

from life." "Nothing but great weight in things can afford a quite literal speech;"¹ but literal speech so weighted is irresistible. Hence the power of Demosthenes among the ancients, of Swift and Daniel Webster among the moderns.

SECTION III.

EASE.

Besides clearness (that which renders language intelligible to the reader) and force (that which renders it impressive in one way or another), there is a third quality essential to the best writing, — the quality which makes language agreeable. This quality has been called by different names, — *euphony, beauty, harmony, smoothness, grace, elegance, ease*. No one of these words covers the whole ground, but EASE covers more than any of the others. In books characterized by ease there is nothing that irritates or distracts, and there is much that pleases. The reader goes from well-chosen word to well-chosen word without a jar and with an agreeable sense that he is getting on.

"It will," says Trollope, "be granted, I think, by readers, that a style may be rough, and yet both forcible and intelligible; but it will seldom come to pass that a novel written in a rough style will be popular — and less often that a novelist who habitually uses such a style will become so. The harmony which is required must come from the practice of the ear. There are few ears naturally so dull that they cannot, if time be allowed to them, decide whether a sentence, when read, be or be not harmonious. And the sense of such harmony grows on the ear, when the intelligence has once informed itself as to what is, and what is not, harmonious. . . ."

¹ Emerson: Letters and Social Aims; Poetry and Imagination.

In order that familiarity may serve him [a writer] in his business, he must so train his ear that he shall be able to weigh the rhythm of every word as it falls from his pen. This, when it has been done for a time, even for a short time, will become so habitual to him that he will have appreciated the metrical duration of every syllable before it shall have dared to show itself upon paper."¹

The negative merits of which Trollope speaks are within the reach of every writer who will take the requisite pains. It is possible for every one to train his ear by familiarizing himself with authors distinguished for ease. It is possible for every one to detect ill-sounding words and combinations of words in what he has written by reading it aloud or, still better, having it read aloud to him by a friend.

To avoid harsh or clumsy expressions is comparatively easy; but to acquire the positive excellences that contribute to ease in style is very difficult. These excellences few, even among famous authors, possess in full measure or have always at command. They are unattainable by any one who does not possess those qualities of character out of which they spring; for ease in its highest form is a gift rather than an acquisition, the gift of an engaging personality. It is, however, a gift that may be developed; even Steele and Addison, Goldsmith and Irving, Newman and Thackeray did not attain perfect ease without patient and persistent labor.

"Goldsmith put an anxious finish into all his better work; perhaps that is the secret of the graceful ease that is now apparent in every line. Any young writer who may imagine that the power of clear and concise literary expression comes by nature, cannot do better than study, in Mr. Cunningham's big collection of Goldsmith's writings, the continual and minute alterations which the author considered necessary even after the first edition — some-

¹ Anthony Trollope: An Autobiography, chap. xii.

times when¹ the second and third editions — had been published.”²

Not that a young author should say to himself, “Go to! I will make myself the Goldsmith of the twentieth century!” A conscious struggle for ease is

Dangers of a
conscious
struggle for
ease.

often fatal to the desired result, or is successful at the cost of things vastly more important.

In the former case, the writer’s manifest effort interferes with the comfort of his readers; in the latter case, clearness or force is sacrificed to smoothness, sense to sound.

Words difficult to pronounce or harsh in sound are, as has already been said,³ objectionable. Other words or syllables not uneuphonious by themselves become so if repeated too often or if coupled with certain other sounds. For example:—

“The subject is handled *tenderly, lovingly*, even as all the essays are, though *seemingly increasingly* so toward the end of their list.”⁴

“It is a *remarkably tastefully* gotten⁵ up *monthly* and will *undoubtedly* win a way to rapid popularity.”⁴

. . . “she could hardly suppress a smile at his *being* now *seeking* the acquaintance of some of those very people.”⁶

“I added, on some dry questions *being* put to me by him, relative to the possibility of there *being* still *existing* an heir to the estate, *that* there was no chance of *that*.”⁷

“One day while Dobbin was *lying reading* in the shade of a tree, he heard a boy *crying* as if in pain, and upon *looking* up saw Cuff *thrashing* a younger boy.”⁸

¹ Query as to this conjunction.

² William Black: *Life of Goldsmith*, chap. viii. *English Men of Letters Series*.

³ See page 21.

⁴ American periodical.

⁵ See page 27.

⁶ Miss Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*, vol. ii. chap. x.

⁷ Captain Marryat: *The Children of the New Forest*, chap. xxvi.

⁸ Student’s theme.

