

## CHAPTER III.

### FIGURES OF THOUGHT.

203. **Figures of Thought** are ornaments of composition consisting in an unusual turn given to the thought for the purpose of imparting to it special strength or beauty. As the expression and the thought expressed are intimately connected, it is often hard to tell whether the peculiar happy turn which constitutes the figure should be attributed to the thought or to the expression, and therefore whether it is a figure of thought or a figure of words. But it matters little, as both classes of figures are to be directed by the same rule.

204. **Rule for figures of words and of thought.**—Look to the end or purpose for which they are used—namely, to add strength or beauty. If a figure does either or both, it is well used; if not, it is faulty. The figures have no charm in themselves, but only in their effects upon the reader or hearer. If this rule is carefully observed all wordiness and declamation will be avoided; for these are the only abuses to which these figures are liable.

205. **The chief figures of thought are:**

1. **Preterition**, when we pretend to omit an argument, thereby calling attention to it.

“I was going to awake your justice to this unhappy part of our fellow creatures by bringing before you some of the circumstances of this awful plague of hunger. Of all the calamities which beset and waylay the life of man, this comes the nearest to the heart, and is

that wherein the proudest of us all feels himself to be nothing more than he is—but I find myself unable to manage it with decorum. These details are so degrading to the sufferers and to the hearers, they are so humiliating to human nature itself, that I consider it more advisable to throw a pall over the hideous object and leave it to your general conceptions.”—*E. Burke.*

206. **2. Reticence**, which purposely leaves a sentence unfinished; as:

“By these [mercenary armies] France and Spain, though blessed by nature with all that administers to the convenience of life, have been reduced to that contemptible state in which they now appear; and by these Britain—but if I was possessed of the gift of prophecy, I dare not, except by divine command, unfold the leaves on which the destiny of that once powerful kingdom is inscribed.”—*John Hancock.*

207. **3. Concession**, which yields a point with a view to making a more telling point.

“Yes, I have ambition, but it is the ambition of being the humble instrument in the hands of Providence to reconcile a divided people,” etc.—*Clay.*

“I agree with my honorable friends in thinking that we ought not to impose a government on France. I agree with them in deprecating the evil of war; but I deprecate still more the double evil of a peace without securities and a war without allies.”—*Grattan.*

208. **4. Paradox**, which advances what is seemingly absurd to make the assertion more striking: as:

“Do not despond, Athenians, even though your situation is very bad. For what is worst in the past is best for the future,” etc.—*Demosthenes.*

“The very excess of his [Burke's] tenderness made him cruel, and the vehemence of his detestation of injustice made him unjust.”—*Shaw.*

209. **5. Self-questioning**, in which the orator puts a question and answers it himself; as:

“And what was it which gave to our Lafayette his spotless fame?



The love of liberty. What has consecrated his memory in the hearts of men? The love of liberty," etc.—*Everett*.

"What is it you can do? This is the question. I answer: Be true to your religion; be true to your fatherland; be true to your families and to yourselves; be true to the glorious republic that opened her arms to receive you and give you the rights of citizenship."—*Rev. T. Burke, O.P.*

210. **6. Suspense**, which keeps the mind in uncertainty awhile, thus arousing attention to what comes next.

"You will read, sir, that Cæsar triumphed four times: first for his victory over the Gauls, secondly over Egypt, thirdly over Pharnaces, lastly over Juba, the friend of Cato. His first, second, and third triumphs were, we are told, magnificent. Before him marched the princes. . . . His fourth triumph approaches, as magnificent as the former ones. It does not want its royal captive, its soldiers crowned with laurels, nor its multitude of spectators—but they send up no shout of exultation; they heave loud sighs; their cheeks are frequently wiped; their eyes are fixed upon one object that engrosses all their senses, their thoughts, their affections—it is the statue of Cato."—*Knowles*.

211. **7. Forestalling an objection**; as:

"But we are told the sanction of virtue is in the social laws of nations. They are sufficient to make man an honest, upright, moral being, such as your religion requires him to be. This objection is so directly at variance with common sense and daily experience that it scarcely deserves an answer."—*Rev. C. F. Smarius, S.J.*

212. **8. Vision** is a vivid description which presents a fact as passing before our eyes; as:

"But lo! the time is come; the awful words have been spoken; the mouth of unfailing Truth has declared his own body to be there. All are reverently and silently awaiting their turn to partake of the tremendous gift; the first have tasted it; Peter is burning and John is melting into tears. The life-giving portion is proffered to Judas, and he stretches to receive it. Oh! in pity let us hope that he understands not, notwithstanding the words just spoken, what it is! O Son of God! exclaim, if thou canst: Father, forgive, for he knows not what he doth."—*Cardinal Wiseman*,

213. **9. Mimesis** is the vivid description of a person's character; as:

"It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I saw the Queen of France, the Dauphiness, at Versailles; and surely there never lighted on this orb, which she scarcely seemed to touch, a more delightful vision. I saw her just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, glittering like the morning star, full of life, splendor, and joy."—*E. Burke*.

