amid the clouds of smoke.' When not specified it is implied. 'The rider dashed across the field, following the sound of the pack, and saw before him a little swamp.' The point of view here is obviously the sight of the rider.

A story which came into my hands not long ago begins with a curious violation of the physical point of view.

> Tom was sauntering in the sunny morning on the lawn before his uncle's country house, when he saw his cousin Helen go down toward the Italian garden. As soon as she was out of his sight behind the laburnum thicket, she began to run.

I trust that I am as responsive as another to the fascinating suggestiveness of 'Italian gardens' and 'laburnum thickets,' but this did not prevent me from neglecting the rest of the story to copy so excellent an illustration of violent transfer of the point of view, a point of view to be considered consistent only on the theory that Tom could see around a corner. The writer may here as elsewhere take the attitude of omnipresence, but of this he should give an indication, and he should hold to it. This diffusive point of view has certain advantages, but it is apt to lack fervor and human interest. In any case, however, the reader must be taken into confidence at the very beginning.

The Chronological point of view is that of time.

In its broadest sense this covers what are called anachronisms. When in "Julius Cæsar" Shakespeare makes Cassius say: —

> The clock hath stricken three,

he violates the chronological point of view. It no less applies to the time at which any action takes place, any description is given, even when any reflection or argument is made, if this is indicated.

> The time for work was over; on the fields, the lanes, the farmyards which they passed, peacefulness seemed to descend, permeating, like rain, with the golden mist of the sunset. — VERNON LEE: *Baldwin.*

This is the position in time, as the physical is the position in space. It is unnecessary to multiply examples, but one or two illustrations of the way in which it is violated may be given.

> He stumbled through the rooms in the dim twilight. They were furnished in yellow satin, really splendid in the day.

It is not day, and the authoress should not have let her anxiety to drag in that trumpery yellow satin furniture betray her into speaking of the daylight.

> As the old men walked toward the west in the still afternoon, one of them pointed first to the setting sun and then to their long shadows which moved on before them.

Absurd as is this mistake, it appeared in one of the popular London magazines.

> The darkness of the coming December night grew until the stars glittered brighter and brighter; and over the western hills hung the golden belt of Orion.

The error here, that of putting the constellation Orion out of place, and so indicating a time much later than that of 'the coming night,' is one which would probably strike comparatively few readers. Something allied to it is the absurd behavior of the lamplight in Poe's "Raven," which throws upon the floor the shadow of the bird close to the ceiling. Of course the blunder last named has nothing to do with time, but the others are wrong because they are things which would belong to an hour other than that indicated by the point of view chosen.

The Personal point of view includes whatever personality may be supposed or involved. The simplest illustration is that of a tale told in the autobiographical form, where any introduction of details which the narrator could not have known is at once a violation of hypothesis. To the grosser examples of this error most readers are sensitive to a greater or less degree; and it is probable that there are few who are not unconsciously affected, even if they are unaware of the cause. This example is from a theme:—

> If men are sometimes kept out of college societies because of manners or clothes, a disease of snobbishness is creeping into the university life which any disinterested outsider would condemn, and which must be eradicated.

The error here is perhaps not important, but the change from the outsider to the writer is confusing to any reader who is vividly following the meaning of the words. In the following the error is more gross:—

Eugene felt as if he were running for life; he strained every muscle; he seemed to himself as if he were trying to make every thought help him over the course, every heartbeat aid him to a victory, but as he neared the last curve they saw him falter.

I was amused at the pompous gentleman in the street-car this morning. He gave his seat to an old lady, and like the man who has founded an orphan asylum and blessed it with his name, he felt that he had done a noble act of charity.

The single introduction of such a word as 'evidently' before 'felt' would have kept the point of view what it was at the beginning, that of the writer's observation.

Golf affords, as but few other outdoor games do, exercise in moderation; yet it is sufficient for most people.

This apparently means 'I think that golf affords,' and 'exercise which most people think sufficient.' Students using language more or less figurative often get confused in their treating the personal point of view.

Everyday experiences give rich returns to him who pursues a figure until he finds one suited to his thought.

First the reader is to identify his thought with that of a person following a single figure of speech, then without warning to be in imagination a person who is seeking to find a figure to follow. Perhaps under the personal point of view might be included the mixing of mythologies, which even when done deliberately, as by Stephen Phillips in "Christ in Hades," is of very doubtful effectiveness. The

most striking example on a large scale of a fine use of this principle that some personality is presupposed in every composition is "The Ring and the Book." In each section of that magnificent work Browning assumes the attitude of a different speaker (with the exception of the return to Guido, and in this case the altered circumstances make him almost another creature), holding throughout the section to that personality with the most wonderful imaginative skill. Illustrations, however, are to be found everywhere, and violations of the most bizarre sort confront the readers of newspapers. In the following the reader may determine for himself how many points of view are involved in this wonderful but genuine sentence from a Boston paper: —

> The funeral of Miss M—— W—— G—— of Melrose, the victim of the terrible fatality at Wellington last Friday night, by jumping from a hack after the alleged drunken driver had fallen from his seat and was instantly killed, was held at 9 o'clock this morning from her residence, No. 110 W—— Avenue.

The Intellectual point of view is the intellectual mood which is supposed, — that of a seeker after truth, as one interested in political economy, as one who cares for facts about any given subject, as one acquainted with mathematics, with astronomy, and so on. It is a violation of this to interrupt a story to sermonize, to introduce levity into the midst of a serious discourse. A college theme furnishes an example which seems to me delicately good, if I can make clear its fault.

The men in the yard who have been in line for thirty-six hours to get tickets to the football game present to me a problem which is puzzling. There they have been for a day and two nights, part of the time in the rain; and for what? To get tickets to see a game in which brute strength is the main feature. I cannot understand such a sacrifice.

This starts with the point of view of one endeavoring honestly to understand the motives and mental attitude of the men taking so much trouble to get tickets, of one who must therefore be trying as far as possible to put himself into the state of mind of these ticket-buyers. When the game is spoken of as a mere contest of brute strength the writer is expressing his own opinion, and not at all that of the men he is trying to understand. He violates the point of view because he has ceased to look at the question as an unprejudiced inquirer. His view may be right or wrong, but for the moment it should be put aside. The illustration marks the difficulty of keeping to a point of view not genuinely realized and genuinely felt.

The Emotional point of view is the feeling, the mood, in which a subject may be considered.

The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as best I could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge. — POE: *The Cask of Amontillado.*

The opening sentences of Saintsbury's "Crabbe," and of Meredith's "The Egoist," cited above, are good examples. The fashion used to be to give the emotional point of view by quotations prefixed to chapters or to essays, but this has pretty much

gone by, although used by Kipling. The violation most frequent is that beginning with the avowal of intent to be judicial, and then being carried away by partisan feelings into violent attack or defense. Almost any departure from the original emotional mood is generally forgiven, however, if it is managed so that the reader is carried along with the writer in the change of feeling.

Ethical is a broad term which may be used to cover the moral, the religious, and the really ethical point of view. It means the assumed standards of right and wrong. It includes decency and morality. It is less often stated explicitly than other points of view. It is violated when scurrility or indecency is introduced into a piece supposed to be respectable; when a loose interpretation of moral law appears; or when a creed presupposed is departed from. The passages expunged of old by the Inquisitors in books supposed to be Catholic were what they considered violations of the religious — and arbitrarily imposed — point of view.

The point of view in any of these, or in other divisions which might be made, may be progressive. In physical matters this would mean a moving of the point of sight, as when one goes forward on foot or in a car. In a narrative one necessarily moves forward in time. In intellectual or emotional progression the change comes from adding facts or ideas, and dealing with the subject in the light of this added information. So the change is consistent, intentional, and clear, there may always be, and in any progressive work there gen-

erally must be, alteration of the position originally taken.

The divisions into which the consideration of the point of view has been parted have already been said to be arbitrary, but they illustrate the variety of things which belong to consistency in writing. Fortunately every writer has been trained by constant experience of life to hold to a mental mood even without analyzing it, so that it is possible for him to take an attitude toward his subject, and to keep to it consistently without having divided and subdivided it under any set of terms, mine or another's. Here, as in all that pertains to composition, the thing which I desire to emphasize is the need of clear realization on the part of the writer of the thing that he means and the effect he wishes to produce. The whole matter is admirably illustrated by reference to the art of the painter. Fromentin, the French painter, in "The Algerian Sahel" describes the market-place in an Algerian village, with low white houses, pointed black cypresses, empty blue sky, green mountains as a distant background, and in the foreground native children playing ball. He goes on to comment upon the various ways in which a painter may look at the scene, — how according to his purpose he may emphasize this and slight that, may make it his object to concentrate attention upon the other, and in a dozen different ways may of given material make any one of a dozen works, individual and each in its way true.

What do we see, and how shall we look at the subject before us? Are these children who are playing in the sunlight, or is it a place in sunlight in which children are playing? . . . The landscapist will see here a landscape, the figure painter a subject in his line. . . . If the children are near enough to the painter so that the portrait of each has a dominant importance, the landscape will disappear at once. From elimination to elimination the painter will contrive to simplify the group. The costume will become of no importance in a picture whose interest is centred in human form and expression. The whole sunlight will be suppressed rather than that it shall interfere with the interest in the human beings. . . . The painter may abandon relative truth for an order of larger truth, less precise, and therefore more absolute.

Every artist, consciously or unconsciously, must make a choice of what he will use from among the superabundant supplies which nature and life offer. The man who has mastered his art is he who is able to do this intelligently, and the way to learn to select intelligently is to select consciously.

An example of the difference which may be made of the same thing from different points of view is given by the two sketches which follow: —

THE EGOTISM OF GRIEF

An epitaph which I once saw illustrates well how the mourner fails to understand that all the world does not suffer with him. In the egotism of his sorrow the sufferer believes that the most indifferent passer who reads the gravestone on which he records his loss will be touched by any word, no matter how sentimental, which records

his grief. In an English churchyard is a stone on which is an inscription beginning: "For Love's sake Remember." It is a phrase which in the egotism of his sorrow the father thought to express the anguish which wrung his heart. To the careless passer, unquickened by the sense of personal loss, the words seem inappropriately artificial. If he be touched as he reads, it is chiefly by the sense of how complete was the self-absorption which made the father in his grief forget that all the world could not take the phrase as a touching appeal.

A TOUCHING EPITAPH

An epitaph in the churchyard of —— seemed to me one of the most touching I had ever seen; and as I read it on a sunny Sunday afternoon, I could feel the tears behind it. The quiet of the summer day lay over the land, made only the deeper by the drone of the bees in the grave-sprung flowers, and the murmur of the congregation repeating the ritual within the church. On a simple slab I read: —

FOR LOVE'S SAKE REMEMBER
H. C.
A CHILD OF GOD
ONLY CHILD OF
H. A. R., PRIEST.

I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Nothing could be more simple, nothing more touching than that opening appeal from a bereaved father to humanity which knows love, and knowing love, must also know grief. 'For love's sake remember.' It is an appeal to the deepest sympathy of loving and sorrow-knowing humanity.

The difference which may be made by a change in the attitude of the writer leads naturally to the reflection how largely the choice of the point of view is a matter of taste. The writer perhaps more surely betrays his real nature by the selection he makes here than by any explicit declaration of belief or of predilections. Nobility or vulgarity of mind shows itself inevitably by the mood in which the writer approaches his subject.

The choice of the point of view is of course equivalent to a decision what shall be the tone and temper of a composition. The difference which may be made by the selection of one or another way of looking at a thing is illustrated well by the story of the old farmer and his wife who were picking over a barrel of apples. "I declare," the farmer said impatiently, "for every sound apple in this barrel there 's sure to be a specked one." "But, John," the sweet-tempered goodwife answered, "for every specked one there is sure to be such a nice, sound one!" An illustration is afforded also by the comment of a recent critic: —

> The chief fault to be found with "The Rise of Silas Lapham" is that instead of showing how an intolerably vulgar man may be innately noble, it shows how an innately noble man may be intolerably vulgar.

The point of view depends upon the personal attitude of the writer to his subject. Sensitiveness to consistency in this may be cultivated by various exercises. It is well to write for practice themes in which the attitude of the author is of necessity

marked, such as the impressions of a blind or a deaf man, or the same story from the point of view of different characters. I have sometimes had students take Edward Lear's "The Owl and the Pussy-cat," and tell the tale in the words of the owl, the cat, the pig, and the turkey; or Wordsworth's "Anecdote for Fathers," and relate the incident as it might have been told by the boy or by his mother; the arrival of the circus in town as it impressed the small boy, the maiden aunt, and the schoolmaster. Any person may devise exercises for himself. The main thing is that the writer realize what he is trying to do. A writer keeps faith with the reader by keeping faith with himself; and when all is said, the secret of being consistent is to be clear and honest.

XI

FIGURES

THE use of figurative language is at once the most inevitable and the most effective characteristic of any composition which rises above the level of plainest statement of the commonplace.

The moment our discourse rises above the ground line of familiar facts, and is inflamed with passion or exalted by thought, it clothes itself in images. A man conversing in earnest, if he watch his intellectual processes, will find that always a material image, more or less luminous, arises in his mind, contemporaneous with every thought, which furnishes the vestment of the thought. . . . This imagery is spontaneous. It is the blending of experience with the present action of the mind. It is proper creation. — EMERSON: *Nature.*

Whoever writes with earnestness will employ figures, and while figures are of the greatest force if properly employed, they are of the most destructive nature if not well managed. I have elsewhere dwelt upon them at some length,[1] but I cannot refrain from adding examples and comments, so great and so constant is their importance.

A figure has necessarily more force than plain, literal speech. The trope calls upon the reader to form a picture in his mind, to bring up clearly an

[1] *Talks on Writing English*, pp. 96–106.

image, and then to draw some sort of a comparison. In a word, it incites him to create an idea. The idea which is created by the mind of the reader is a hundredfold more effective than one which is received from the writer. There can be no figure without a suggestiveness which calls for such creation; and hence it is that this rhetorical device is so powerful a tool.

A figure is powerful, moreover, even when it is used unconsciously. Language is full of figurative elements, and we are so accustomed to employing comparisons that we often speak or write them unwittingly. We slip, too, from intentional comparisons into unintentional, or, what is worse, into conventional ones. There are numerous words of which the tropical use has become so common as to pass without notice. 'A piercing glance,' 'a striking remark,' 'an itching palm,' may serve as examples. Phrases of this sort, of which the figurative force becomes at once apparent upon reflection, are used so often that we hardly recognize them as being other than literal. If we are to employ them properly, however, we must keep this quality in mind. I came recently upon the sentence, "Her piercing glance steeped him in anxiety." How one is steeped in a thing that pierces, let him determine who may. The example is an extreme one, but such expressions as 'his piercing look took in the whole scene at a glance' are common enough. They pass in virtue of the fact that the figurative force has ceased to be effective. The real absurdity of the sentence is not offensive

simply because the figure has become too worn to be noticed. If 'piercing' carried with it the idea of something which penetrates, it must destroy that of gathering up or taking in. The writer who uses language of this sort is therefore depending not on the effectiveness, but on the ineffectiveness of what he writes. The keen reader is not to be caught in snares so flimsy. He feels the image indicated by these half-literal expressions, and is disturbed by the incongruity between this and the author's meaning. The temptation to misemploy words partly fossilized into literal uses besets constantly the unwary. I read recently in a newspaper that an after-dinner speaker "ballasted his serious argument with a jest or two;" and while after-dinner jests are often of a nature which adapts them to use as ballast, I felt that the reporter was making an unconscious quip so good that he would probably never appreciate it. Another example of what I mean was furnished by the student who wrote in a report of a lecture: —

> Paragraphs are links of a chain. A succession of interlocked paragraphs should all look to the same end:

a form of words which brought irresistibly to mind the eyed link of Masonic symbolism. I am not able, either, to admire the line in which a newspaper poet declares in praise of his lady that

> Her lovely eyes her crowning glory are.

Before I could prevent it, my vagrant fancy beheld the damsel crowned with a row of lovely but most

inappropriately placed orbs. The fault may be mine, but I cannot help feeling the force of words. A suggestion must awake a response in the mind of the reader, and the response is no less vivid because it is not what the writer meant.