“*One* always feels that a particularly interesting two or three hours are in store for *one* when a Haymarket first night is in prospect. *One* is sure to see everybody *one* knows as well as everybody *one* would like to know and does n’t, and that is always entertaining while the curtain is down. When it is up, even if *one* does n’t altogether admire the play, *one* is certain of seeing an earnest, artistic bit of work.”¹

“A conclusion which *one* rejects for *one’s* children is either a conclusion *one* doubts, or a conclusion of which *one* is ashamed.”²

“‘I know *one* has got no business to be bored, and it is *one’s* own fault as a rule if *one* is,’ she went on.”³

“On the board between Washington and Richmond the eyes of the world were fixed, and by the turns of the balance *on it* the chances *on it* of the combatants were measured.”⁴

“The array moved on accordingly; the sound of trumpets and drums again rose amid the acclamations, which had been silent *while* the King stopped; *while*⁵ the effect of the whole procession resuming its motion, was so splendidly dazzling, that even Alice’s anxiety about her father’s health was for a moment suspended, *while* her eye followed the long line of varied brilliancy that proceeded over the heath.”⁶

“I will not say *but* that she knew them to be so, *but* she felt angry with them and brushed them roughly and carelessly.”⁷

“The Romans were fortunate,” says Landor, . . . “in having so many words to express *but*, another sad stumbling-block to us. Our language is much deformed by the necessity of its recurrence; and I know not any author who has taken great pains to avoid it where he could.”⁸

Considerations of euphony have prevented the adoption of a rule insisted upon in some quarters,—the rule that

¹ Letter from London to an American newspaper.

² The [London] *Spectator*, Feb. 17, 1894, p. 227.

³ E. F. Benson: *Dodo*, chap. vii.

⁴ Goldwin Smith: *The United States*, chap. v.

⁵ See page 89.

⁶ Scott: *Woodstock*, vol. ii. chap. xx.

⁷ Anthony Trollope: *Barchester Towers*, vol. ii. chap. i. Tauchnitz edition. For another example, see page 88.

⁸ Landor: *Conversations*, Third Series; Johnson and Horne (Tooke).

who or *which* should be confined to cases in which the relative clause explains the meaning of the antecedent or adds something to it, and *that* to cases in which the relative clause restricts the meaning of the antecedent. This rule, however helpful to clearness it may be in theory, few good authors observe. Its strict observance would lead to harsh combinations like that condemned by Steele in "The humble Petition of WHO and WHICH:"—

"We are descended of ancient families, and kept up our dignity and honour many years, till the jack-sprat THAT supplanted us. How often have we found ourselves slighted by the clergy in their pulpits, and the lawyers at the bar? Nay, how often have we heard, in one of the most polite and august assemblies in the universe, to our great mortification,¹ these words, 'That THAT that noble lord urged;' which if one of us had had justice done, would have sounded nobler thus, 'that WHICH that noble lord urged.'²

Excessive alliteration is one of the worst offences against ease, not only because it is unepigrammatic, but because it is affected. For example:—

Alliteration
in excess.

"Red buds of ballad blossom, where the dew
Blushed as with bloodlike passion."³

"Since the songs of Greece fell silent, none like ours have risen;
Since the sails of Greece fell slack, no ships have sailed like ours."⁴

In an article on "Farmers, Fallacies, and Furrows," we read of "fidelity to the furrows—material, financial, intellectual, and economic—which were marked out by their virtuous and patriotic ancestry, and a quick, sharp farewell to the fallacies of Protection and Paternalism."⁵

In an article on "Protection and the Proletariat" we read, "And the proletariat has learned of the protectionist. And putting

¹ Query as to the position of this phrase. ² The Spectator, No. 78.

³ Swinburne: Birthday Ode.

⁴ Ibid.: Athens.

⁵ American magazine.

the *precepts* of protection into practice, the *proletariat* petitions for pecuniary aid from the Government, and proclaims for paternalism by the American Republic."¹

When a word in one sense stands near the same word in another sense, or when two words alike in sound stand near each other, there is an offence against ease. For example:—

A word in
two senses.

"He turned to the *left*, and *left* the room."²

... "every morning *setting* a worthy example to his men by *setting* fire, with his own monster-hands, to the house where he had slept last night."³

"Society is infested with . . . contradictors and railers at public and private tables, who are like terriers, who conceive it the duty of a dog of *honor* to growl at any passer-by, and do the *honors* of the house by barking him out of sight."⁴

This species of inelegance is sometimes resorted to as a humorous device:—

"Poor Madame Mantalini *wrung* her hands for grief, and *rung* the bell for her husband; which done, she *fell into a chair* and a *fainting fit* simultaneously."⁵

Sometimes the substitution of one word for another that has the same meaning—as of one relative pronoun for another that has the same antecedent—is an offence against ease. For example:—

Two words in
the same
sense.

"He was just one of those men *that* the country can't afford to lose, and *whom* it is so very hard to replace."⁶

"He was hard-favoured, with . . . an eye *that* had looked upon death as his playfellow in thirty pitched battles, but *which* never-

¹ American magazine.

² Student's theme.

³ Dickens: A Child's History of England, chap. xiv.

⁴ Emerson: Conduct of Life; Behavior.

⁵ Dickens: Nicholas Nickleby, vol. i. chap. xxi.

