

with the rain dripping on it from the eaves; an unhappy *cur*, chained to a dog-house hard by, uttered something every now and then between a bark and a yelp; a drab of a kitchen wench trampled backwards and forwards through the yard in *pattens*, looking as sulky as the weather itself; every thing, in short, was *comfortless*¹ and forlorn, *excepting* a crew¹ of hard-drinking ducks, *assembled* like *boon companions* round¹ a puddle, and making a *riotous noise* over their *liquor*.'

"It was the *tomb* of a *crusader*; of one of those *military enthusiasts*, who so *strangely* mingled *religion* and *romance*, and whose *exploits form* the *connecting link* between *fact* and *fiction*, between the *history* and the *fairy tale*. There is something *extremely picturesque* in the *tombs* of these *adventurers*, *decorated* as they are with *rude armorial bearings* and *Gothic sculpture*. They *comport* with the *antiquated chapels* in which they are *generally* found; and in *considering* them, the *imagination* is *apt* to *kindle* with the *legendary associations*, the *romantic fiction*, the *chivalrous pomp* and *pageantry* which *poetry* has spread over the wars for the *sepulchre* of *Christ*.'

"In the first of these extracts, out of one hundred and eighty-nine words, all but twenty-two are probably native, the proportions being respectively eighty-nine and eleven per cent; in the second, which consists of one hundred and six words, we find no less than forty aliens, which is proportionally more than three times as many as in the first."²

Our associations with words of Anglo-Saxon origin often differ widely from those called up by words from the Latin. Change "The Ancient Mariner" to "The Old Sailor," and you throw the mind into a mood utterly inharmonious with the tone of Coleridge's poem. Substitute "What goes to make up a State?" for Sir William Jones's "What constitutes a State?" and you not only destroy the force of the associations with "constitutes," but also obscure the meaning. "It [whist] brings kind-

¹ *Crew* and *round* should have been italicized; *less* in *comfortless* should not have been italicized.

² Marsh: Lectures on the English Language, lect. vi.

ness into life and makes society cleave together" is less clear, as well as less vigorous, than Dr. Johnson's "It generates kindness and consolidates society." Another illustration of the difference between these two classes of words may be taken from Disraeli's "Coningsby." The question was of "A Conservative Cry" for the election of 1837.

"Tadpole took the paper and read, 'Our young Queen and our old Institutions.' The eyes of Tadpole sparkled as if they had met a gnomie sentence of Periander or Thales; then turning to Taper he said, 'What do you think of "ancient" instead of "old"?"

"'You cannot have "Our modern Queen and our ancient Institutions," said Mr. Taper.'¹

One serious difficulty with the etymological standard lies in the fact that, with the increasing demands of civilization for increased facilities of expression, words that originally bore the same, or almost the same, signification have received separate meanings. Such are: *bloody* and *sanguine*, *handy* and *manual*, *body* and *corpse*, *sheep* and *mutton*, *feather* and *plume*, *shepherd* and *pastor*,² *work* and *travel*. Sometimes the noun comes from one language, the adjective from another: *word* and *verbal*, *ship* and *naval*, *mouth* and *oral*, *tooth* and *dental*, *body* and *corporal*, *egg* and *oval*. Sometimes words for which there were no equivalents in Anglo-Saxon have been taken from the Latin or the Greek: *civilization*, *religion*, *politics*, *science*, *art*, *electricity*, *clergy*, *member of Congress*, *chemist*, *musician*, *telephone*, *elevator*, *veto*, *album*, *gratis*, *data*, *dynamite*, *quorum*, *ignoramus*, *aroma*, *anemone*, *premierum*, *ratio*, *index*, *vertigo*, *dyspepsia*, *neuralgia*, *siren*.

¹ Disraeli: Coningsby, book v. chap. ii.

² *Pastoral* is, however, still used in both the literal and the figurative sense.