Realization becomes, then, the first requisite in using figurative terms; and since language is full of words constantly used in a sense to some degree unliteral, realization is the secret of any accurate expression. A critic writing in the London "Athenæum" some time ago commended in the verse of Norman Gale, a current English rhymester, a passage in which were the lines: —

> We stood upon the forehead of the hills
> And lifted up our hearts in prayer.

Without raising what might seem the captious inquiry how many hills may share one forehead, I humbly submit that the word 'forehead' must mean very little to the reader, or the idea of standing upon a forehead, in prayer or otherwise, must strike him as absurd. The error here is a typical one. It is the inevitable result of using words conventionally. Some poet once saw the mountains looking out over the land like giants, awful presences before which humanity might stand in awe, lifting up to the eternal skies their upper slopes like the brows of faces gazing into space. When he used the word 'forehead,' he did it with the full realization of all that it meant and all that it suggested. The strength of the image impressed the men who came after him, and now, the imagination of the verse-maker not serving him to realize the

comparison he cannot originate, we are treated to the incongruous, Gulliver-like picture of pigmies swarming about the brow of a giant, and praying — perhaps for the means to get down. One had better try to set type in the dark than to employ figurative language without realization, the essential to any success in its use.

Realization includes the sense of what must be the point of view of the reader. One of the things which it is hardest for the young writer to learn is the difference between suggestion which is effective and that which is merely affected. Figures that are arbitrary are not an aid in conveying ideas or emotion. Suggestion cannot be made to depend entirely upon the will of the writer; it involves also the understanding of the audience. Once I heard individual fancies discussed at a club, when one man said: "The taste of rum always suggests to my mind the dark, peculiar green of rotten wood." "To me," another responded, "the three of clubs always calls up the view from Mt. Lebanon." In each case some peculiar or personal reason had established a connection of ideas which for other persons would not exist. It would be idle for the one of these men to attempt to suggest the flavor of rum by bringing up the color of decaying wood, nor could the other hope to present a view of Mt. Lebanon by the mention of the three of clubs. We all have ideas of this sort; personal fancies or associations which even when explained appear to others whimsical. The desire for originality leads the inexperienced writer to use these arbitrary

images, and the more bizarre and remote the idea is, the more fresh and admirable does it appear to the amateur. A young man once consulted me in regard to one of those mongrel productions, neither prose nor yet verse, the existence of which is apologized for by the name "prose poem." I found myself at the very start confounded by the expression, "The dusk of oriental seraglios where lithe white tigers crouch." I at once confessed my lamentable ignorance of the habits or even of the existence of white tigers, and of the fact that oriental seraglios were the customary haunts of any such beasts. The author informed me, with more condescending contempt than it was polite for him to show, that to him the women of the Eastern harems had always seemed like sleek white tigers. The phrase was evidently to him the most satisfactory imaginable, and he had assumed that it was the business of the reader to regard it from his point of view. The example may be called extreme, — although as a matter of sober fact it is not! — but at least it illustrates the danger of forgetting that the writer must keep steadily before him the effect on the mind which receives.

Figures must, moreover, be of a nature to come within the probable range of the reader's knowledge. The likeness may be real, the figure consistent, the comparison even ingeniously apt, yet the trope fail through its remoteness from common experience or knowledge.

He therefore sent arrows of wit among them, to determine their disposition by the exercise of this belomancy.

That belomancy was an ancient art of divination from the flight of arrows is a fact so little likely to be within the knowledge of the ordinary reader that the figure falls flat. It does not make the thought more clear, but itself requires explanation.

So Jack, the mischievous and nimble, climbed in at the dining-room window, and went foraging about, a lembus that soon was laden with choice spoils of cake and fruit.

The reader who remembers his Greek sufficiently well may say to himself, "Lembus means a small sailing vessel." It is only that one man out of a thousand who has seen the term applied to the brisk, sharp-prowed, undecked piratical craft of the Adriatic, a sort of rover now obsolete, who is able to understand what Jack is compared to.

His desire for revenge was a swage which moulded every act.

The dictionary declares 'swage' to mean a die for stamping metal, and the reader who is aware of that fact may receive illumination out of this comparison, but for myself I fell into dark bewilderment. Even when the context explains such a word, the effect is not good, as witness 'pont-levis' in the following verse: —

> Yonder 's a plum-tree, with a crevis
> An owl would build in, were he but sage,
> For a lap of moss, like a fine pont-levis
> In a castle of the middle age,
> Joins to a lip of gum pure amber.
>
> BROWNING: *Garden Fancies.*

Whatever else is obscure, a figure should be clear.

An exception in the matter of perfect clearness may perhaps be made in favor of what is known as a conceit. A conceit is a fancy which tickles the mind by its ingenuity, but which cannot be realized by the imagination without running into an absurdity. It is a bit of mental dexterity; the sleight of hand of metaphor; agreeable when well done, but not to be taken seriously. A well-worn passage of Tennyson seems to me a good example.

> Jewels five-words-long,
> That on the stretched forefinger of all Time
> Sparkle forever.
>
> *The Princess.*

This entertains the mind by its ingenuity, but to attempt to realize it is merely to call up an image nothing less than absurd. Tennyson himself cannot have taken it seriously, or he would never have been able to tolerate the 'all' which destroys the effect of the personification of Time.

A pretty example of a conceit is this from a recent story: —

> Birds, in an ecstasy for nesting, juggled with melodic phrases, and tried the trick of keeping three notes in the air at once. — ALICE BROWN: *A Sea Change.*

George Meredith has an especial fondness for conceits. His intellect is so nimble that it has now and then to turn somersaults in its flights from pure wantonness.

> A great voice is an ocean. You cannot drain it with forty thousand opera-hats. — *Vittoria.*

Parsons and petticoats must always mince the meat to hash the fact. — *Adventures of Harry Richmond.*

The dictionaries severely characterize a conceit as " a thought or expression intended to be striking or poetical, but rather far-fetched, insipid, or pedantic." This is true of such a figure at the worst, but while the conceit is not adapted to serious work, it may at its best be amusing, pleasing, and decorative. Rather than to make a conceit lucid, however, it is the aim of the writer to insure that it shall be dazzling.

The characteristic excellences of figures may be for working purposes summed up in some such manner as this: —

1. Every comparison must be founded upon a real likeness.

2. The figure fails if this likeness is not made clear.

3. Accidental and unessential points of resemblance should generally be passed over.

4. If the desired likeness is clear, the more marked the general difference between the things compared, the stronger the effect.

5. Differences had as a rule best be left unspecified.

6. Figures are not pleasing unless they appear to be spontaneous.

7. The denotation of a figure is not more important than the connotation.

The first essential in a simile is that it bring out some point of resemblance. It is not possible to compare things which have nothing in common.

A potato and a picture, for instance, cannot be compared in beauty, likeness, or æsthetic effect, for the evident reason that these are not qualities common to both. One may say, however, that a picture has no more artistic merit than a potato. The likeness is the lack of something, but it is a genuine likeness. One might extravagantly say, "This picture has no more place in such a collection than has a potato among crown jewels!" The likeness is unfitness; and the comparison would be admissible only on the theory that the writer wished to push extravagance to the limit of absurdity; but like all similes and metaphors, this figure is the application of a point of likeness.

In hunting for figures, then, if it should come to a question of hunting for them, it is first necessary to decide clearly what is the thing to be brought out. Suppose, for instance, we are writing of a girl's dancing, and wish for a comparison which will make clear the impression we have of it. We think of the things which dance, or which move with a motion more or less similar: a leaf in the wind, the sunlight on water, a reed swaying in the breeze, a cloud, a swan, and so on. Then according to the point we wish to bring out, we may say any of these things: —

The girl danced as blithely and briskly as a last red maple leaf fluttering madly in a keen October breeze.

Over the stage she twinkled on the tips of her toes, as a single sunbeam touches and leaves with twinkling swiftness the crests of the little waves.

She danced with the wild abandon of a gypsy beating out a fierce measure to strings and tambourines in the light of swaying torches and a forest feast-fire.

She floated through the voluptuous measure like a cloud in the languorous southern sky.

Through the mazes of the dance she went flitting like a flake of thistle-down tossed to and fro by the warm summer breeze.

> As for her dancing, 't was as when a swan
> Moves stately with her fellows, while the tide
> As if in love reflects each snowy curve.
>
> Dancing she seems a reed swayed by the wind
> That bends to rise, and rises but to bend.

Mrs. Mullholland's dancing, — well, it was like nothing else so much as the jerking of a wooden monkey on a pole in the hands of a small boy.

Gilbertine is a sort of human gyroscope. When she dances, the different portions of her body seem to be all but independent of each other, all revolving with speed, but each around a different centre.

Poor Miss Schawnsee in the dance was a sight to make angels weep. She was as persistent as a cart-horse, as resolute as a drunken Irishman, and as destructive as a centre-rush in a football team.

To increase greatly the list of things to which a girl dancing might be compared would of course not be difficult, but these are sufficient to illustrate. It is evident that they all find something in common between the dance and some other thing, but that the resulting impressions vary greatly. There is a world-wide difference between the stately

maiden moving through the dance like a swan amid its fellows, and clumsy Miss Schwansee dashing destructively about in frenzied unwitting imitation of the centre-rush of a football team. The thing which makes any of these figures possible is the perception of a likeness, and its presentation so that it shall emphasize some characteristic of the particular performance which the writer is describing. A young lady dancing is not especially like a swan, a centre-rush, a gyroscope, a cloud, or any of the other things mentioned, except in the point which the figure is designed to bring out. In that particular, however, the similarity must be clear and marked.

The point of resemblance upon which the figure is founded must be made entirely clear. No matter how good may be a comparison, if the introduction of other ideas obscures the likeness which is its real purpose, its effect is spoiled. In the following verse by Keats the figure is a failure because the words do not make evident the point in common between the things compared.

> Oh, what a mad endeavor
> Worketh he
> Who to thy sacred and ennobled hearse
> Would offer a burnt sacrifice of verse
> And melody.
> *On a Lock of Milton's Hair.*

The likeness which Keats evidently had in mind was that a sacrifice and a poem might either be intended to honor a hero's memory. The failure of his image is due to the fact that this likeness is

not brought out in the words, while the unlikeness of verse and a burnt sacrifice is patent. The matter is perhaps made worse — it certainly is for me, — by the unfortunate suggestion of ambiguity which makes it possible to fancy a fire of verse, and to realize the impossibility of a blaze of melody. The difficulty was probably increased by the poet's need of shaping his verse and coupling his rhyme; but here, as in most cases, the fault probably arose from the fact that the author felt the likeness which he wished to express, and did not realize that the words which he set down did not fairly represent his thought. Not what a writer means to put into language, but what that language gives out to the intended audience, is the measure of successful workmanship.

A likeness may be so evident that it is clear at a word, and in that case nothing is easier than to make the figure do its work. A good example, and one appropriate to this subject, is Lowell's remark in regard to that extravagant and sloppy style known as "fine writing:" —

> Thoughts were never draped in long skirts like babies if they were strong enough to go alone.

In selecting images a writer always does well to choose those as familiar and close at hand as may be without seeming hackneyed and trite. In any case he will avoid those which are not easily made clear to the reader, since above everything he must insure that a figure be easy of instant apprehension.

Figures must be spontaneous in effect, I have said; and of course this is but an application of

the general principle that art should conceal art. Nothing but a false figure is worse than a labored figure. Spontaneity comes largely by the training which renders the mind able to think of images easily and naturally. In workmanship nothing conduces to an effect of freshness more than the making of the comparison apt and clear. The better a figure fits the use to which it is put, the more surely it seems to have sprung inevitably from the subject. If it appeals instantly to the mind of the reader, it cannot but seem to have arisen naturally and without effort in the mind of the writer. The workmanship, too, has much to do with the degree to which a figure gives an impression of ease and spontaneity. Spontaneity, after all, is chiefly a matter of bringing out vividly the points of resemblance, of so managing the wording that the desired impression comes instantly and clearly, and hence convincingly to the mind.

Since spontaneity must depend largely upon the fitness of the figure to the use for which it is designed, it follows that it is in no small degree affected by the connotation of the image. It is easy to destroy all the good effect of a figure by some unfortunate and jarring suggestion. This example from a theme will show what I mean: —

> The street after the great storm was like fairyland. The tempest had plastered the snow to the sides of all the buildings like a thick coat of whitewash.

The comparison brings out the whiteness and to a certain extent gives a good idea of how the houses

looked; but alas for all idea of the gracious beauties of fairyland when into the image comes the connotation of the homely and prosaic 'whitewash'! The suggestion of the storm going about like a darky with his pail and brush may or may not arise in the mind, but certainly no reader can have at the same moment an image of whitewashed houses and the elfin, frostlike architecture of a street in a fairy city. The whole secret of the force of any figure being that it arouses in the mind of the reader a creative mood, too great care cannot be taken that this sensitive mood be not offended, as it easily may be by a wrong suggestion.

How to cultivate the art of devising figures is a matter worth careful thought. It is well to encourage the habit of converting into comparisons striking sensations and experiences. This is done with especial ease in the case of natural things. I do not know that in this way originated a certain happy phrase of Stevenson's, but it seems probable. Stevenson speaks of a man who "laughed not often, but when he did, with a sudden, loud haw-haw, hearty, but somehow joyless, like an echo from a rock." Here is a fresh image; one that appeals instantly to the reader, and which at once brings vividly home to him the idea which the author wished to convey. It is a delightful stroke of literary art to employ the word 'rock.' The laugh is not simply like an echo, although that would after a fashion have done the business; it is an echo hard and lifeless as the rock from

which it is thrown back. This seems to me to have been born at some moment when Stevenson was hearing such an echo; perhaps when he was cruising about among the boulders described in the "Merry Men:" "On calm days you can go wandering between them in a boat for hours, echoes following you about the labyrinth." However this particular simile came, it is at least a fact that the mind may be trained to make figures out of all sorts of experiences. Some of these will be remembered in good time; some will be forgotten. The main thing is that the mind will have been turned in the right direction.

Tennyson has recorded how he received the suggestion of some of his similes. A storm which came upon his steamer as he was crossing the North Sea suggested the line: —

> With all
> Its stormy crests that smote against the sky.

He saw the water-lilies on his own pond blown by sudden gusts, and he fashioned the figure: —

> As the water-lily starts and slides.

"I was walking in the New Forest," he told his son. "A wind did arise, and

> 'Shake the songs, the whispers, and the shrieks
> Of the wild wood together.'"

His son says again: —

In "Locksley Hall" my father annotates the line, "Let the great world spin forever down the ringing grooves of change:" "When I went by the first train from Liverpool to Manchester (1830), I thought that

the wheels ran in a groove. It was a black night, and there was such a vast crowd round the train at the station that we could not see the wheels. Then I made this line." — *Life*, i. p. 195.

"Here is another anecdote about suggestion. When I was about twenty or twenty-one I went on a tour to the Pyrenees. Lying among these mountains before a waterfall that comes down one thousand or twelve hundred feet, I sketched it (according to my custom then) in these words: 'Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn.'" — *Ib.*

The words "according to my custom" are worth noting. His son adds this footnote: —

When I was walking with my father almost for the last time, he said to me: "I generally take my nature similes direct from my observation of nature, and sometimes jot them down;" . . . If he was in the vein during a walk, he would make dozens of similes that were never chronicled.

He gives also from his father's note-books examples of striking figures made from nature as Tennyson walked.

(Torquay.) "As the little thrift
Trembles in perilous places o'er the deep."

(Bray Head.) "O friend, the great deeps of Eternity
Roar only round the wasting cliffs of time."

(River Shannon Rapids.) "Ledges of battling water."

The same literary habit of making similes is to be seen in the "American Note-Books" of Hawthorne, although the flavor is characteristically different from those of Tennyson.

Imitators of original authors might be compared to plaster casts of marble statues.

Language, — human language, — after all, is but little better than the croak and cackle of fowls and other utterances of brute nature, — sometimes not so adequate.

A gush of violets along a wood-path.

Bees are sometimes drowned (or suffocated) in the honey which they collect. So some writers are lost in their collected learning.

If the note-books of other authors were examined, I suppose that this habit would be found to be general with literary craftsmen.