214. **10. Apostrophe** addresses absent persons as if present, or personified objects as if listening; as:

"Hail, sacred tabernacles, where thou, O Lord, dost descend at the voice of a mortal! Hail, mysterious altar, where Faith comes to receive its immortal food!" etc.—*Archbishop P. J. Ryan*.

"Accept, O Prince! these last efforts of a voice once familiar to your ears. With you all my funeral discourses are now to end. Instead of deploring the death of others, it shall be my study to learn from you how my own may be blessed," etc.—*Bossuet*.

215. **11. Comparison or Simile** illustrates the subject by comparing it with something else:

"Boundless as ocean is a mother's love."—*S. H. Messenger*.

"Men whose lives glided on like rivers that water the woodlands, Darkened by shadows of earth, but reflecting an image of heaven."  
—*Longfellow*.

"The diamond's sparkle and the ruby's tint are darksome compared to friendship's transcendent lustre. But the diamond can be imitated; so, too, alas! may friendship be assumed. As all precious gems are rare, so are friends. A true friend, like the ivy that clings to the walls of the old deserted castle, is ever by one's side to comfort us in sorrow and rejoice with us in prosperity."—*J. J. Hamlyn*.

216. **12. A Wish or Prayer** is often used as an elegant and powerful figure; as:

"Thus lived and thus died our sainted patriots! May their spirits still continue to hover over their countrymen, inspire all their councils, and guide them in the same virtuous and noble path! And may that God in whose hands are the issues of all things confirm and perpetuate to us the inestimable boon which through their



agency He has bestowed, and make our Columbia the bright exemplar for all the struggling sons of liberty around the globe!"—*Wirt*.

217. **13. Exclamation and Interrogation**, when they are used to adorn the style or move the heart; as:

"Has God rejected the beautiful in this temple of creation? . . . Who was the first painter that touched with his brush the flowers of the valley and tinged with deep azure the ocean? . . . Who was the first inspirer of music? Who was the first decorator that studded with gems the Milky Way, and spread his arch of splendor across the concave of this his temple?"—*Archbishop P. J. Ryan*.

218. **14. Allusions** hint at some fact sufficiently known, in illustration of the present subject. These, as well as **Maxims** and **Quotations**, are figures if they beautify the style; as:

"And why are these eternal gates thus lifted up? And why is this sublime spectacle revealed, if not that we may be induced to take the dove's wings and fly—fly from this earth, which the waters of bitterness and iniquity still cover, and bear the olive-branch of our reconciliation to this open ark, where alone our feet can rest?"—*Cardinal Wiseman*.

"Slowly as out of the heavens with apocalyptic splendors  
Sank the city of God, in the vision of John the Apostle,  
So with the cloudy walls of chrysolite, jasper, and sapphire  
Sank the broad, red sun, and over its turrets uplifted  
Glimmered the golden reed of the angel who measured the city."  
—*Longfellow*.

219. **Exercise 1.** Collect elegant figures from the speeches of Webster, Calhoun, Clay, Burke, Pitt, Chatham, Cardinals Wiseman, Newman, Manning, Fathers Burke and Smarius; or from any selections in prose or verse—*e g.*, from your reader or hand-book of elocution.

220 **Exercise 2.** Write an address, full of figures, to stir up indolent students or to enkindle in an audience feelings of patriotism, generosity in behalf of a disabled soldier, or any other noble sentiment.

## BOOK III.

### STYLE IN LITERARY COMPOSITION.

221. We have so far considered the chief elements of literary composition; we now proceed to combine these elements, and to study the more complex subject of *style*.

**Style** (from *stylus*, the ancient instrument for writing) is the manner in which a person expresses his thoughts and feelings by means of any of the fine arts. We speak of different styles in music, painting, architecture, etc. In literature style is the manner of expressing one's thoughts and feelings by means of language. A man's thoughts and feelings are not, in themselves, perceptible to other men. Style sets them forth in a sensible form; it gives them body and shape, beauty to please, and power to influence others. We study style with a view to increase this beauty and power in our compositions.

222. For this purpose we are to consider in so many chapters: 1. Beauty in itself; 2. Sublimity, Wit, and Humor, which are species of beauty; 3. Taste, which directs the use of these sources of pleasure; 4. Different species of style; 5. Improvement of style.