Whatever the language might have been but for the Norman Conquest, it is now a composite language, in which every part has its function, every word in good use its reason for existence.¹

"I would gladly," writes Landor, "see our language enriched as far as it can be without depraving it. At present [in the eighteenth century] we recur to the Latin and reject the Saxon, thus strengthening our language just as our empire is strengthened by severing from it the most flourishing of its provinces. In another age, we may cut down the branches of Latin to admit the Saxon to shoot up again; for opposites come perpetually round. But it would be folly to throw away a current and commodious piece of money because of the stamp upon it, or to refuse an accession to an estate because our grandfather could do without it. A book composed of merely Saxon words (if such a thing could be) would only prove the perverseness of the author. It would be inelegant, inharmonious, and deficient in the power of conveying thoughts and images, of which, indeed, such a writer could have but extremely few at starting. Let the Saxon, however, be always the ground-work."²

In John Bright's style "there was," says a recent writer, "a consummate union of simplicity and dignity. Its resources were equal to every demand that he made upon it. It was perfect for all purposes, — for plain narrative, for homely humour, for picturesque description, for fierce invective, for pathos, for stateliness, for the expression of lofty moral sentiment, for imaginative splendour. To attribute its unique excellence — as is the habit of critics — to Mr. Bright's anxiety to adhere to an almost exclusive use of the Saxon elements of our language is an error; and it is an error from which the critics should have been saved by Mr. Bright's delight in Milton, who, of all our great poets, did most to enrich our plainer speech with the spoils of Greece and Rome. He knew exactly the moment when the Saxon element of our tongue would not serve him. Mr. Hutton pointed out many years ago the illustration of his wonderful felicity which is afforded by

¹ See James Hadley's "Brief History of the English Language," revised by G. L. Kittredge, §§ 40-44. Webster's International Dictionary; Introductory.

² Landor: Conversations, Third Series; Johnson and Horne (Tocke).

the famous sentence in which he looked forward to the time when it will be possible to say that 'England, the august mother of free nations, herself is free.' It is the word 'august,' with its train of splendid imperial associations, that gives to the sentence its spell for the imagination and its impressive dignity."¹

"When I say," writes Lowell, "that Shakespeare used the current language of his day, I mean only that he habitually employed such language as was universally comprehensible, — that he was not run away with by the hobby of any theory as to the fitness of this or that component of English for expressing certain thoughts or feelings. That the artistic value of a choice and noble diction was quite as well understood in his day as in ours is evident from the praises bestowed by his contemporaries on Drayton, and by the epithet 'well-languaged' applied to Daniel, whose poetic style is mainly as modern as that of Tennyson; but the endless absurdities about the comparative merits of Saxon and Norman-French, vented by persons incapable of distinguishing one tongue from the other, were as yet unheard of. Hasty generalizers are apt to overlook the fact that the Saxon was never, to any great extent, a literary language. Accordingly, it held its own very well in the names of common things, but failed to answer the demands of complex ideas derived from them. . . . For obvious reasons, the question is one that must be decided by reference to prose-writers, and not poets; it is, I think, pretty well settled that more words of Latin original were brought into the language in the century between 1550 and 1650 than in the whole period before or since, — and for the simple reason that they were absolutely needful to express new modes and combinations of thought. The language has gained immensely by the infusion, in richness of synonyme and in the power of expressing nice shades of thought and feeling, but more than all in light-footed polysyllables that trip singing to the music of verse. There are certain cases, it is true, where the vulgar Saxon word is refined, and the refined Latin vulgar, in poetry, — as in *sweat* and *perspiration*; but there are vastly more in which the Latin bears the bell. Perhaps there might be a question between the old English *again-rising* and *resurrection*; but there can be no doubt that *conscience* is better than *inwit*, and *remorse* than *again-bite*. Should we translate the title of Wordsworth's famous ode,

¹ R. W. Dale: Mr. Bright. The Contemporary Review, May, 1889.