Besides taking figures when they are presented to the mind by circumstance, it is well to look for them. It is excellent practice to employ time otherwise idle — the half hour on the train when reading is impossible, moments in long walks, intervals between appointments, and so on — in devising similes. Hunt a likeness down. Say to yourself that you will find an image which shall convey vividly such a thought. The first thing which comes to the mind will often be a mere conventionality like "the forehead of the hills;" but if each comparison upon which the mind hits is examined with critical care, better and better material will be found. The writer who refuses to be satisfied with a poor figure discovers one more apt.

In this search for comparisons the first step is to decide exactly what is to be the office of the figure. The exact point of likeness to be brought out must be entirely clear in the mind of the

seeker, and with this as a measure he may try each idea which presents itself. In making similes from things seen, the perception of the essential quality of the object or incident so impresses the attention that it is natural by association to connect it with some other thing, which, although perhaps seemingly remote, has the same essential characteristic. So with the idea to be illustrated sharply defined, the student looks about for some near and easily comprehended image which shows that idea strikingly and clearly.

One important result of the habit of making similes daily and hourly is that the material used is likely to come from familiar life, and thus the figure is apt to be of a sort to appeal to every reader. While it is true that the writer who deals with exalted themes is justified in employing stately ornaments and comparisons drawn from high matters, it is certain that the general reader is more likely to be touched and quickened if the illuminating word be drawn from familiar, even from homely, life.

A rosebud set with little willful thorns,
And sweet as English air could make her, she.

TENNYSON: *The Princess.*

Knowledge and timber should n't be much used till they are seasoned. — HOLMES: *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table.*

A man is a bundle of relations, a knot of roots, whose flower and fruitage is the world. — EMERSON: *History.*

His kingship was conspicuous by its workaday homespun. — LOWELL: *Abraham Lincoln.*

It would be easy, but is unnecessary to multiply examples. The student for whom I am writing will have small occasion to go far afield for comparisons; his business is to make those he uses tell, and this he will almost always accomplish best by availing himself of the likeness to be discovered in things near at hand.

Closely allied to the formal figure is the epithet. Strictly speaking, the epithet is a word of adjective force which is employed to characterize a substantive. In its narrower meaning the term denotes an adjective which is used to give force and vividness by bringing out some trait which in the thought expressed has especial significance.

If there is anything worse than an unimaginative man trying to write imaginatively, it is a heavy man when he fancies he is being facetious. He tramples out the last spark of cheerfulness with the broad, damp foot of a hippopotamus. — LOWELL: *Milton*.

The word 'damp' adds twofold force to the image, and gives to the whole a certain air of reality at once humorous and most effective. The epithet is one of the most easily abused of all rhetorical devices, so that Voltaire was not so far from the truth when he said that adjectives were the greatest enemies of the substantive, although they agreed with their nouns in gender, number, and case, — a jest more effective in French than in uninflected English. The epithet that adds nothing weights the style; well and cunningly employed epithets do more than any other single thing to add to com-

position that crowning grace which we call distinction.

The summing up of the whole matter in regard to figures is that they are the most natural and most forceful of the resources of language. Their force makes them the more dangerous when they are not well managed. To be satisfactory they must be clear, pertinent, and direct. They can be clear, pertinent, and direct only when they are entirely intended, simply stated, and above everything, fully realized.

XII

EXPOSITION

EXPOSITION is an explanation, a setting forth, or an expounding. It is an attempt to render something plain, an effort to convey to the reader a train of thought which represents the conclusions of the writer upon a subject. The writer, it is at once evident, must be acquainted with the subject with which he deals. He is presuming to teach, and must be in a position which justifies him in so doing. He is prepared to write an exposition only when he is able, in regard to the topic in hand, to take frankly and unreservedly the attitude of a teacher.

A teacher must have many good gifts and graces; and whoever else may fail to be well acquainted with a given lesson, he must have mastered it thoroughly. To teach he must first know. Whoever has taught understands how completely different is the attitude of the teacher from that of the pupil. While the pupil is hardly expected to be able to do more than reasonably well to understand the subject in hand, the teacher must be able to explain, to justify, to make clear relations, and to impart the whole matter. The pupil is excused with a sort of hearsay knowledge, but the teacher must have a vital experience of what he teaches.

Especially must he be able to comprehend and to represent a subject as a whole. He is responsible for the student's being able in turn to coördinate facts and theories so as to produce unity; and it is therefore essential that he himself have power to hold and to make clear a continuous train of thought.

The teacher, moreover, must have over his mind discipline so firm that he is not dependent upon moods. He must cover the wide difference between the train of thought which springs spontaneously in the mind and that which is laboriously worked out as a logical sequence of ideas relating to a subject forced upon the attention. The pupil may to a certain extent indulge the vagaries of his inclination, but the teacher must respond to the need of the moment. He must have trained his mind to give an intelligent judgment upon any matter presented to it. He is not equipped for instructing — nor is any individual ready for life — until he can command the resources of his inner self to the utmost. The trained person is one who can take a subject which may not at the outset especially appeal to him, which is full of complications, which is not in itself, perhaps, attractive, and can insist with himself that his mind shall master it thoroughly. He is able so to expend his whole mental strength, if need be, upon any necessary topic that the subject shall be examined, acquired, assimilated, and then shall be so organized, so illumined, and so presented that others shall be instructed. The mind of the teacher, in a word,

is so disciplined that it will work when it is ordered.

The ideal state of mind for him who wishes to communicate knowledge is that of being absolute master of all its resources. Many who possess no inconsiderable powers of thought are practically unable to command the best powers of their intelligence. They depend upon the whim of the moment, upon some outward pressure or inward impulse, to arouse their intellect. They fail to reflect that while any ordinary intellect naturally forms some opinion upon any subject which interests it, only the trained mind is able to judge clearly and lucidly of an indifferent or uninteresting matter. In this mastery of thought lies the difference between the sterile and the productive mind. Only one brain in a thousand has not the disposition to shirk work if it is allowed, and every student has moments when his intelligence seems almost to act like a spoiled child that hates to get up when called on a cold morning. To establish the power of the will over the intellect is the object of education, and the ability to exercise this power is what is meant by the proper use of the word 'cultivation.'

The mental process of the cultivated thinker when considering any subject is likely to be: first, to become sure of his terms, then clearly to set before his mind the facts and conditions, and lastly to make the possible and resulting deductions and conclusions. This gives a hint, and indeed practically affords a rule for the writer of exposition.

An exposition, broadly speaking, may be said to

consist of three steps which nearly correspond to the three steps of mental activity just set down: the Definition, the Statement, and the Inference.

Definition is making clear to self or to the reader what is under discussion.

Statement is the setting forth of whatever is to be said of the facts, conditions, relations, and so on, which it is the object of the exposition to make clear.

Inference is the conclusion or conclusions drawn.

These three parts will seldom be found as formal divisions in any ordinary exposition, but in some sort they are always present; and the writer must at least have them clear in his mind if he hopes to render his work well ordered, comprehensive, and symmetrical. Together they are woven as the strands which give a firmness of texture to the whole.

To illustrate the bearing of this analysis on the composition of an exposition, we may imagine that a student has been required to write a theme on "The Influence of College Life." He has first to concern himself with definition. He must decide what he means by college life as a moulding influence; whether its intellectual, its social, its moral aspects, or all these. He must consider, too, whether he is to deal with the effect upon specific characters or upon types; whether upon boys during the time they are in college or as a training for after life; whether at a special institution or as the result of any college. If he limits himself to one phase of influence, he must in the same way

decide fully in what sense he intends to treat that phase. If he is to consider the social effect of college life, for instance, he has to define for himself the sense in which he will use the word 'social.' Is it to mean simply formal society, adaptation to the more conventional and exclusive forms of human intercourse, or to imply all that renders a man more self-poised, more flexible, and more adaptable in any relations with his fellows? If, on the other hand, it is the intellectual influence of college life which is to be studied, the first step is to decide what is to be considered for this purpose the range of the term 'intellectual;' whether it is to be taken to mean the mere acquirement of information; whether it has relation to acquirement or to modification of mental conditions; whether it means change in the mind in the way of development or of modification; whether it shall be applied to an alteration in the student's attitude toward knowledge or toward life in general. All this is in the line of definition, and it is naturally connected with the statement of whatever facts bear upon the topic under discussion.

Statement has largely to do with fact. Theory belongs rather to whatever inference is part of an exposition. In the statement will come the observations of the writer; whatever he knows of general conditions at college, or such individual examples as bear upon the question in hand. From these he will inevitably draw some conclusions, and the value of the exposition will depend upon the reasonableness and convincingness of these infer-

ences, as these will in turn depend upon the clearness of the writer's original knowledge in regard to his intentions and the logic of his statements.

Composition, it should be remembered, is the art of communicating to others what is in the mind of the writer. To write without having the subject abundantly in mind is to invite the reader to a Barmecide feast of empty dishes. The necessity of insisting upon such particulars as those just given of the process of making an exposition arises from the stubborn idea of the untrained student that writing is something done with paper and ink. It is, on the contrary, something which is done with brains; it is less putting things on paper than it is thinking things out in the mind.

Before leaving the illustration of a theme on the influence of college life, we may glance a moment more at the difficulty, even with so simple a subject, of attaining perfect clarity of thinking. One of the first things which must be determined is the essential difference of life in a college from ordinary existence. If the subject be given out to a class of students, half the themes handed in will begin with a remark upon the great change which comes to a boy who finds himself for the first time freed from the restraints of home. The moment this idea is presented to the mind it is to be looked at, not as something with which to fill so much paper, but as a stepping-stone toward ideas beyond. It is necessary, for instance, to determine the distinctions between freedom at college and freedom elsewhere; to decide wherein lie the differences in

the conditions which surround a boy in a university and one who escapes from the restrictions of home by going away to live in a city or in a country village, on shipboard or in the army. To be of value, every thought in an exposition must have been tested by a comparison with allied ideas as wide and as exhaustive as the thinker is equal to making.

To learn to think is after all the prime essential in exposition-writing, and the beginning of thought is the realization of what is already known. The student who patiently examines his views on the subject of which he is to write, who determines to discover exactly how much he knows and what is the relative importance of each of his opinions, is likely soon to come to find that he is considering the theme chosen not only deeply, but with tangible results. The value of any exposition, to sum the matter up in a word, rests primarily and chiefly on the thoroughness of the thought which produces it.

XIII

DESCRIPTION

DESCRIPTION as a literary art is addressed primarily not to the ear but to the eye. The term is so loosely used that this fact is constantly lost sight of, and moreover in most cases the difficulty of appealing in words to the sense of vision brings it about that in composition description is apt to be mingled with some other form of writing, especially with exposition or narration. Even description by suggestion,[1] if it is to call up a picture at all definite, must deal with visual images.

In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. — DICKENS: *Christmas Carol.*

The one particular mentioned, a particular so happily chosen that it does the work of a page of less felicitous phrases, is a visual matter. In practice writers frequently use a more or less vague mixture of visual associations to bring up the sentiment which is related to the beauties of nature or art, and really make no successful effort to paint to the inner eye a definite image. This is entirely legitimate, and at times the effect is admirable. To avoid confusion of terms, however, it seems well in speaking of description to use the word strictly in

[1] See *Talks on Writing English*, pp. 188–190.

the sense of an attempt to present to the mind an inwardly visible picture.

To paint with words is of course, strictly speaking, impossible. Language can convey visual ideas only in the sense that it can effect new combinations of images already existing in the mind of the person addressed. This fact is taken advantage of when the subject is sufficiently simple, and a visual object is merely named, as one says simply that the moon shone, the grass waved, the roses were in bloom. The assumption is that every reader is able to make the picture for himself. This is generally true, but it is true with a limitation which illustrates how completely the mind depends for visual effects upon memory. If a man blind from birth read of moon, grass, or rose, it is not to be supposed that he has of it a mental impression which resembles the image in the thought of one who sees. The same fact is illustrated in any question of experience. Before I saw an olive I had read of it as a gray or silver-leaved tree, and when I added a sight of it to my experiences, I suddenly realized that a description in which olive-trees were mentioned I had always theretofore filled out with poplars. It had been the best I could do. The poplar was the only silver-leaved tree that I had seen, and no words could give me a picture clear enough to displace the actual image impressed on my mind by sight.

In the fact that the mind selects from the images which it has received through actual experiences of vision lies the secret of descriptive writing. This

limitation at once restricts the writer, and restricts him, moreover, to material which he can know only by inference. It forces the exercise of insight and common sense to divine and to combine the images which exist in the minds of his audience. With certain things every reader may reasonably be supposed to be familiar, as the sun, the moon, grass, trees, clouds, and so on. Other things it is fair to suppose that in all probability he has seen, as the sea, a cliff, a cave. Any one of these some individual reader may have missed, yet they all come within the ordinary experience of the persons to whom published writings would be likely to be addressed. Still other images which might be employed in description depend upon travel or especial experience, like the olive-tree of which I spoke, a cathedral, a walled town, or tropical foliage. Pictures of all sorts are nowadays so common as to have supplied to some extent the lack of experience, and it is for the author to decide for himself how far he may safely go in the employment of visual impressions of this third class. In the following passage a good deal is taken for granted: —

Blue-distant, a mountain of carven stone appeared before them, — the Temple, lifting to heaven its wilderness of chiseled pinnacles, flinging to the sky the golden spray of its decoration. Higher it grew with approach, the blue tones changed to gray, the outlines sharpened in the light. Then each detail became visible, the elephants of the pedestals standing upon tortoises of rock; the grim faces of the capitals; the serpents and monsters writhing among the friezes; the many-headed gods

of basalt in their galleries of fretted niches, tier above tier; the pictured foulness, the painted lusts, the divinities of abomination. And, yawning in the sloping precipice of sculpture, beneath a frenzied swarming of gods and Gopia, — a beetling pyramid of limbs and bodies interlocked, — the Gate, cavernous and shadowy as the mouth of Siva, devoured the living multitude. — LAFCADIO HEARN: *Chinese Ghosts.*

Any reader who has not traveled in India will involuntarily and inevitably, I think, try to recall pictures of Indian architecture, and if he cannot remember such, he will fail to produce mentally a clear vision of the temple-gate described. Description is in reality an invoking of the visual memory of the reader, and herein lies a principle which must be kept constantly in mind.

To overdo description is as easy as it is common. Stevenson shrewdly remarks: —

No human being ever spoke of scenery for above two minutes at a time, which makes one suspect that we hear too much of it in literature. — *Talk and Talkers.*

This is to be taken with reservations. Stevenson himself has given so many charming descriptions that it is not necessary to go beyond him for the necessary corrective; but he is certainly right in the implication that it is wise to be wary in the use of attempts to picture by words. Books overloaded with description do indeed please the unimaginative, who like to soak in warm, shallow pools of epithet, and to suppose that they have been thrilled. For such readers a novel should be made like a corn-ball, a little nourishment, a great

many husks, and sticky sweetness enough to hold the whole together. Readers who read to realize are not likely to be pleased by being kept long on the stretch of constructing mental pictures; and of most lengthy passages of this sort of writing it is safe to conclude that they merit what Jules Lemaître says of Zola's views of Paris from the top of the Trocadero:[1] "These descriptions, of which the shortest occupies at least ten pages of print, have become famous. Everybody admires them greatly, in many cases without having read them." Horace remarked long ago that when an unpoetic scribbler of verse comes to a standstill for want of ideas, he instantly begins to paint a grove, an altar, a brook flowing amid flowers, or something of the sort. The moral is that the inexperienced writer should be wary of engaging in description at all, should be sure that what he does write shall serve a definite purpose, and should in revision cut out all that he can possibly do without.

The point of view is the first thing to be decided upon. This is dwelt upon in all books on composition as far as the physical point of view is concerned.[2] The principle is simple, and if the writer will keep in mind the fact that he is endeavoring to produce a picture, it is not in the least difficult of application. In description as elsewhere, however, the point of view is not only physical, but mental and emotional. It has to do with the time selected, and with the mood of the person through whose

[1] *Impressions de Théâtre; Une Page d'Amour.*

[2] *Talks on Writing English*, p. 186.

eyes the writer supposes the thing pictured to be seen. It involves, moreover, not only the state of mind of the assumed spectator, but that of the audience.

The violation of mood in the point of view is illustrated by this extract from a theme: —

> Guy was so thoroughly out of sorts that he looked out gloomily over the trim lawns wet with rain, the dripping rhododendron beds, the lines of geraniums so cheery when the sun shone on them, and the view of the hills beyond, which his aunt took delight in showing visitors at sunset.

By the time the reader has read this sentence and been forced to take three distinct views in time and in mood, he is nearly incapable of creating in his mind any clear picture whatever. The same fault, to my thinking, injures the description of which this is a part: —

> To her happy mood the whole landscape was sunlit with the spirit of joyful spring; the tender green grass, the trees with their amethystine young leaves, springing from the sodden remains of last year's foliage, trodden down by the bitter storms of the winter, the brooks, so lately freed from ice, the soft sky, blue and milky with the mists of bygone rains.

The effort here seems to be to heighten the effect by a suggested contrast, but the contrast is more impressive than the original intent, and in the end I cannot feel the 'spirit of joyful spring' for the strength of the suggestion of winter. The writer has mingled the two like the fragments of a couple of broken lantern-slides swept up together.

The particulars to be included must be selected with reference to the chosen point of view. In every physical thing certain salient points most readily address the eye, and these, if reproduced, should call up the whole. The suggestion, however, is to the mind, or rather to the imagination through the mind. If we say: 'A horizontal line, two dots, and a perpendicular line,' we are far from conveying a vivid idea of a human face. Put the things in their proper position on paper, and the suggestion to the eye is instant. In written description the treatment must be different. Here is a passage in which the features rudely suggested by the dots and lines are chosen as all that it is necessary to use to bring up a face: —

> The flare of the match brought out of the darkness a red nose, bulbous and shining; a pair of bleared eyes, shaggy browed and fierce; a great, thick-lipped mouth, set with stumps of yellow, fang-like teeth.

Here is perhaps too much of epithet, but on the whole the picture is effective because of the choice of salient features.

In a landscape, or indeed in any picture, the need of choice of points is no less. Here is a bit which attempts to show what a man saw on coming out of Sever Hall, Harvard: —

> He came from the dimness of the corridor into the brightness of the open air, and, standing upon the steps, looked around. Opposite him, mellowed in the afternoon glow, stood a great white dormitory, the most conspicuous of the buildings which loosely enclosed a sort of quadrangle. In bold relief against its pale wall stood

out a couple of strong, tall pines. On his left the quadrangle was half spanned by a chapel-like building of gray stone; on the right, smaller, browner, and more solid, was what seemed a genuine chapel. Fine and fantastic were traced against the dull blue sky the leafless branches of the numerous elms dotting the faded turf between the ash-gray walks. Darkly green and picturesque, the pines, conspicuous against the white dormitory, appealed vividly to his eye, delighting him by their emphasis and by their charm.

This is moderately complex, yet it names only the buildings, the trees, turf, sky, and walks, the last three coming in for the merest mention. Specification of windows, doors, fallen leaves, chimneys, or any other detail has been omitted as likely rather to hinder than to help. Whether this is successful or not, it illustrates the manner of selection.

Analysis of this passage shows the method. The white dormitory directly opposite would first strike the eye of one coming out of the dim corridor. It is necessary at once to let the reader understand, however, that this is one of a group of buildings, and in a general way what is the form of the group. No one could look toward University Hall, the white dormitory, without being struck by the pines, and they must come in immediately. The library, being in itself so striking, would naturally claim the next place, and the chapel would come after. The trees which are scattered about the yard cannot be omitted, and the pines are mentioned again because when the elms are leafless the green masses dominate the whole picture. The attempt

here has been, as it must be in all description, to divine the order in which objects would present themselves to the mind, and then to overcome by judicious omission and swiftness of enumeration the fact that in real vision one point after another is apprehended so quickly that all seem to be seized by the eye at once. The two things of prime importance are selection of details and celerity of presentation.

Celerity of presentation means making possible to the reader quickness of apprehension. Largely this depends upon the order in which images or particulars are set forth. In the description just given the writer might say 'strong, tall pines,' 'tall, strong pines,' 'pines strong and tall,' or 'pines tall and strong.' To use either of the last two of these and give the substantive first is to run the risk that the mind of the reader will have called up the wrong sort of pines before the writer has time to tell him that they must be strong and tall. It is better to put the adjectives first. They indicate qualities, and cannot call up a picture until united with a substantive. After they have been given, however, the pines cannot come to mind except as limited by the descriptive words. The same sort of reasoning might be applied to the question of 'strong, tall,' or 'tall, strong,' although in this instance, as both are placed before the substantive, the question becomes one of mere accent. It is probable, or at least possible, that the reader, if given the phrase 'pines tall and strong,' would see instantly with the first adjective

a slender tree. The flash of the thought is never more instantaneous than in recalling a visual image, and it is necessary for him who would produce a given picture in the mind of the reader to provide for this. Whether the niceties with which I have been dealing in this paragraph appeal to the student or not, he must at least assent to one proposition; and that is that whoever writes description must guard carefully against the possibility of arousing in the reader's mind any impression that must afterward be removed or modified. So strongly do I feel that this should be insisted upon that I had thoughts of putting it down in staring capitals. Whether the impression be slight or deep, whether the chance is that it remain for the time required for pronouncing a syllable or for the reading of a dozen lines, is merely a matter of degree. The principle is the same. Clearness and swiftness of mental vision are not possible where images must be changed or discarded. The essential matter is that the writer shall not allow the formation of any impression outside of those which he distinctly and deliberately desires for his own predetermined effects.

A picture can be clear to a reader only when it is possible to hold in mind all particulars at once. How long a descriptive passage may profitably be under this restriction depends upon the power of the writer. M. Lemaître is of the opinion that the maximum limit should not exceed fifteen lines, which would perhaps be one hundred and fifty words. "All description which exceeds this," he

declares, "ceases to be clearly perceptible, even to the most vigorous intelligence; beyond that the reader has only a series of partial pictures of which the succession is fatiguing and boresome." I doubt if it is possible to fix so arbitrary a limit, since genius will generally contrive to prove itself superior to all rules; but the idea of such restriction is a safeguard to the ordinary writer. The piling up of details is like a shower of feathers, which may at first be charming, but which ends by smothering the beholder. The mind must see all at once, or it sees nothing clearly.

The difficulty of making the mind hold many points of vision at once is partially to be avoided by combining description with narration. Lessing in "Laocoön" set forth most admirably the principle that language is capable of conveying extension in time better than extension in space. Language can, in other words, better express action than appearance; it is adapted rather to narration than to description. The reason is evident. The eye seems to seize all parts of a scene at once; speech can at best reproduce them only one by one. Words must therefore fail to give the effect of sight; and to overcome this difficulty is the feat which the writer of pure description undertakes. A picture which is accomplished by the aid of narration gains by seeming to be wrought within the peculiar province of language; and where such an expedient is possible this method gives vividness and sureness of effect.

For the complete and most suggestive discussion

of this whole subject the student cannot do better than to go to the "Laocoön" itself; but I hope to be pardoned for quoting a part of Lessing's remarks on the famous passage in the Iliad which describes the making of the shield of Achilles. Having spoken of the difficulty of presenting in words a picture so complicated, Lessing continues:

Homer does not paint the shield as perfect and already made, but as a shield being made. He has availed himself of the much-praised artifice of changing that which is coexistent in his design into that which is successive, and thereby presenting us with a living picture of an action instead of the wearisome description of a body. We do not see the shield, but the divine master as he works. There he is with hammer and tongs before his anvil, and after he has wrought the plates out of the roughest ore, the figures which are destined for its ornament rise before our eyes, one after the other. . . . We do not lose sight of them till all are finished . . . and we stand amazed over the work. But it is with the believing amazement of an eye-witness who has seen the work wrought. — *Laocoön*, xviii.

The passage from Homer is too long to quote entire, but it is possible to give enough to show what Lessing meant.

And first he forged a strong and spacious shield
Adorned with twenty several hues; about whose verge he beat
A ring, threefold and radiant, and on the back he set
A silver handle; fivefold were the equal lines he drew
About the whole circumference, in which his hand did shew
(Directed by a knowing mind) a rare variety;

For in it he presented Earth; in it the Sea and Sky;
In it the never-wearied Sun, the Moon exactly round,
And all those Stars with which the brows of ample heaven are crowned:
Orion, all the Pleiades, and those seven Atlas got,
The close-beamed Hyades, the Bear, surnamed the Chariot,
That turns about heaven's axle-tree, holds ope a constant eye
Upon Orion, and of all the cressets in the sky
His golden forehead never bows to th' Ocean empery.
Two cities in the spacious field he built, with goodly state
Of divers-languaged men. The one did nuptials celebrate,
Observing at them solemn feasts, the brides from forth their bow'rs
With torches ushered through the streets. . . .
The other city other wars employed as busily,
Two armies glittering in arms, of one confederacy,
Besieged it, and a parlé had with those within the town. . . .
To these the fiery artisan did add a new eared field,
Large and thrice ploughed. . . .
There grew by this a field of corn, high, ripe, where reapers wrought. . . .
He set near this a vine of gold, that cracked beneath the weight
Of bunches black with being ripe, etc.

CHAPMAN: *Homer's Iliad*, xviii.

This manner of describing under the guise of narration is the method of Defoe and to a great extent that of Stevenson, to name but two of the many examples which might be cited. The device

of picturing a landscape as it comes gradually in sight to one approaching or as it is revealed by the dissolving of mist is an example of this method. Its danger lies in the fact that the writer is apt to become more interested in his story than in his picture, and the description is ruined. A passage from Scott will illustrate this.

> The library at Osbaldistone Hall was a gloomy room, whose antique oaken shelves bent beneath the weight of the ponderous folios so dear to the century, from which, under favor be it spoken, we have distilled matter for our quartos and octavos, and which, once more subjected to the alembic, may, should our sons be yet more frivolous than ourselves, be still farther reduced into duodecimos and pamphlets. The collection was chiefly classics, as well as foreign or ancient history, and, above all, divinity. — *Rob Roy.*

It was the eye of the story-teller, not that of the painter, which saw that the books were classics and divinity, and the point of view is violated. If in this especial instance no great harm is done, at least the clear impression which is given by the first two lines is blurred, and the sense of seeing the room vanishes. Properly employed, however, this narrative fashion of description produces a lively impression.

As a hint which is sometimes useful it may be added that an epithet of action is generally more vivid and convincing than one of simple condition. 'The brawling brook,' 'the foaming brook,' or 'the leaping brook' is more effective than 'the rough brook,' 'the silvery brook,' or 'the brown

brook.' 'The winding brook' conveys a clearer impression, it seems to me, than 'the crooked brook,' although one epithet means much the same thing as the other. 'The poplar hoary-leaved' brings to my mind an image less striking than that created by 'the quivering poplar.' To insist too strongly upon delicate differences of meaning such as these would perhaps be to confuse rather than to aid the student; but he who wishes to be an artist in the use of words must at least know that such shades of expression exist. If he goes far, he is sure some time to find himself where he needs to take advantage of them; to find, for instance, that the effect he wishes in a given passage is to be obtained only by a choice between epithets of motion and those of action.

The methods of the collection of material for any sort of literary work are likely to be as various as the writers; and this is of course no less true of description than it is of anything else. It is idle to think of an arbitrary law here, but certain hints may be taken from a conversation with Wordsworth which was related by Aubrey de Vere. The poet, one of the most loving and careful students of nature, was contrasting his own methods of work with those of Scott.

"He took pains," Wordsworth said; "he went out with his pencil and note-book, and jotted down whatever struck him most — a river rippling over the sands, a ruined tower on a rock above it, a promontory, and a mountain ash waving its red berries. He went home and wove the whole into a poetical description." After

a pause Wordsworth resumed, with a flashing eye and an impassioned voice: "But Nature does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms! He should have left his pencil and note-book at home, fixed his eye as he walked with reverent attention on all that surrounded him, and taken all into a heart that could understand and enjoy. Then, after several days had passed by, he should have interrogated his memory as to the scene. He would have discovered that, while much of what he had admired was preserved, much was also wisely obliterated; that which remained — the picture surviving in his mind — would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene, and done so in a large part by discarding that which, though in itself striking, was not characteristic. In every scene many of the most brilliant details are but accidental; a true eye for nature does not note them, or at least does not dwell on them." — MYERS: *Wordsworth.*

It is hardly possible to subordinate the visual to the literary sense, and the eye so quickly notes and absorbs that what is seen is taken in with a fullness of detail simply bewildering to writer or reader. A writer makes better work, I believe, with a remembered picture. The artist in line or color must see his subject while he works because he presents effects which appeal to the eye directly; the artist in words has from the many facts to select carefully and perhaps even laboriously the comparatively few before him which will arouse the imagination to build in the mind of the reader a complete picture. He needs all the aid which memory and forgetfulness can give him; memory to hold the essential and forgetfulness to expunge

the trivial details. It is through the imagination he must reach the reader, and it is with the imagination he must work. What has touched him so that it is remembered is likely also to appeal to the reader; what he has forgotten is probably that which is well omitted. It is certainly enormously difficult to produce a good literary picture in sight of the subject.

An illustration of what I mean may be found by any reader who will attempt to describe the room in which he is sitting. He will be in danger of coming at once to the difficulty, almost amounting to an impossibility, of deciding where to begin, what to mention, and what to omit. A student who tried this told me that after puzzling over the matter for half an hour she found herself beginning with a minute description of an elaborate inkstand on the table, going on with the windows and the wall-paper, and then coming to a standstill over the question whether she should or should not mention the fireplace. The things about her in actual physical presence distracted and confused her. When the scene is viewed only in remembrance, the essentials, as Wordsworth declared, remain in the mind, while the accidental, the unimportant, drop away.

The fewer traits, the fewer details, a description may contain without the omission of essentials, the more chance it has of being successful. The writer who is concerned with really presenting a picture will generally do well to cut out everything which he can possibly spare. The reader is far more

likely to be able to supply omissions than he is to be equal to the task of blending into a whole a number of trifling and unessential details. A sharp outline once secured, there is no danger that the reader will fail of filling it in. The less the imagination is hindered, if it is properly appealed to, the more sure is it to create a picture vivid and vital.

As a matter of training the student should set down in his note-book word-pictures of the places and of the persons which strike him. Whatever holds the attention through the eye may be made the subject of this sort of literary exercise. Do not look at the landscape or the man with a view of describing, but with the sole aim of seeing. Let the matter of selecting details alone, to be taken up from memory. Give yourself up entirely to the interest of the moment, and the result will be more satisfactory than if you looked in the consciously productive mood. The best literary work in all branches of creative production is that which is wrought from material not collected but lived; from experience rather than from observation; from that which has been felt and seen, rather than from that which has been dissected and analyzed. Do not go about looking for things to describe, but picture those which have found you, those which have asserted themselves to your attention, those which you have enjoyed without ulterior thought. It is not amiss to practice in a quiet way upon things or folk seen; to determine as you ride in the street-car what phrase would best convey the strange per-

sonality of the passenger opposite, to decide upon the color-epithet for the tint of sunset cloud, or sea, or sky; but this is only part of the general training of the mind to be always alert and receptive. The serious work is that of putting upon paper efforts at pictures in words, pictures pure and simple, pictures that are not the mushy sentimentality which in the cheap magazines is known as "word-painting," but clear and earnest attempts to arouse the imagination of the reader, and so to guide it that it shall create before the inner sight a visual image in all essentials resembling that in the mind of the author. To achieve this result, the most difficult of literary feats, hardly any amount of labor can be too great.

XIV

NARRATION

THE first great principle in all narration is that it shall be true. Literary truth in narration is the same whether the narrative be historical or fictitious. Its measure is the effect produced upon the reader. From a literary point of view that composition is true which produces an impression of reality; that is false which fails to be convincing. According to moral standards, it may be a fault in Defoe's "Journal of the Plague Year" that it should deceive the reader into a faith that it is a fact when it is really a fiction; judged by literary canons, it has in this its crowning merit. The moral question need not be minutely discussed here, but it is never well to allow a possible error in regard to the integrity of art, and it should therefore be said that the persuasiveness of art rests upon its fidelity to fundamental conditions of human life. Defoe is not literally honest in saying that he was a man in London at the time of the plague, but in his account of that doleful time he is true to the essential characteristics of humanity. He appeals to the reader's knowledge of human life, and he convinces by being faithful to the great actualities of mortal existence. The truth of literature is, then, the essential rather than the accidental truth.