'Intimations of Immortality' into 'Hints of Deathlessness,' it would hiss like an angry gander. If, instead of Shakespeare's

'Age cannot wither her,
Nor custom stale her infinite variety,'

we should say, 'her boundless manifoldness,' the sentiment would suffer in exact proportion with the music. What homebred English could ape the high Roman fashion of such togated words as

'The multitudinous sea¹ incarnadine,'—

where the huddling epithet implies the tempest-tossed soul of the speaker, and at the same time pictures the wallowing waste of ocean more vividly than the famous phrase of Æschylus does its rippling sunshine."²

Many of those who condemn the employment of Latin instead of Saxon words have in mind the pernicious practice of using long and unfamiliar expressions. Short and plain words are no doubt preferable to long and pedantic ones; but to give prominence to the etymological fact is to substitute an obscure for an obvious ground of preference.

It is, certainly, incumbent on him who would write well to avoid FINE WRITING,—that is, writing intended The vulgarity of fine writing. to display his verbal wardrobe; for, as Lord Chesterfield says, "It is by being well drest, not finely drest, that a gentleman should be distinguished."³

In fine writing, every clapping of hands is an "ovation," every fortune "colossal," every marriage an "alliance," every crowd a "sea of faces." A hair-dresser becomes a "tonorial artist;" an apple-stand, a "bureau of Pomona;" an old carpenter, a "gentleman long identified with the building interest;" an old thief, a "vet-

¹ See text in Shakspeare: Macbeth, act ii. scene ii.

² James Russell Lowell: Literary Essays; Shakspeare Once More.

³ Lord Chesterfield: Letter to his son, Nov. 8, O. S., 1750.

eran appropriator" or an "ancient purloiner." A man does not breakfast, he "discusses (or "partakes of") the morning repast;" he does not go to dinner, he "repairs to the festive board;" he does not go home, he "proceeds (or "wends his way") to his residence;" he does not go to bed, he "retires to his downy couch;" he does not lie on the grass, he "reclines upon the greensward;" he no longer waltzes, he "participates in round dances;" he is not thanked, he is "the recipient of grateful acknowledgments;" he sits, not for his portrait, but for his "counterfeit presentment." A house is not building, but is "in process of erection;" it is not all burned down, but is "destroyed in its entirety by the devouring element." A ship is not launched, it "glides into its native¹ element." When a man narrowly escapes drowning, "the waves are balked of their prey." Not only presidents, but aqueducts, millinery shops, and miners' strikes are "inaugurated." We no longer threaten, we "indulge in minatory expressions." Modest "I" has given place to pompous "we."²

"That right line 'I' is the very shortest, simplest, straight-forwardest means of communication between us, and stands for what it is worth and no more. Sometimes authors say 'The present writer has often remarked;' or 'The undersigned has observed;' or 'Mr. Roundabout presents his compliments to the gentle reader, and begs to state,' &c.; but 'I' is better and straighter than all these grimaces of modesty: and although these are Roundabout Papers, and may wander who knows whither, I shall ask leave to maintain the upright and simple perpendicular."³

Verbal finery is regarded by some as suitable to the pulpit. An American clergyman, for instance, was sub-

¹ Why "native"?

² For other examples, see "The Foundations of Rhetoric," pp. 176-180.

³ Thackeray: Roundabout Papers; On Two Children in Black.

jected to severe censure for using the word "beans" in a sermon, and a writer in an English magazine says that he remembers "quite¹ a sensation running through a congregation when a preacher, one evening, instead of talking about 'habits of cleanliness' and the 'necessity of regular ablution,' remarked that 'plenty of soap and water had a healthy bracing effect upon the body, and so indirectly benefited the mind.'"²

In a dialogue between Mrs. Vincy and Rosamond, George Eliot sets her mark on fine language:—

"'But I shall not marry any Middlemarch young man.'

"'So it seems, my love, for you have as good as refused the pick of them; and, if there 's better to be had, I'm sure there 's no girl better deserves it.'