The prime object of a writer is to produce in the mind of the reader the effect of veracity.

The measure of literary truth is naturally not that of actuality. A writer endeavors to persuade his readers to receive as real events which are real to him. Whether they are real in his knowledge or in his imagination, whether they have come to him by experience or by creation, has, so far as literary truth goes, nothing to do with the matter. Even if they have actually occurred, they may become false from a literary point of view by being so told as to seem unreal. The art of acting offers an easy illustration. A player presenting on the stage the part of a gentleman in a drawing-room would be ridiculous if he spoke in the actual tone of his model. It is his first concern that the audience shall hear what he says, and his voice must be raised to a pitch which in a drawing-room would be intolerable. If he spoke in a tone such as would be used in society, he would be inaudible beyond the footlights, and would give the impression of a clown too self-conscious to speak so as to be heard. His truth to the part is measured by the effect upon the audience. The same is no less true of the writer. If he set down exactly what is done, exactly what is said, he is like an actor speaking in a drawing-room voice. To literal fact he must be untrue, if need be, in order to produce that which is the object of work and the criterion by which work is to be judged, — the impression of truth upon his audience.

The rank of work as literature, it may be re-

marked in passing, is to be measured by this test. History and science are both to be ranked as literature below fiction and poetry, because in history and science literal truth is held of more importance than literary truth. History must confine itself to the presentation of what actually occurred; science must first of all be literally exact. In both cases, while it may be possible for the gifted writer to fulfill artistic requirements without sacrificing scientific or historic exactness, the latter qualities must be the first object. The impression of truth must throughout science and history be subordinate to actual truth, conviction is of less moment than accuracy, and from this it follows that neither sort of composition can take first rank as literary art. The test is that of placing the impression of truth above literal veracity, of owning first allegiance to the principles of human existence rather than to particular facts or events.

The choice of material in narration is constantly determined by the impression to be produced. It is often needful to be unreal to produce the effect of reality. The significant must be chosen, the ineffective must be suppressed. Literal and entire truth is as impossible as, if it could be recorded, it would be intolerable; and what shall be told is selected by the writer of narration entirely with an eye to giving those things which will impress the reader as coming naturally to mind. In remembering an event the mind almost inevitably retains the significant and in general neglects the insignificant. To force the accidental on the reader is to destroy

the sense of reality, which is the prime object of the literary artist.

As an illustration we may take this passage from Thackeray: —

"If your Majesty will please to enter the next apartment," says Esmond, preserving his grave tone, "I have some papers there which I would gladly submit to you, and by your permission, I will lead the way;" and taking the taper up, and backing before the Prince with very great ceremony, Mr. Esmond passed into the little Chaplain's room, through which we had just entered into the house. "Please to set a chair for his Majesty, Frank," says the Colonel to his companion, who wondered much at this scene, and was as much puzzled by it as the other actor in it. Then going to the crypt over the mantel-piece, the Colonel opened it, and drew thence the papers which so long had lain there. — *The History of Henry Esmond.*

This might have been written, with more literal exactness: —

"If your Majesty will please to enter the next apartment," says Esmond, preserving his grave tone, resting his hand on the back of a chair, and bowing as he spoke, "I have some papers there which I would gladly submit to you; and by your permission I will lead the way." He stepped forward a couple of paces. He took up the taper, bowing again, and backed before the Prince with great ceremony toward the door of the little Chaplain's room, through which we had just entered the house. He glanced under his arm as he bowed, to see the threshold, lest he should stumble and destroy the dignity of his march. The Prince followed slowly, regarding the other with a look at once of rage and stupefaction. His

coat, which he had put on unassisted, was all awry, his wig tumbled, and his ribbons rumpled. He rested his hand upon the hilt of a dagger which he wore at his belt, and he carried his head with a manner almost openly defiant. Behind him came Frank, most astonished of all, but following the lead which the Colonel gave. His steps were longer than those of the Prince, and once he had to stop to let his Majesty get farther ahead of him. Etc.

There is nothing here which might not have belonged to the real scene, but the stupid piling up of details has so blurred the outlines that the whole effect is spoiled.

All this is so obvious that there is but one excuse for bringing it in. Young writers are apt to feel that they produce distinctness of impression by minuteness and abundance of detail, and writers of experience and no small amount of vogue have explicitly advocated much the same doctrine. As far as these novelists are concerned, it is sufficient to say that whoever cares to analyze their stories will be fairly sure to find that they are successful in proportion directly as they disregard their own theories. To the younger writers it is necessary again and again to repeat that in all art one of the first laws is the absolute necessity of disregarding the unessential.

The distinction between what is properly to be called a plot and what is in reality only an episode is not unconnected with the question of what is material and what accidental, and in any case it needs to be considered. A plot, properly so called, is a

story which is complete in itself. It includes the beginning, the continuation, and the end of some series of acts, events, or emotions. In the short story it is essentially the same as in the long, although of necessity less complicated, and told in a different manner. In either case completeness is an essential. A story deals, for instance, with love. Of any phase of love which is made the theme, a plot must go to the very end. If the motive is unsatisfied, passionate devotion, the plot carries the reader to the end of that phase by tracing events until love is crowned with success or by some circumstance made forever impossible. Death or marriage, the discovery of fatal obstacles to union, or a complete change of fancy may conclude a plot of this sort and leave it complete. If the tale deal with ambition, patriotism, poverty, or adventure, it is equally bound to carry the story to a point where the reader may feel that this phase of existence is finished. An episode, on the other hand, is any incomplete fragment of life. It may be a mere digression of a page or the subject of a book. It remains an episode, even though it be made to do duty as a plot and to occupy volumes in the telling.

Episodes as excrescences on plots are rather uncommon in these days, when invention seems to flag, and when even an under-plot in novels is becoming somewhat the exception. Few novelists alive have the fertility of resource which allowed the older writers to put into a single novel the materials which might have been made to serve for half a dozen books. We have gone to the other

extreme, and an episode is not infrequently made meagrely to furnish forth the coldly set table of a voluminous novel. Dickens in "Bleak House" uses as his principal plot the story of Lady Dedlock, from her passionately misguided youth to her lonely and tragic death. More or less loosely connected with this are the stories of Ada and Richard, of Caddy Jellyby and Prince Turveydrop, of Miss Flite, of Poor Jo, of Esther and Dr. Woodcourt, of Mlle. Hortense, of George Rouncewell, and two or three more, any one of the sub-plots complete enough to serve as the theme of a novel after the modern mode. Dickens seemed always to have so superabundant a supply of material that he hardly could find room to express it; and any of his books has in it plots or suggestions of plots sufficient to set up a whole circulating library of current plot-scanty fiction. A tale may of course deal with a mystery, and thus end without solving what is the heart of the matter. In humorous writing this is a trick devised, perhaps, by mediæval writers; certainly used by them with much skill. The imitation of the mediæval story, such as "The Lady or the Tiger," by Mr. Stockton, is so well known that his tale is a sufficient example of this class. In serious work a plot ending with an unsolved riddle is made complete by carrying it to the point where it is evident that the mystery can never be solved. What is told is complete as far as human possibilities are concerned, and that is sufficient. Tales like Poe's "Assignation," although there is no explanation of what is said to

have happened, have complete plots because there is no human possibility of explaining. The whole is given as it appears to human intelligence; and the author has a right to assume that beyond that it is not possible for a human narrator to go. The real difference between plot and episode in any case is that of completeness or incompleteness.

All this I call to the attention of the student for the sake of impressing upon him that he should know in narrative whether he is dealing with a plot or an episode. I do not think of any work of fiction which has permanently kept a high place in literature which has embodied only an episode. "Tristram Shandy" might suggest itself as an exception, but that can hardly be said to hold rank as a novel at all, its effect depending upon its story so little that it need not be considered. We preserve with care the torso of an ancient statue, fondly and delightedly rebuilding in imagination the original figure of which it was a portion; in the comparatively rare instances in which sculptors have made as a complete work some portion of the human body, a hand, an arm, or a foot, art-lovers have acknowledged its beauty, but without finding it possible to be moved as the same piece would have moved them were it evidently a fragment of some lost whole. Nothing which is confessedly episodical can give, I believe, the effect of a complete work of art. The effect is sure to be as unsatisfactory as the subject is unfinished. A writer may deal with a long story or a short story; he may choose as his theme a complicated history or

one of the minor parts which make up such a tale; but the thing which he selects is to be given as a whole. It is to be complete in itself. He is not, by any theories about taking a page out of life or giving a transcript of existence, to be deluded into being content with an episode in place of a plot. A page out of life, treated as a page out of life, is no more a work of art than a leaf out of a volume is a complete book. It is the purpose of art to present to man those things which exist in life, but which it is difficult to see properly and properly to estimate while they are tangled up with the infinitely intricate tissues of life and death. Art takes one group of emotions and isolates it so that it is possible for human intelligence and emotion to grasp it firmly. Art is concerned vitally with the endeavor to enable the mind to seize the subject strongly and definitely, and above all as a whole. It is part of the task of the artist to make clear the relations of a theme to other events and emotions; but he does this by showing it in its own completeness and individuality.

The impossibility of separating any part from the whole of life is a good deal insisted upon in these days; and from this is deduced the theory that a story should have neither end nor beginning. This seems to me no more sensible than the theory that in making a coat the cloth should not be separated from the web. The fabric has been woven as a whole, and is not fairly represented, the manufacturer might say, by a piece cut from it and ingeniously fashioned into a garment. The obvious

answer is that the tailor is not trying to represent the web; he is making a coat. The artist is not — or should not be — attempting to show the whole of life; he is endeavoring to produce a work of art. The writer on political economy or the student of sociology may if he choose present fragments of the great web of human existence as fragments; but as on such a plan the tailor could not make a coat, so by such methods no writer would achieve a permanent work of art.

Certain tricks appear in one generation after another as novelties, apparently because their results are too ephemeral to leave an impression deep enough to be remembered. The careful and minute student of old fiction is surprised to find how many of the tricks now most lauded as original have been tried before. They have made in their day a temporary sensation; they make in our day a temporary sensation; but the conditions of art remain permanent, and these things do not succeed in holding a place in violation of what are the essentials of good work.

One fashion of this class which was greatly in evidence in my youth was that of ending a story sadly. The notion somehow arose that to be artistic a tale must conclude with heart-throbs of unmitigated anguish. The heroes and heroines of the stories which I attempted in my salad days invariably came out with bleeding hearts reekingly exposed to an unfeeling world like the eyes which in sacred art Santa Lucia carries about on a platter. I think now that I have learned better; and

meanwhile it is certainly true that the fad has happily gone out of sight. It will probably be reinvented as entirely new about the middle of the present century.[1]

The proper conclusion is that which grows inevitably out of the plot; but in general I feel that the fact that a theme necessarily leads to a sad ending is rather against it as literary material than in its favor. The general office of literature is to appeal to the sense of beauty and to conciliate man to life. The general taste for a pleasant ending is after all not so Philistine or so inartistic as it has sometimes been the fashion to consider it; behind this taste is the sense that it is the prime function of art to uplift, to inspire. The tragic tale which arouses courage and ideality is less sad than the light mocking gayety which leads to cynicism; and in the last analysis the value of a plot is to be measured by the uplift it gives. Whoever writes fiction must reckon with this fact. He may make up his mind that it is the office of his art to be didactic, to be depressing, to be cynical; the conditions of life are not altered by individual caprice, or even by individual conviction. Art will despite of all remain, as it has always remained, true to this principle of existing to inspire, to uplift, and to delight. He who writes against this principle in so far sacrifices his work. He may achieve the temporary success of novelty, but he cannot alter conditions. The great masters have changed the methods, but never the nature or the essential aims

[1] See *Talks on the Study of Literature*, p. 215.

of art. In proportion as the worker conforms to the fundamental characteristics which have been permanent in art from its beginnings, he is likely to achieve permanent success.

The secret of a work of genius is not to be plucked like a berry from a bush, or even to be picked out like the kernel from a nut. The ultimate difference between a work of genius and one of talent is not to be told in books on English Composition, or to be measured by the rules of rhetoric. The technical means by which genius has wrought are, however, open to the examination of any student of intelligence and patience. It is within the power of any one to discover by examination how large a part of a book by a master is devoted to dialogue, for instance; and what use is made of description, and, in a word, the means by which effects are produced. He may study the use of figure, the complexity or simplicity of style, the art with which one portion of the tale has been led up to or prepared for by others, the manner in which allusions which seem almost casual are made to serve as important links. Whatever is purely technical may be studied if examined with intelligence and care.

All this is deliberate training, and not the method by which stories are to be written. I believe that the less deliberately a tale is produced, other things being equal, the better it is likely to be. In training there is little danger of too much care in planning, in analyzing, in comparing; the sense of fitness, of proportion, of reality is to be

cultivated in every possible way. When it comes to actual production, once the story is planned, the writer will generally do well to let his imagination take the bit in its teeth, and run, or gallop if it will. The point is to have the mind so well trained that it will instinctively and almost unconsciously make the proportions, the working out, the truthfulness, all that they should be; and in revision exactly to correct all errors or shortcomings. A story is not worth much which leaves the writer so cold that he can be self-contained and consciously technical throughout, but on the other hand it is likely to have little artistic finish or merit unless by painstaking study the author has made himself exquisitely sensitive to form and to literary quality.

For practice it is well to cultivate the habit of planning tales, even with no especial intention of writing them out. To make of any narrative which one chances to hear the plot of a tale, and to set this down in order on paper, is excellent preparation for the moment when the story born in the imagination insists upon being written. To develop trifling incidents heard or seen in daily life, and to carry them to a possible and fictitiously legitimate conclusion is a method of training which is little less than essential to the making of a good literary craftsman; — and even a genius is hampered if he have not attained to good literary handicraft. A good exercise is to try to tell actual incidents which are improbable so that they shall have that convincingness which is literary truth. Every writer and every critic knows that real in-

cidents are apt to be the most unmanageable of material in fiction unless they are treated as things to be built upon and built up from. The thing which really happened is inflexible in form, and the writer is apt to depend for its effect upon its verity. The old proverb which pronounces truth stranger than fiction might be rewritten to declare that truth is too strange for fiction. In Hallam Tennyson's life of his father is given an illustration of this in a letter from the poet.

I have known an old fish-wife, who had lost two sons at sea, clench her fist at the advancing tide on a stormy day, and cry out "Ay! roar, do! How I hates to see thee show thy white teeth!" Now if I had adopted her exclamation in one of my poems, I dare say the critics would have thought it original enough, but would have advised me to go to nature for my old women and not to my own imagination; and indeed it is a strong figure.

Another example is vouched for by a correspondent of the London Academy. As fact it can hold its own by the establishing of the veracity of the writer; as fiction it would need to be told with the greatest art to be really persuasive.

Two friends, Mrs. A and Mrs. B, had lost sight of one another for some years, and Mrs. A had tried in vain to discover Mrs. B's whereabouts. A mail-steamer was wrecked, but the mails were ultimately recovered, and after some delay Mrs. A received a letter which had been contained in a submerged mail-bag. The envelope had evidently adhered closely, when wet, to another letter, and its blank side bore a more or less clear impression of reversed writing. This

writing, when held up to a looking-glass, proved to be the name and address of Mrs. B, with whom, by this means, communications were successfully reëstablished. — *London Academy*, May, 1899.

Incidents of this sort are always likely to come to the knowledge of the student, and it is excellent practice to see how they can be so told, so put into the proper atmosphere, that they shall seem real with the reality of life.

In training, — and it is always to be kept in mind we have here to do with nothing else, — the student should think over his story, should put as much of it on paper as is possible; but he should regard it all as material until he has made a definite and formal plan. Methods of actual production will and should differ according to the individualities of writers; but no student can afford to neglect the discipline of work which is systematic. When a plan is made, the material should be adjusted to it with equal care. What the student is to strive for is that state of mind when the thought will plan instinctively, so that it will be possible to write with abandon, and yet with artistic form; is the habit of thinking organically and systematically even in moments of most creative excitement. When this is achieved, it is possible to do good work impulsively, and to trust to revision for the correction of faults. Until the mind is so developed, however, while still the work of the student is going on, system and the organizing of material must be rigidly self-enforced.