"'Excuse me, mamma. I wish you would not say "the pick of them."'

"'Why, what else are they?'

"'I mean, mamma, it is rather a vulgar expression.'

"'Very likely, my dear. I was never a good speaker. What should I say?'

"'The best of them.'

"'Why, that seems just as plain and common. If I had had time to think, I should have said "the most superior young men."'"³

A potent cause of the preference for fine over simple language is the desire to be witty or humorous. For this taste, Dickens — inimitable at his best, but easily imitated at his worst — is in a great measure responsible.

"The Chuzzlewit Family . . . was, in the very earliest times, closely connected with the agricultural interest."⁴

"'I have heard it said, Mrs. Ned,' returned Mr. George, angrily, 'that a cat is free to contemplate a monarch.'"⁵

¹ See page 40.

² C. H. Grundy: Dull Sermons. Macmillan's Magazine, July, 1876.

³ George Eliot: Middlemarch, book i. chap. xi.

⁴ Dickens: Martin Chuzzlewit, chap. i. ⁵ Ibid., chap. iv.

"'The domestic assistants,'¹ said Mr. Pecksniff, 'sleep above.'"²

"It [Pecksniff's eye] had been piously upraised, with something of that expression which the poetry of ages has attributed to a domestic bird, when breathing its last amid the ravages of an electric storm" (a duck in a thunder storm).³

One form of fine writing is the designation of a specific object by a general term, which seems to magnify its proportions but which really destroys its individuality.

"Of course, on the great rise, down came a swarm of prodigious timber-rafts from the head waters of the Mississippi, coal barges from Pittsburg, little trading scows from everywhere, and broad-horns from 'Posey County,' Indiana, freighted with 'fruit and furniture' — the usual term for describing it, though in plain English the freight thus aggrandised was hoop-poles and pumpkins."⁴

The effect produced on the mind by general as compared with specific terms is analogous to that produced on the eye by distant as compared with near objects. Some writers on rhetoric⁵ General or specific terms? maintain that the idea conveyed by a general term or the picture made by a distant object, though less vivid than that produced by an individual term or a near object, is equally clear as far as it goes. Everybody is, however, in the habit of saying that he cannot "clearly make out" a distant object, — a remark implying that what is seen raises questions which cannot be answered until one approaches the object. In like manner, a general term suggests questions which only specific knowledge can answer. The assertion that Major André was

¹ These words are in character.

² Dickens: Martin Chuzzlewit, chap. v.

³ Ibid., chap. x.

⁴ Mark Twain: Life on the Mississippi, chap. x.

⁵ Campbell: The Philosophy of Rhetoric, book iii. chap. i. sect. i. Whately: Elements of Rhetoric, part iii. chap. ii. sect. i.

executed is clear as to the fact that he suffered death, but is not clear as to the manner of his death; the assertion that he was executed as a spy is clear to those who know the laws of war; the assertion that he was hanged is perfectly clear to everybody who knows what hanging is. If we hear that a friend has had "a piece of good fortune," we are in the dark as to its exact nature until we have clearer, because more specific, information. When the report came (in 1876) that "the Turkish troops committed many atrocities in Bulgaria," people either dismissed it as too vague to mean anything, or thought, some of one, some of another kind of atrocity; but when the papers said that fifty cities had been burned and ten thousand old men and children put to the sword, everybody understood what the Turks had been doing.

"The usual faintness of highly generalised ideas is forcibly brought home to us by the sudden increase of vividness that our conception of a substantive is sure to receive when an adjective is joined to it that limits the generalisation. Thus it is very difficult to form a mental conception corresponding to the word 'afternoon;' but if we hear the words 'a wet afternoon,' a mental picture arises at once, that has a fair amount of definition. If, however, we take a step further and expand the phrase to 'a wet afternoon in a country house,' the mind becomes crowded with imagery."¹

Instances of the superior value of individual or specific terms, as compared with general, abound in good writers. For example:—

"Up from my cabin,
My sea-gown scarf'd about me, in the dark
Groped I to find out them; had my desire,
Finger'd their packet, and in fine withdrew
To mine own room again; making so bold,

¹ Francis Galton: *Psychometric Facts*. The Nineteenth Century, March, 1879, p. 432.

My fears forgetting manners, to unseal
Their grand commission."¹

"Him there they found
Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve."²

"The *thin blue flame*
Lies on my *low burnt* fire, and *quivers* not;
Only that *film*, which *fluttered* on the grate,
Still *flutters* there."³

"It was a *close, warm, breezeless* summer night,
Wan, dull, and glaring, with a *dripping* fog
Low-hung and *thick* that covered all the sky."⁴

"— But the Kitten, how she *starts*,
Crouches, stretches, paws, and darts!"⁵

"You've the *brown ploughed* land before, where the oxen *steam* and
wheeze."⁶

"Where the long grasses *stifle* the water within the stream's bed."⁷

Burly, dozing humble-bee,
Where thou art is clime for me."⁸

"The long light *shakes* across the lakes,
And the wild cataract *leaps* in glory."⁹

"The lights begin to *twinkle* from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the *slow* moon *climbs*: the deep
Moans round with many voices."¹⁰

Specific terms are used with great skill in Tennyson's account of what happened when the prince awakened the sleeping beauty:—

"A touch, a kiss! the charm was snapt.
There rose a noise of striking clocks,
And feet that ran, and doors that clapt,
And barking dogs, and crowing cocks;

¹ Shakspeare: Hamlet, act v. scene ii.

² Milton: Paradise Lost, book iv. line 799.

³ Coleridge: Frost at Midnight.

⁴ William Wordsworth: The Prelude, book xiv.

⁵ Ibid.: The Kitten and Falling Leaves.

⁶ Browning: Up at a Villa — Down in the City. ⁷ Ibid.: Saul.

⁸ Emerson: The Humble-Bee.

⁹ Alfred Tennyson: Song in "The Princess." ¹⁰ Ibid.: Ulysses.

A fuller light illumined all,
A breeze thro' all the garden swept,
A sudden hubbub shook the hall,
And sixty feet the fountain leapt.

"The hedge broke in, the banner blew,
The butler drank, the steward scrawl'd,
The fire shot up, the martin flew,
The parrot scream'd, the peacock squall'd,
The maid and page renew'd their strife,
The palace bang'd, and buzz'd and clackt,
And all the long-pent stream of life
Dash'd downward in a cataract."¹

Another excellent example of the use of specific terms is the passage quoted for another purpose² from Irving's "Stout Gentleman."

It will generally be found that the more specific a word, the less likely it is to be bookish. In a real exigency, everybody grasps at the word that points to the individual person or thing he is speaking of; and the greater his interest, the greater the probability that his word will exactly express his meaning. To "talk like a book," on the other hand, means to use words that are unnecessarily abstract and general, — words that belong to books rather than to life.

Not that general terms should be discarded either from conversation or from print. They are, indeed, indispensable to a language which does any but the lowest work. Answering to no one thing in particular, they sum up in a convenient short-hand formula the characteristics of a number of things. If, having no class names, we were obliged in every instance to enumerate the members of a class, — if, instead of speaking of "literature," we were obliged to give a catalogue of the books that form literature, or, instead of

¹ Tennyson: The Day-Dream.

² See page 97.

speaking of "nations," to say Russians, Austrians, etc., — we should never have done.

General terms are preferable to specific in cases in which clearness is not the primary object, — when, for instance, a writer wishes to leave an object in obscurity in order either to avoid vulgar associations, or to produce the effect of vagueness and mystery, or to create a background for something more important.