Seriousness in writing, which is one of the essen-

tials of effective fiction, grows with the consciousness of the power of craftsmanship. Self-consciousness will ruin any attempt at art. The reader may be willing, or more than willing, to give himself up to the illusion of the moment, and to live in the ideal world which the author is creating; but in order that he may do this, it is necessary that he shall not be reminded that the whole is visionary. If the author hints, consciously or unconsciously, that the narrative is a matter of illusion, and that it might have been arranged otherwise, the whole dream-world falls to ruin like the palace of Rabesqurat when the pillars were smitten by Shibli. The audience is disillusioned and irritated by the more or less conscious feeling of having been played with. The author has asked attention for his imagination, and instead of it has presented his self-consciousness, that stupid form of vanity. If a thing is not true to the author, he has no business to tell it; and above all must he feel while writing that in his imagination the fiction which flows from his pen is informed by the most complete literary truth. He is to do his work seriously or to let it alone. This has been admirably put by Henry James.

> Fiction . . . if it will not give itself away, as they say in California, . . . must speak with assurance. . . . Certain accomplished novelists have a habit of giving themselves away which must often bring tears to the eyes of the people who take their fiction seriously. I was lately struck, in reading over many pages of Anthony Trollope, with his want of discretion in this particular.

In a digression, a parenthesis or an aside, he concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only 'making believe.' He admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime; it is what I mean by the attitude of apology, and it shocks me every whit as much in Trollope as it would have shocked me in Gibbon or Macaulay. It implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth (the truth, of course I mean, that he assumes, the premises that we must grant him, whatever they may be) than the historian, and in so doing it deprives him at a stroke of all his standing-room. To represent and illustrate the past, the actions of men, is the task of either writer, and the only difference that I can see is, in proportion as he succeeds, to the honor of the novelist, consisting as it does in his having more difficulty in collecting his evidence. — *The Art of Fiction.*

The ultimate appeal of any narrative must lie in the humanity of the work. Self-consciousness is fatal because it violates the principle that every human being instinctively desires truth; and although truth in the imagination be the aim of a tale, departure from even this verity offends the sense of fitness. The effectiveness of whatever is written, whether it be history, biography, or avowed fiction, will be directly proportionate to its appeal to human instincts, human interests, human emotions, human passions. Eccentricities may astonish, but the work which throbs with sympathy for daily life lives. He who goes far afield may create

astonishment, but the author who is loved is he who speaks directly and simply to the human being of the emotions which are common to all; who records the virtues, the imperfections, the feelings, above all the aspirations, the heart-beats, and the desires of a warm, live man, sound and sane.

XV

DIALOGUE

DIALOGUE[1] is at once one of the most delightful and one of the most elusive forms of prose literature. It is so easy to read that it seems the most simple thing in the world to write; while as a matter of fact nowhere is the saying that easy writing makes hard reading more true than in respect to dialogue. There may almost be said to be three kinds of literature: prose, verse, and talk, so individual and so different is the last. In the most formal and least plastic human speech there is a quality different from that of written discourse; and to make the printed page convey this characteristic difference so that what is written shall seem to have been spoken requires cunning art.

The use of quotation marks does not convert a passage into dialogue. Most young writers begin with the notion that if enough inverted commas are inserted the whole difficulty is solved. They scribble pages of their opinions, their fancies, their anything you please, and fondly and fatuously suppose that their quotation marks have made the whole into dialogue, as the alchemists credulously supposed that lead could be transmuted into gold by a muttered spell. They only succeed by their

[1] See *Talks on Writing English*, pp. 250–257.

punctuation in making their failure more conspicuous.

Dialogue is composition which produces the effect of human talk. It should as nearly as possible give the effect of conversation which is overheard. It must make plain to the reader who is speaking, as in real talk the voice would do, but it should accomplish this with as little show of effort as possible. Interruptions, even the smallest, diminish the sense of reality the moment they are unnecessary. Cooper is a warning in this particular. He had perhaps less skill in dialogue than any other writer of equal standing, continuity and naturalness being alike conspicuously absent whenever he makes his characters talk. Had he not possessed a power of inventing and arranging incident which has hardly been equaled by any American novelist before or since save Hawthorne, his books might easily have been killed by the mere weight of his heavy and clumsily constructed dialogues. A single sample, selected almost at random, will illustrate.

"I am not entirely ignorant of human character," returned the naturalist, prudently receding a little from the position which he had until now stoutly maintained at the very base of the hill. "But here comes one who may know its secret windings still better than I."

"Ellen! Ellen Wade!" cried Paul Hover, who had advanced to his elbow, without betraying any of that sensitiveness which had so manifestly discomposed the Doctor, "I did n't expect to find an enemy in you!"

"Nor shall you, when you ask that which I can grant

without treachery. You know that my uncle has trusted his family to my care, and shall I so far betray the trust as to let in his bitterest enemies to murder his children, perhaps, and to rob him of the little which the Indians have left?"

"Am I a murderer — is this old man — this officer of the states," pointing to the trapper and his newly discovered friend, both of whom by this time stood by his side, "is either of these likely to do the things you name?"

"What is it then you ask of me?" said Ellen, wringing her hands, in excessive doubt. — *The Prairie.*

The constant interruption of speech by long parenthetical clauses of description has a most exasperating effect upon the nerves. The dialogue is not good, and nothing but complete rewriting could make it so; but it might be much improved by simple rearrangement.

The naturalist prudently receded a little from the position which he had until now stoutly maintained at the very base of the hill. Paul Hover advanced to his elbow, without betraying any of that sensitiveness which had so manifestly discomposed the Doctor.

"I am not entirely ignorant of human character," Battius said, "but here is one who may know its secret windings still better than I."

"Ellen! Ellen Wade!" cried Paul, "I did n't expect to find an enemy in you!"

"Nor shall you, when you ask that which I can grant without treachery. You know that my uncle has trusted his family to my care, and shall I so far betray the trust as to let in his bitterest enemies to murder his children, perhaps, and to rob him of the little which the Indians have left?"

"Am I a murderer? Is this old man — this officer of the states, is either of these likely to do the things you name?"

He pointed to the trapper and his newly discovered friend, both of whom by this time stood by his side. Ellen wrung her hands in excessive doubt.

"What is it, then, that you ask of me?" she said.

I cannot give an air of ease to talk which is in itself stiff and unnatural, and I make my apologies to the ghost of Cooper for presuming to attempt to improve upon his work; but certainly the mere lessening of the number of interruptions does increase the force of the dialogue such as it is. It brings the whole toward that quality which written speech must have to be convincing, the sense of movement and spontaneity.

The theory of dialogue may be expressed under two heads: that of Convincingness and Interest.

To be convincing dialogue must seem the natural speech of the characters into the mouths of whom it is put, and of those characters under the circumstances represented. It must possess possibility, relevancy, and consistency. The author who makes the personages in a story the vehicles for the expression of his own views, and sets them at afternoon teas discoursing lengthily of 'faith, righteousness, and a judgment to come,' is little likely to persuade the reader that it is at all possible that such a conversation ever took place. Perhaps a better word to express what I mean is likelihood. It is the clever adaptation of dialogue to speakers and to situation so that the talk shall seem not only

possible but natural, and, if the author has the skill to go so far, shall even appear inevitable.

Relevancy is the quality which in dialogue is next in importance to possibility. This has to do with the relation of the dialogue to the narrative into which it is introduced. It is natural for an author well acquainted with his fictitious characters to write dialogue which might have passed among them, yet which has nothing to do with the tale in hand. Every writer of fiction must know a great deal more about the personages of whom he writes, and whom he is popularly said to 'create,' than belongs to any one particular story. Stevenson has written a quaint and charming bit of talk which is called "The Persons in the Tale," which may serve here as an illustration. It begins in this way: —

After the 32nd chapter of Treasure Island, two of the puppets strolled out to have a pipe before business should begin again, and met in an open place not far from the story.

"Good morning, Cap'n," said the first, with a man-o'-war salute and a beaming countenance.

"Ah, Silver!" grunted the other. "You 're in a bad way, Silver."

"Now, Cap'n Smollett," remonstrated Silver, "dooty is dooty, as I knows, and none better; but we 're off dooty now; and I can't see no call to keep up the morality business."

"You 're a damned rogue, my man," said the Captain.

"Come, come, Cap'n, be just," returned the other. "There 's no call to be angry with me in earnest. I 'm only a chara'ter in a sea story. I don't really exist."

"Well, I don't really exist either," says the Captain, "which seems to meet that."

And so on for a delightful five or six pages of half-fantastic discussion. All is written with a sure sense of the characters speaking, in spite of the fact that they weirdly acknowledge their own unreality; but it is evident that their dialogue has no place in the story. Constantly in novels, and perhaps especially in first novels, the reader finds pages of talk which has nothing to do with the narrative in hand. It expresses, for the most part, those discoveries in regard to life which the author, in common with all young people, has made, and has looked upon as new to mankind because they are new to him. When the young author has learned that all these wise thoughts in regard to existence have been the common property of mankind for uncounted generations, he is likely to be a good deal disappointed, but he is sure to write better stories. His dialogue will not be so overcrowded with theory and information, but it will possess much more relevancy.

The third element in the effectiveness of dialogue in narration is that it shall be consistent. The individuality of the speakers must uninterruptedly dominate the talk of each. Any sort of violation of the character of the speaker as it is understood by the writer injures the effect. The principle is that of application to dialogue of the point of view; and the success with which this is accomplished will depend upon the clearness of the conception which the author has of what that point of view —

in other words, the character of the personage in the tale — really is. Upon the clear realization of the individuality of the characters made to speak must rest the completeness with which is attained the great virtue of consistency.

Dialogue may be convincing, it may be made real to the reader by the high development of its possibility, its relevancy, and its consistency, and yet it may somehow fail to hold the reader. It is not easy to state definitely in general terms what gives charm to any sort of writing; but of one thing everybody is aware, that all formal merits are of less importance than the power to give pleasure to the reader. Without the qualities just named dialogue can have no lasting literary value, and is not likely even to achieve transient success; but with these qualities it may still fall flat for lack of the essential quality of interest.

The interest which dialogue inspires is of course dependent upon various things, as the soup upon which a *chef* stakes his reputation is compounded of many flavors. The propriety of the talk to the circumstances under which it is supposed to take place, the indications which it gives of the characters of the speakers, and the general flavor of brightness or wit, all tell greatly to increase the attractiveness of written conversations. The helping forward of the story is another and very forceful means by which dialogue makes itself interesting. One of the most brilliant examples of talk which carries the story forward is to be found in the D'Artagnan Romances. The talk of Dumas

at his best is rapid, clear, and convincing, while it advances the story with wonderful skill and verve. The novels of Dumas are full of exciting incidents which are told very largely by the talk; and when dialogue is thus carrying on an absorbingly interesting tale, it is one of the most effective forms of narration possible. Of the dialogue which owes its interest largely to its presentation of character Scott offers excellent examples. The talk of Caleb Balderstone, for instance, has little to do with the plot of "The Bride of Lammermoor;" it has some connection now and again with the situation and story, but its chief claim is in the knowledge it conveys to the reader of the character of the faithful though crotchety old serving-man. The talk of Sam Weller is not a bad illustration of the same thing. In both instances the element of humor is relied upon quite as much as is the actual display of character. How far it is possible to make attractive the talk which displays only traits in themselves dull and fatuous is a matter upon which there is much disagreement. The interminable prosing of Miss Bates in "Emma" is to some readers stupid and to others most amusing. The gentle satire upon human weakness is found delightful by many, and they are of that portion of the reading world which is most interested by the skillful delineation of human character.

The humanity of dialogue is really the element which most surely gives it interest. The skillful delineation of character of which I have just spoken is allied to this, and indeed it is hardly possible

to separate the two things. The author who has succeeded in making his personages real to himself will almost inevitably find them speaking like human beings, and in this case his dialogue will be at least convincing. To be entirely human the characters and the author must be in touch with the great heart of life; must be sympathetic, and feel to the quick the joy and the sorrow which belong to the whole human race.

Narrative effectiveness dialogue must have to be at all successful; the power of indicating character it must possess if it is to be regarded as serious literature; and its chance of ranking high or holding a place permanently will be in direct proportion to its embodiment of the essentially human.

Practical suggestions in regard to learning to write good dialogue should follow the largely theoretical remarks which I have been giving. Talk must be made neither too phonographically minute on the one hand, nor on the other fantastic, over-epigrammatic, symbolic, or opinion-laden. Once when I was suffering from writer's cramp a friend induced me to try dictating a story into a phonograph. A copyist was directed to set down literally what I had said, and the result began as follows: —

It was in one — one of those — er — those old, old weather-beaten New England farmhouses, standing alone in the country amid rocky pastures lived Marm Ackley. She — she was as weather-beaten as the crooked old apple-trees that bore bitter in her apples in

her orchard, and lacking, as lacking in comeliness as the great boulders on the hillsides about her.

This is of course not entirely fair, for I was for the first time face to face with an infernally burr-burr-burring cylinder, and confused by the feeling that I must keep up with it or perish in the attempt. It may serve, however, as an illustration of the difference between the literal and the effective. To include all the repetitions, hesitations, and trifling faults which are found in almost all speech is simply to tease and tire the reader. The mere fact of putting a thing on paper may so increase its importance as to destroy all proper proportions. Trollope says well: —

> The ordinary talk of ordinary people is carried on in short, sharp, expressive sentences, which, very frequently, are never completed, the language of which even among educated people is often incorrect. The novel-writer, in constructing his dialogue, must so steer between absolute accuracy of language — which would give to his conversation an air of pedantry — and the slovenly inaccuracy of ordinary talkers — which, if closely followed, would offend by an appearance of grimace — as to produce upon the ear of his readers a sense of reality. If he be quite real, he will seem to attempt to be funny. If he be quite correct, he will seem to be unreal. Above all, let the speeches be short. No character should utter above a dozen words in a breath, unless the writer can justify to himself a longer flood of speech by the specialty of the occasion. — *Autobiography.*

Common sense and a realization of the effect produced are the great principles.

Length of speeches is not to be judged by actuality. Any serious talk reproduced as pronounced would be likely to seem unnatural, because speech which is read appears longer than when uttered. The formality of reading, and the fact that the reader is receiving it by the eye, lengthens it in effect. A reader will accept speeches of half a page or a page in length if he is sufficiently interested in the matter, but such dialogue seldom produces the effect of reality. A little cleverness will so easily break up a dialogue that it is seldom wise to run without especial reason the risk of diminishing the hold upon the reader. Nothing more surely gives swiftness and briskness of movement than brevity of single remarks in dialogue. Dumas *père* is a shining example of this, and any reader of Stevenson and Kipling will recognize how their stories illustrate this point. The test in any case is the effect which the writer wishes to produce.

The surest method of discovering what will produce the effect of truth is what might paradoxically be called writing dialogue aloud. The trained writer is able to judge of effects without this test, but the student working for practice will do well not to put down anything as talk which he has not tried by actually saying it aloud. Anything which can be written may be read; but to say a thing is something different from reading it. To say a thing aloud will in most cases remove the speech so far from the personality of the author as to enable him to judge of it as talk; and many a writer has found on going over his work aloud that what

he called dialogue is simply prose bespattered with quotation marks.

Dialogue should not only be talk, but it should be easily intelligible. Twenty years ago it was the fashion to write a sort of conversational shorthand with the idea that it made the author seem to be extremely clever and subtle. In reality it made him appear like a fool. Here is an example in which the reader is expected to understand, so far as I can make out, that the personages in the tale were endowed with some sort of telepathy by which each comprehended what the other did not say.

"It will be hard to leave the old home," she murmured.

He comprehended her unspoken question, and responded: —

"In three days now."

She was silent a moment.

"It cannot be that you are right," she said slowly.

"I must be," a flush mounting his cheek as he found his thought read so accurately.

This sort of thing goes giddily on for a page, while the reader becomes more and more exasperated. 'He' may know what 'she' thinks and 'she' may have a supernatural understanding of what 'he' is driving at; but the reader is utterly in the dark as to the meaning of either, and regards the pair much as if they were gibbering monkeys. Young writers fall into this style sometimes through ignorance of how much of their thought they have got down on paper; but they are sure in that case to

give by this muddled and muddling talk the impression that they do not know themselves what they wish their characters to convey. The reader has rights, and one of them is that of having intelligence made plain.

Dialogue is often wisely made to indicate action, as interpolated comment is thus avoided. "Do stop pulling that rose to pieces, and listen;" "Why do you tease that dog so?" and bits of this sort will sometimes save the writer from explanation which would injure the effect of the talk.

A common colloquial use of dialogue is that of making oral story-telling effective. It has been said that Americans do not converse, but that instead they tell stories. 'Anecdotage' is a state into which no intelligent person willingly falls, leaving it for the traveling salesman and the man of few ideas; but Americans are hardly less fond of tales than Orientals, and the wish to be able to tell a story well is an entirely legitimate ambition. The accomplishment needs study and practice. Good *raconteurs* take more trouble with their stories than is generally appreciated; and the art, if not a great one, has its distinct social value. In talk and in letter-writing anecdotes offer the readiest means of brightening what might be otherwise too uniformly serious; and the effect of a brief tale depends in nine cases out of ten on the cleverness with which the speeches are rendered.

For training it is well to try the telling of brief stories entirely in dialogue. Any short magazine story may be taken, if original subjects do not

present themselves, or any incident of history or biography will serve. It is good practice, too, to work up anecdotes which come from daily experience, but which have never been put on paper before. If they have been printed, they are almost sure to have their form made, and the student gets better training where he is obliged to work with material entirely fresh.

Dramatic writing is a subject so extensive that it can be treated adequately only on a scale too large to be possible here. The general principle of a play theoretically is that the action tells the story. This is a principle seldom carried out fully, it is true, but the more action a play has in proportion to its words the more likely is it to be successful. Beginners confound movement — the coming and going of characters, the crossing and recrossing the stage, and so on, — with action; but action is the actual doing of something, and dramatic action is the doing of something really significant. All that has been said of talk applies to the dialogue of a play, but much talk which is entirely legitimate in a novel is utterly out of place on the stage. The playwright has an especial trade to learn, in order that he may know how to apply to dramatic uses the knowledge which he acquires of literary composition in general.

Dialogue is merely one of the accessories of Narration, but it is one of importance so great that it has seemed worth while to take it up at this length. The man who wishes to do anything in literature, even if it be no more than writing good letters,

should exercise himself in the writing of dialogue. He should put down scraps of talk that come into his mind, founded if possible on things that he has actually heard, but which are never attempts at actual reproduction. He must make his pen talk; not merely break narration, or description, or argument, or exposition up into bits; but actually, vitally, and humanly — talk.

XVI

PUNCTUATION

PUNCTUATION is sometimes spoken of as a mechanical matter, and is apt to be regarded as a thing which concerns the printer rather than the writer. It would, however, be far more logical to leave the compositor to put into his copy all the conjunctions and articles according to the rules of the printing-house, than to allow him to arrange the punctuation marks. Personally I can more easily forgive the over-intelligent printer who alters a word, than the one who takes liberties with my commas and semicolons. Some time there will arise a seer who will accurately deduce the exact progress of civilization from the general knowledge or ignorance of the proper use of semicolons; and against his coming writers should look to their own practice. Punctuation is the thermometer of professional exactness.

A writer should as clearly mean his commas as he means his nouns or his verbs; and nothing but a slovenly habit of mind will allow any student to go on flinging in commas at haphazard, and bestowing upon the reader a semicolon or a period as an excuse for taking breath. To lie by the use of a comma is no less morally wrong than to lie by the use of a substantive. Indeed, as being more sly, it is perhaps worse.

So many handbooks on punctuation are available that here I need do nothing more than to enter my protest that so many students of composition ignore this important branch of the subject. Proportion is a matter of many forms; and although this chapter is hardly longer than the famous one on the snakes in Iceland, it is meant to be emphatic by its very brevity. No man can write really well who cannot punctuate well; who does not vitally mean every punctuation mark as clearly and as vigorously as he means any word.

XVII

LETTER-WRITING

LETTER-WRITING is said to be largely a lost art in these days, the intercommunication of ideas being now accomplished by methods less laborious and as a rule less personal. I have been frequently asked in my lectures to say something of the way in which this lost art might be revived or cultivated; and I have always replied that all that may be said of any sort of composition applies to the making of letters. Composition is one; and it is an error to suppose that correspondence is so different from other forms of literary expression as to need an exclusive set of rules. Since I have been so often asked, however, to say something of letters, I may go on to make a few of the obvious applications of the principles of rhetoric. I realize that Johnson drew the picture of many an unhappy mortal when he wrote: —

> Tom Birch is as brisk as a bee in conversation, but no sooner does he take a pen in hand than it becomes a torpedo to him, and benumbs all his faculties. — *Rambler.*

To persons afflicted with this unfortunate temperament the composition of a letter is apt to present itself as a work of great difficulty, and for

their benefit it is charity to offer all possible assistance.

The reason why to many persons letter-writing is so difficult and the resulting epistles are so poor is that so few correspondents are willing to take the trouble to write well. The ordinary letter is merely a jotting down, without art or order, of whatever comes to mind during the brief interval given to composition. It is rare, I believe, for a modern letter-writer to plan a note with reference to its effectiveness; or to take any pains to give to it the appearance of unity. A letter is apt to be a mere handful of scraps of news, not even agglutinated by the ink, but with each fact as distinct and individual as a pebble. In personal and family letters it is generally inevitable that a good many bits of news should be included; but no real reason exists why something should not be done to bring these fragments into some sort of relation. If they cannot be made into a flawless whole, they may at least be worked into a very pretty mosaic. When persons complain that they cannot write good letters they are generally, with entire unconsciousness, explaining that they shrink from the labor of doing it.

Effective letter-writing always counts, and this is especially true to-day, when so few persons will concern themselves to do it. I am not speaking, of course, of public letters, letters to the newspapers, whether of the sort of those highest expressions of British emotion, letters to the "Times," or of those poultices for the sore Bostonian soul,

letters to the "Transcript;" I have in view only private epistles, the correspondence of friends not intended in any way for public circulation. The man who produces good letters is sure to get his reward. His friends say of him that Jim must be clever or he could never write so well; and when all is said and done, it is the opinion of acquaintances and friends which tells most for the happiness or discomfort of life. He or she who chooses to assume that the thing which has to be done should be done well, who does not shirk the labor of being a good correspondent, may win no small degree of consideration and of comfort by the simple device of writing his letters well. The reputation which comes from this is not likely to be wide, but it is immediate and comforting.

The letter-writer has every possible advantage. His audience is defined by the fact that he addresses a particular person; he is allowed to use an easy and colloquial manner; his correspondent may generally be assumed to be interested in the matters which lie nearest to the life and heart of the writer; he may without impropriety express sentiments which policy or deference to others would force him to exclude from published composition; and ordinary epistles are so generally destitute of all literary effectiveness that any comparison is at once in favor of him who will take pains.

Outside of the literary class, of the men whose professional training is so complete that they inevitably write with attention to form and effect, the best letters to-day are probably written by

business men. The need of accomplishing a definite end, the desire to produce a well-determined impression, and the need to be absolutely clear lead the man of affairs to take pains with his letters. The wish to present a scheme in the way which will render it most attractive, the determination that the conditions of a new venture shall be put in a way which cannot be misunderstood, the practical and insistent necessities of business correspondence force the business man to letter-writing which is good because it is clear, exact, and well considered.

The notion is widespread that there is something artificial and even cold-blooded in planning a letter. The average mortal is apt to feel that to plan a letter as one lays out any other composition is to destroy all spontaneity. This idea is more than half pure indolence; the other half is nonsense. To read a letter written without plan is a sufficient answer. Such an epistle is likely to seem less spontaneous than one skillfully put together. Set down in disordered fragments, it conveys the impression — often falsely — that the writer has labored to find something to say; while the communication carefully arranged runs so smoothly as to have an air of ease and quickness.

Prevision and revision, those watchwords of all composition, are the secrets of good letter-writing, as of all other forms of expression.

Prevision has to do with the planning beforehand, and revision with the deliberate and patient rewriting of what can thereby be improved. To

set down from time to time the clever sayings of acquaintances, the story which has come from the experience of the writer himself, to turn a phrase happily, to express tersely the thing which he feels strongly, to relieve a bit of wisdom by a scrap of gossip, all these things are within the power of any person of education. This is the collecting of material, and in its homeliest and sometimes most comfortable shape it takes the form indicated by the following bit of newspaper wisdom: —

"I feel as though I had met a whole roomful of my old friends," said the girl who is trying — in spite of homesickness — to make her own way in the city. "I 've just had a letter from Aunt Louise. It is n't filled with her own aches and pains and trials and troubles. The home news is all here, but there is n't one selfish, whining word.

"She writes eight pages. See! She 's mentioned most of the people and places I 'm interested in, and told me dozens of things I wanted to hear about. I don't mean to say they 're important things; but it is nice to know the name of Cousin Carrie's baby, and to learn that Etta Mayo is taking music lessons, and to have a description of the new minister's family, and even to hear that they 've laid a new sidewalk over the muddy place above the post-office!

"'Gossip'? Perhaps it is, but it is n't mean gossip. I would n't hesitate to show it to any one who is mentioned here. And it makes me feel as though I 'd made a visit home, and found that I was n't forgotten.

"I know how Aunt Louise does it. She makes a list of the people we know, and when the time comes to write, she just looks at the list, to make sure she has n't

left any one out. She says she does n't pretend to be a letter-writer, but her letters do me lots of good, for all that. Little things look large when one 's away from home, and everything is news ! "

The wider the horizon of the correspondent, the broader the field over which the collecting of material may extend ; but the good letter is not written by trusting to an unassisted memory while the pen is actually in hand. The planning of a letter depends, too, upon the completeness with which the writer is aware of what is to be written.

In all letter-writing the fixing of the point of view by the personality of the one addressed is of the greatest assistance. I cannot deny myself the fun of quoting in illustration one of the prim little rhymes in which good children were instructed at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The muse of those lays wore stiffly starched bib and tucker, and demurely folded her mitted hands and ankle-tied feet ; but she was a quaint and attractive muse for all that : —

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER.

Maria intended a letter to write,
But could not begin (as she thought) to indite ;
So she went to her mother with pencil and slate,
Containing " Dear Sister," and also a date.

" With nothing to say, my dear girl, do not think
Of wasting your time over paper and ink ;
But certainly this is an excellent way,
To try with your slate to find something to say.

"I will give you a rule," said her mother. "My dear,
Just think for a moment your sister is here,
And what would you tell her? Consider, and then,
Though silent your tongue, you can speak with your pen."

ELIZABETH TURNER.

A letter must derive its value and interest largely from its subject and from the attitude of the mind of the writer. Some letters of course are mere matters of business or serve to communicate especial news; but the higher office of correspondence is to keep unbroken that sympathy of friend with friend which is so apt to suffer from separation and from the resulting diversity of interests. Friendship is preserved by the interchange of what is best, and no one writing to a friend should be content with giving to what he writes a value simply superficial and ephemeral. Modern periodicals have largely done away with the opportunities of making a private correspondence the means of conveying public news, and this is undoubtedly one reason why letter-writing has so generally fallen into neglect or dull mediocrity. Thought still remains as an illimitable field for the writer, and there are few things worth setting down at all which do not naturally suggest reflections which the recipient of a letter would be interested in, and which, coming sincerely from a thoughtful mood, are well worthy of being communicated. To fill a note with loose moral platitudes is to be infinitely tedious; but in the same way that one tells a friend opinions when talking with him, it is natural and appropriate to express views

and sentiments by the pen. The secret of doing this well is to consider what are our real opinions, and then to express them as simply and as pointedly as possible. No person with whom it is possible to carry on a real correspondence can fail to be interested in a frank and unaffected expression of opinions upon topics such as are naturally included in the most ordinary friendly letter. By false shame and self-consciousness a writer is sometimes hindered from saying the things which come to him while he is composing; but he must remember that the richness of the finished result is largely dependent upon the freshness and completeness with which he is willing to express his real thought.

To write a good letter is a proof of friendship and consideration, and conversely, to write carelessly is to treat slightingly. Two centuries and a half ago James Howell said wisely of a traveler's letters: —

> And by his missives let it appear that he doth not only remember, but meditate upon his friend; not to scribble a few cursory lines, but to write elaborately and methodically, and thereby he will quickly come to the habit of writing well. — *Instructions for Travel.*

To scribble a few cursory lines is all that the majority of persons are willing to do in these days of feverish activity and feverish restlessness.

The whole question may be summed up in a phrase current long ago in a certain village in Maine, derived from a local anecdote which is not dignified enough to be admitted into a book of this sort, yet which — with apologies — I cannot resist

telling. An eccentric old lady once lived there from whose head ungallant time had removed the locks of her youth. She possessed three wigs of degrees of warmth varying with their preservation. One was new and figured upon great occasions; the others, in graded states of dissolution, served for times of less importance. One hot day in summer she was to attend the funeral of a relative; and when ready to start she appeared, to the great dismay of her daughter, in her third-best, shabby wig, the gauze of its foundation showing in great patches. To all remonstrances upon her appearance the old lady had but one answer: "I don't care if it does look like the Old Scratch; it 's cool; and I 'm not going to get my head all het up just for Jane!" The moral is obvious. He who is not willing to take trouble to make a letter good in form and matter, well planned and well expressed, is simply not willing to heat his head for Jane. He does not feel that the occasion is worth his best effort. All the principles of composition apply to letters, as to other forms of expression, but perhaps that which, from its neglect, needs most to be insisted upon is the necessity of taking pains.

XVIII

EUPHONY

LANGUAGE, even when written, produces an effect by its appeal to the sense of hearing. That it may never be read aloud does not alter this fact, since what in hackneyed phrase is called the 'inner ear' listens as the eye translates the signs on the printed page. Through the actual silence the mind unconsciously hears the words as they would sound if pronounced, the cadences as they would fall; and it is not able to escape some influence from the possible effect of oral delivery. The appreciation of the melody of poetry when we read it in silence depends upon this principle, that the mind always receives language as if it were spoken. The extent of the influence of this potential value of language, like that of the actual effect when it is uttered, will vary according to the sensitiveness and responsiveness of the individual reader; but it can never be absent, and remains a permanent quality in composition. Every careful writer, therefore, keeps in mind the remembrance that what he puts on paper is addressed to the mind not only through the meaning, but through the sound. He endeavors not only to arouse the understanding, but also to please the ear.

The English language is one of great possibili-

ties in the matter of richness and variety of vocal effects, and it follows that readers of our tongue have unconsciously been trained to a sensitiveness which must be reckoned with by any writer who hopes for real success. The degree of responsiveness of course varies greatly, but so many masters of sound have wrought with English speech that the general appreciation of the charms of rhythm and melody are far greater than untrained writers are likely to comprehend. The remarkable variety of vowel sounds, the despair of foreigners learning the tongue, is one of the great resources of the literary craftsman; and this is supported generously by the abundance of irregular forms, especially in verbs. The remains of old inflections not only give to style an idiomatic aroma, but by doing away with the necessity of the repetition of terminations add much to variety, and hence to euphony. In such phrases as 'given and received,' 'he has decided and gone,' 'seen, taken, and held,' 'known, loved, and lost,' the irregular forms afford to the ear a pleasant variety which would be entirely wanting in a language with no exceptional inflections. More subtilely the relations of the consonants make an element in word-music which is of wonderful delicacy and beauty. I do not feel that as a working basis the clever dissection of Stevenson is likely to prove of great value to the ordinary student; but as an illustration of the extent to which analysis may be carried, a single passage may prove interesting, and it indicates the quality of English as a sound-language.