Euphemisms¹ — fine substitutes for plain language — often spring from the desire to veil an unpleasant fact under words that do not clearly individualize it. Hence the use of *casket* for "coffin," *passing away* for "dying," *abstraction* for "pilfering," *a delicate transaction* or *a questionable act* for "a crime," *bad habits* or *disorderly conduct* for "drunkenness," *hair-wash* for "hair-dye," *a gay young man* for "a dissipated young man," *road agents* for "highway robbers," *misappropriation of property* for "embezzlement," *irregularities* for "forgeries," *sample-room* or *saloon* for "bar-room," *the late unpleasantness* for "the late Civil War," *society, environment, and tendency*² for "the world, the flesh, and the devil." Hence all the unnecessarily general expressions used by persons of all sorts and conditions, from the criminal who would rather not call his crime by its name to the preacher who, with his mind on an individual sinner, lashes vice in the abstract.

General terms are serviceable in "breaking bad news." A familiar example occurs in Macbeth.³ Ross, who has come to tell Macduff that his castle has been surprised and his wife and children slaughtered, begins by enumerating the woes of Scotland. He then slowly approaches

¹ From εὖ, well, and φημί, say.

² The expression of a London clergyman.

³ Act iv. scene iii

that part of the general suffering which touches Macduff most nearly, and at last tells him exactly what has happened.

General terms sometimes by their very vagueness stimulate the imagination. For example:—

“Will no one tell me what she sings? —
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For *old, unhappy, far-off things.*”¹

“A *privacy* of glorious light is thine.”²

“Enclosed
In a tumultuous *privacy* of storm.”³

“Or Music pours on mortals
Its beautiful *disdain.*”⁴

“Interpose at the difficult minute, snatch Saul, *the mistake*,
Saul, *the failure, the ruin*, he seems now, — and bid him awake
From the dream, the probation, the prelude, to find himself set
Clear and safe in new light and new life, — a new *harmony* yet,
To be run and continued, and ended — who knows?”⁵

“But she —
The glory of life, the beauty of the world,
The splendour of heaven,
. . . . that’s fast dying while we talk.”⁶

“It has been noted how well-chosen is the epithet ‘water’ applied to a lake in the lines, —

‘On one side lay the ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.’

. . . In the night all Sir Bedevere could observe, or care to observe, was that there was ‘some great water.’ We do not — he did not — want to know exactly what it was. Other thoughts, other cares, preoccupy him and us. Again, of dying Arthur we are told that ‘all his greaves and cuisses were dashed with drops of onset.’

¹ Wordsworth: The Solitary Reaper.

² Ibid.: To a Sky-Lark.

³ Emerson: The Snow-Storm.

⁴ Ibid.: The World-Soul.

⁵ Browning: Saul.

⁶ Ibid.: The Ring and the Book; Giuseppe Caponsacchi.

‘Onset’ is a very generic term, poetic because removed from all vulgar associations of common parlance, and vaguely suggestive not only of war’s pomp and circumstance, but of high deeds also, and heroic hearts, since onset belongs to mettle and daring; the word for vast and shadowy connotation is akin to Milton’s grand abstraction, ‘Far off *His coming* shone,’ or Shelley’s, ‘Where the Earthquake Demon taught her young *Ruin.*’¹

The proportion of general terms as compared with specific varies with the kind of composition. In philosophical works, for example, there is a larger proportion of general terms than in historical or dramatic; in Milton there is a larger proportion than in Shakspeare.

SECTION II.

FORCE.

In some kinds of composition, clearness is of primary importance. Such are judicial opinions, expositions of doctrine, chronicles of events, text-books of science, — all writings, in short, of which the sole purpose is to convey information. If, however, the communication of knowledge is not the sole aim, or if the reader’s attention cannot be taken for granted, the language should be not only clear but effective. A man whose eyes are shut or are turned away from an object will not see that object, however clear the atmosphere: he must be made to open his eyes and to turn them in the desired direction. Another man, though he sees the object, may take little interest in what he sees: his sympathies have not been awakened, his passions aroused, or his imagination set to work. The quality in language

¹ Roden Noel: The Poetry of Tennyson. The Contemporary Review, February, 1885.