"I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for not without dust and heat." — [Milton.] Down to 'virtue,' the current S and R are both announced and repeated unobtrusively, and by way of grace-note that almost inseparable group PVF is given entire. The next phrase is a period of repose, almost ugly in itself, both S and R still audible, and B given as the last fulfillment of PVF. In the next four phrases, from 'that never' down to 'run for,' the mask is thrown off, and, but for a slight repetition of the F and V, the whole matter turns, almost too obtrusively, on S and R; first S coming to the front, and then R. In the concluding phrase all these favorite letters, and even the flat A, a timid preference for which is just perceptible, are discarded at a blow and in a bundle; and to make the break more obvious, every word ends with a dental, and all but one with T, for which we have been cautiously prepared since the beginning. The singular dignity of the first clause, and this hammer-stroke of the last, go far to make the charm of this exquisite sentence. But it is fair to own that S and R are used a little coarsely. — *Technical Elements of Style in Literature.*

Stevenson writes as if he were analyzing a piece of music, and I at least believe that Milton would have been a little astonished to read what he had done; but the analysis is sufficiently well supported by the facts to bear out the importance of sound and the capabilities of our tongue in this respect in adding a charm to style.

Definite rules for euphony are hardly to be given,

any more than it is possible to tell a musician how to make a good tune. It is easy, however, to define a tune which is not pleasing, and any tyro can inform a small boy why his early attempts to learn to whistle are a madness and a torment. If the student cannot be informed with much definiteness what he is to do in order to render his style attractive to the ear, he may at least be warned of certain things which he should avoid. Most of them are sufficiently obvious when once the attention has been called to them; but even these may be set down, so that in our examination of the subject we may come somewhere near to a reasonably complete catalogue of the worst offenses against euphony which are likely to be committed by the unwary.

The first and most obvious fault is that of unnecessary repetition. This applies in the first place to the actual repeating of words.

He maintained through life his playful *fancy*. His essays show signs of his bitter experiences, but he carries us along with him upon the train of his witty and delicate *fancy*.

This example is especially bad because the repeated words come at the close of consecutive sentences; and to end succeeding clauses or sentences with the same word, except for evident and deliberate emphasis, is always obnoxious to the ear. The principle applies also to the needless repetition of similar sounds.

His remarks were *shot* at a *short* man.

Rhyming syllables are equally bad. An example is the use of 'bitter' and 'witty' above. A more obvious one is this awkward sentence: —

In a little, green velvet valley, where a white brook turns a *mill*, stands a thatched cottage under a *hill*.

David Masson, in his life of Milton, gives a sharp criticism by that poet on this fault in a brother author.

Having occasion to quote these lines from . . . Bishop Hall,

> "Teach each hollow grove to sound his love,
> Wearying echo with one changeless word,"

he adds, ironically, "and so he well might, and all his auditory besides, with his 'teach each'!"

Excess of alliteration is the form of this fault which constantly besets young versifiers, and even poets of reputation are not always free from the charge of having carried this dangerous adornment too far. Swinburne frequently wearies by the rich, reduplicating redundance with which he overstrains the ear by repeating some favorite consonant, and lines like this from Lowell soon cloy, —

Sir Launfal flashed forth in his maiden mail.

How far alliteration may safely go in prose is a nice question, and must be determined by the ear of the writer. A sentence which I wrote just above was intentionally made detestable by its excessive alliteration; but properly applied this ornament in prose, as well as in verse, may be delight-

ful.[1] The point is that the ear first of all demands variety, and uniformity of sound is agreeable only when subordinate to this.

Any succession of words difficult of enunciation is to be avoided. As an ordinary working principle, the student hardly needs to remember more than that what is easy to pronounce is as a rule agreeable to hear. For special effects the tongue may be hindered, to give to the reader the impression of difficulty or of roughness, since one would naturally speak of impregnable crag-beset mountain fastnesses in phrases by intention more harsh and labored than the smoothly flowing clauses picturing flowery vales; but the general rule for style is to make it easy of enunciation. Analysis and synthesis of long and short vowels, of mute or liquid consonants, such as that quoted from Stevenson, may be interesting in study, but in practice these things seem to me to count for little. Euphony is dependent upon so many particulars that he who tries to achieve sweetness and melody by rule is all but sure to produce prose labored and formal. Careful reading aloud, with the judgment awake and sensitive to the facility with which phrases and sentences may be pronounced, is of more practical value to the student than any laborious attempt to try his work by elaborate rules. The great masters of style may or may not have produced their fine harmonies by putting words together according to intricate relations of sound; I do not believe that they often did, but in any case this belongs to

[1] See *Talks on Writing English*, pp. 112–114.

an advanced stage of literary craftsmanship.[1] The practical value of analysis is to give to the writer, when he finds his work unsatisfactory in euphony, the ability to tell wherein lies the fault.

Any arrangement of the members of a sentence which brings the voice to an abrupt stop is offensive to the ear. A common example of this fault is the awkward fashion of putting one object after two prepositions: 'as good as, if not better than, the other road,' 'let us go to, and not from, the shore.' If the preposition is a long word the fault is less obvious: 'go behind, rather than before him;' but dislocations of this sort are seldom elegant. A clause or a sentence should not end with words which check the voice, except in rare instances where some peculiar effect is to be striven for. It is not pleasant to end enunciation abruptly, any more than it is to stop suddenly in running; and the writer who tests his work by reading it aloud quickly discovers faults in this line.

Too regular sentence-measure is monotonous, and every schoolboy is taught that he must mingle long constructions with those briefer and more easily said. Equally is it made clear early in rhetorical training that metre is to be eschewed in prose. Rhythm is the agreeable rising and

[1] It may not be amiss to add that as far as we are able to judge from most imperfect knowledge, the more consciously learned the analysis of the poet in this line, the less satisfactory his melody in verse. Between *Enid* (1859) and *Balin and Balan* (1885) Tennyson had become very learned in verse analysis, but the latter poem no one would think of comparing with the former in metrical beauty. Such evidence is of course not conclusive, but it seems suggestive.

falling of the voice, the pleasant alternation of long and short, of accented and unaccented syllables; but it is distinct from the regular pattern of metre, which depends for its effect upon a repetition of combinations. The moment the beat in prose becomes regular the prose seems to be trying to masquerade as verse, like a man in the garb of a woman. The prose that is metrical is worse than that which is unrhythmical.

In the matter of euphony, it is well to remark in passing, modern readers have been made more critical by the cleverness in technical skill of the best of recent writers. During the whole of the nineteenth century, from the time of Edmund Burke, the growth of the rhythmical quality of English prose has been steady if not always uninterrupted. Macaulay did much and De Quincey perhaps even more to train the ears of readers of our language, and modern writers like Stevenson have consciously striven for prose harmony with much effect. The success of Shorthouse and probably of William Black owed much to the pleasure which their rhythms gave to readers who for the most part were entirely unaware of the exact technical quality which attracted them. The taste of readers has been educated so that the writer who aspires to do serious work must attain to some skill in word-music. Other qualities are needed to insure permanent value, and neither flowing phrases nor super-sweet descriptions have sufficed to keep Black from falling into neglect; but the favor won by his books illustrates the fact that, in the matter

of sound, readers of to-day, without being conscious of it, are more exacting than those of the past.

The power of appreciating the harmonies of words is no more a universal gift than is an ear for music. One like the other — if, indeed, it is not near to the truth to consider them identical — may be lacking in readers, but either may be greatly developed by cultivation. The man who is not able to distinguish between the "Fisher's Hornpipe" and the "Dead March in Saul" may be left out of the account as abnormally deficient; and the general proposition may be laid down that the student in composition can and must train his ear. To train the ear means in this particular, as in all others, to train the mind. This is not a question of rules. It is not unlike instruction in good manners; young persons may be taught what to avoid and even what to do in society, but can never be made well-bred by rules of etiquette. One receptive hour in the company of a truly courteous gentlewoman will effect more than the study of the most elaborate manuals of behavior; and in the same way a greater gain comes from the appreciative reading of a page of a master of word-music than by chapters of the most cunning analysis. Talk about the musical properties of combinations of letters may be indirectly useful by rendering the mind alert to sound-values in words, but reading aloud for pleasure in verbal melody is the real method of education. Ruskin in "Modern Painters," Cardinal Newman, Hawthorne, Milton in his best prose, Burke, are examples of prose writers

who are admirable for this use. The reading of poetry, and especially of the blank verse of Milton, Beaumont and Fletcher, and above all of Shakespeare, is perhaps even more productive of good, if combined with a sufficient reading of prose to prevent the danger of associating rhythm and melody exclusively with poetry. The thing to be sought for is to render one's own ear exacting, and this is best done by filling the mind with examples of the most perfect verbal harmony.

XIX

THE LITERARY LIFE

THE pursuit of literature as a profession generally begins with dreams vague but delightful of future triumphs, of world-wide fame, of wealth at least approaching, even if not surpassing, the dreams of avarice. Young writers do not, perhaps, phrase all this to themselves, and still less do they seriously consider the infrequency with which these rewards are won. They see the authors who have succeeded, and they have neither knowledge nor thought of the uncounted multitudes that have come to a gruesome end by the way. It is not to be expected that they should appreciate how small a proportion of those who attempt authorship succeed; but they might be supposed to note the sufficiently patent fact that fame and wealth seldom come to the same man through literature, at least in his lifetime. It is wise to insist somewhat that a young writer will do well to consider specifically what he is aiming at, so that he run as little risk as may be of the danger of falling between two stools.

In these days it is practically unwise for him who desires notoriety and money to indulge in dreams of lasting fame. The roads to permanent reputation and to popular success are not the same.

A few writers have been popular in their lifetimes and famous afterward; but when one begins to try to count them, the fingers of a single hand will serve for much going over of literary history. Certainly no harm can come from a proper estimate of self, and a young man will be no worse for understanding what he is most in earnest about. He can lose little and may gain much if he is able to decide whether he loves art as art, whether he is anxious for fame, or whether he really desires most the substantial reward of a corpulent bank account.

A youth who decides to follow a life of letters will not do amiss to be frank with himself at the start. He may say to his inner self: "I can make money with my pen. It is a business like another. I should find it pleasant, to be sure, to try to produce literature; but I see that it does not pay. I prefer the flesh-pots of Egypt, hot, well filled, highly spiced, to any vague promises of the delights of a far-off and rather doubtful Canaan of art. I will write what people will buy; and I will take my reward as I go, in pleasant applause and good hard cash." Or if he be of another mind, he may have the hardihood to say to himself something of this sort: "It is true that if I do the best that I can in literature, I shall be hard put to it to pay the butcher and the baker. The candlestick-maker will dwell in abundance, while by the glimmer of a tallow dip set in the meanest of his wares I wearily and very likely hungrily write that which not one man in a thousand would care

to read, and not one woman in ten thousand would think of taking out of the circulating library. There is, moreover, the gravest doubt whether, even after I am dead and cannot enjoy it if it comes, reputation will crown my work. Yet in spite of all this, I am so constituted that the delight of doing my best, the pleasure of serving my art, will make up to me for all that I forego in choosing to strive toward literary perfection. I elect to walk while others ride, to be splashed by mud from the carriage wheels of the wife of the man whose rubbish is sold by the million copies and given away with the popular brand of soap; I will starve if it must be, but I will live my own life." Something of one of these decisions it will be well to adopt at the start.

When the decision is made, it is to be abided by. A man has no more right to complain at the loss of the thing he deliberately let go than he has to be angry that two and two make four. It is true that few are able to make the higher choice without some secret thought, — that unacknowledged hope which, all intangible as it is, is one of the most comforting delusions of life; that hope not put into word even in the most secret chamber of the heart, yet without which so many heroisms would be impossible! — some deeply hidden conviction that fortune will to them be so propitious that all discouraging precedents will be violated. It is so hard for youth to believe that anything it desires is impossible! The ardent young author, working steadfastly in his attic, has a firm faith

that fame and fortune will one day be his in abundance. That this dream is so often false is profoundly pathetic; but it is not a vital misfortune if the man be virile enough not to be soured by disappointment and disillusion. Character is the great stake for which one plays the game of life; and if this is won, the rest is of less, no matter how grave, weight. The failure of literary aspirations is bitter, but the worst is escaped as long so one is able firmly to say: "I chose the pleasure of an unviolated literary conscience, the delight of serving art with my best endeavor, rather than the rewards of meretricious work. I have had what I bargained for; and I stand by that ungrudgingly. If I hoped for a bonus at the hand of Fortune and have not got it, at least I have received the price which I stipulated."

The price stipulated in such a bargain with life is at least sure. He who elects to serve literature and to do his best for the pleasure of such doing cannot be robbed of his reward; while he who works for other advantages may and often does fail of securing them. He who makes the pleasure of being true to his best instincts his purpose is secure of the satisfaction which comes of nobility of intention and consciousness of high aim, while the man who seeks money and notoriety often comes to grief. A writer may even be willing to stoop to any and every low device to gain popularity, and yet may miss it. It is one thing for a man to be willing to sell himself to the devil, and quite another to induce the devil to pay his price.

No man devotes his life to any work without some more or less clearly defined idea of what he shall gain from such a course. The reward of literature is not money, although occasionally that will come in abundance, and in these days usually rewards in moderation any literary labor done at all well. The reward is not reputation, albeit that cannot but be pleasant to any man who wins it, for no sane human being can remain totally indifferent to the approval and applause of his fellows. These things are good, but they are not the true guerdons of art. The real reward of literature is the joy of producing it. There are few earthly delights which can compare with the pleasure of artistic creation: to feel a work grow in the mind and take shape under the hand; to look on a new found idea as a "watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken;" to be lifted above whatever is small or petty or annoying, whatever is unsatisfactory in human life, by the power of the creative impulse, — that is the true good of the literary worker; and it is a good so great that all others may well seem petty beside it. There is much else which is attractive and desirable, — contact with alert minds, familiarity with the thought of the world, and the enjoyment of an artistic atmosphere, — but these are less certain, and are really of less importance. The most admirable return for all one's labor that he hath under the sun is the joy of a congenial pursuit and the inspiration of creative effort.

This may seem somewhat far from the standards

of a workaday world. It is certain that no transports of literary creation will pay the coal bill or settle an account at the grocer's. Necessity knows no law, and a man may be forced to drudgery with the pen as with the pickaxe. To him, however, who is willing and able to sacrifice material to intellectual ends, what I have said is of actual and practical application. Literature reaches far, and those who have written in the love of it as an art will realize that there is nothing extravagant in the lines in which Mrs. Browning makes the poet comfort his fellows for loss and failure in the ordinary acceptance of those terms.

> Sit still upon your thrones,
> O ye poetic ones!
> And if, sooth, the world decry you,
> Let it pass unnoticed by you!
> Ye to yourselves suffice,
> Without its flatteries.

The man who gives his life to literature as a profession should be able to look upon the delight of work as the reward of work. If he is not able with his whole heart to do this, he is not wise in attempting literature in its higher and more exclusive sense. If such a man desire to write, he should study the taste of the least exacting portion of the public, and accommodate himself to the whim of the time. Given a reasonable intelligence and sufficient patience, any man with the smallest gifts may learn to write at least marketable stuff, and may earn an honest livelihood. Such work is

honest; and if it stands in much the same relation to literature that designs for sheet-iron ornaments stand to sculpture, it is not to be despised. The profession of the journalist, the magazine-writer, the editor, rank with the profession of law or medicine. There are quacks and incompetents in all professions, and in mechanical letters they are neither better nor worse than elsewhere; they are rather more in evidence, perhaps, but they no more degrade one profession than another.

Literature is a great creative art. The muse, however she may have been decried, and however many charlatans have injured her reputation by masking in her garments, was goddess-born. The vital question is whether a writer serves the real goddess, or is earning wage in the service of some pretender. Men who are the most mercenary hacks are angry if they are not regarded as of the priesthood; and for these need be neither tolerance nor respect. To those who look upon literature as a service and a high trust belongs the right to feel themselves apart from the servants of the material side of life; and they will recognize that for them the reward lies not in praise, but in being; not in outer, but inward gain.

The man to whom authorship is a trade naturally concerns himself with what the public will buy; his gains are tangible, and if he be honest, the wage he wins is honest wage. He who follows literature for the love of art will feel that it is the office of the author to make his fellow men realize the beauty and the truth that there is in life.

With patience, with humility, with reverence, yet with enthusiasm, he gives himself to the work, and finds his best repayment in the satisfaction of the endeavor worthily to write what is worthy to be written.

INDEX

INDEX

The Riverside Press
CAMBRIDGE . MASSACHUSETTS
U . S . A