⁶ Anthony Trollope: The American Senator, vol. iii. chap. xi. Tauchnitz edition.

theless expressed a calm contempt of danger, rather than the ferocious courage of a mercenary soldier."¹

"It feels like donning knee-breeches and buckles, to read *what* everybody has read, *that* everybody can read, and *which* our very fathers thought good entertainment scores of years ago."²

Harsh constructions. Constructions that hinder the reader's progress and jar on his sense of harmony offend against ease.

The so-called "*and which* construction," — by which "and" is used to connect a relative clause with an expression not co-ordinate with it, — though found, at least occasionally, in many good authors, cannot but be regarded as an offence against ease. For example:—

"And immediately the curtain parted, and Sidonia beheld a group in the highest style of art, *and which*, though deprived of all the magic of colour, almost expressed the passion of Correggio."³

"On rounding Europa Point, our captain forgetting to hoist his colours, we had the pleasure of hearing a shot whiz over our vessel, *and for which* he had to pay ten dollars."⁴

"We think of the road-side life seen by Parson Adams or Humphry Clinker, *and of which* Mr. Borrow caught the last glimpse when dwelling in the tents of the Romany."⁵

"He begged him at the same time carefully to preserve for him his Highland garb and accoutrements, particularly the arms, curious in themselves, *and to which* the friendship of the donors gave additional value."⁶

... "Stephen, with a glance serious *but which* indicated intimacy, caught the eye of a comely lady."⁷

¹ Scott: *Quentin Durward*, vol. i. chap. vii.

² Frederick Harrison: *On the Choice of Books*. The Fortnightly Review, April 1, 1879, p. 510.

³ Disraeli: *Tancred*, book iv. chap. xi.

⁴ J. H. Allan: *A Pictorial Tour in the Mediterranean*, chap. viii.

⁵ Leslie Stephen: *Alexander Pope*, chap. iv. English Men of Letters Series.

⁶ Scott: *Waverley*, vol. ii. chap. xxxiii.

⁷ Disraeli: *Sybil*, book ii. chap. x.

"She would have exhausted herself in expressing regret and making apologies, had she not been put to silence and restored to equanimity by the Princess, who requested, in the most gentle manner, *yet which*, from a Daughter of France, had the weight of a command, that no more might be said."¹

... "a lady very learned in stones, ferns, plants, and vermin, *and who* had written a book about petals."²

"The camels, laden with the tents and baggage, attended by a large body of footmen with matchlocks, *and who*, on occasion, could add their own weight to the burden of their charge, were filing through the mountains."³

... "the land about consists of meads of a vivid colour, or vegetable gardens to supply the neighbouring population, *and whose* various hues give life and lightness to the level ground."⁴

"Should" is used to express a future, dependent on a past tense, *and when* the event is under our control."⁵

... "he and Lockhart and a band of daring young Tories about them had made that magazine at once a terror and a new splendour in the island, *and where* there was no lack of other literary possibilities and openings."⁶

The use of "and" to connect expressions which are not co-ordinate is not confined to the "*and which* construction:"

"In the Warrington family, *and* to distinguish them from other personages of that respectable race, these effigies have always gone by the name of 'The Virginians.'"⁷

"Sir William's only chance now remaining was the possibility of an overturn, *and* that his lady or⁸ visitor might break their⁹ necks."¹⁰

¹ Scott: *Quentin Durward*, vol. i. chap. xi.

² Anthony Trollope: *Barchester Towers*, chap. x.

³ Disraeli: *Tancred*, book iv. chap. x.

⁴ *Ibid.*: *Sybil*, book ii. chap. xvi.

⁵ Angus: *Handbook of the English Tongue*, chap. vi. 302.

⁶ Masson: *De Quincey*, chap. vi. English Men of Letters Series.

⁷ Thackeray: *The Virginians*, chap. i.

⁸ Is not a word omitted here?

⁹ See page 54.

¹⁰ Scott: *The Bride of Lammermoor*, vol. ii. chap. xiv.

"He avowed himself no lover of names, *and* that he only contended for good government, from whatever quarter it might come."¹

"We could see the lake over the woods, two or three miles ahead, *and* that the river made an abrupt turn southward."²

"I had reckoned on the shore being deserted *and* that I might make my way inland."³

"I recollect studying his 'Complete Angler' several years since, in company with a knot of friends in America, *and* moreover that we were all completely bitten with the angling mania."⁴

"The Soldan undertook the preparation of the lists, *and* to provide accommodations and refreshments of every kind for all who were to assist⁵ at the solemnity."⁶

... "she listened while he opened the street door and closed it, *and* to his footsteps growing fainter along the pavement outside."⁷

"All they knew about him was that his name was Arthur St. Clair, *and* what Dorothy Brooks told them."⁸

The introduction of trivial or vulgar expressions into serious composition, though usually spoken of as a fault of taste or a sin against elegance, may be deemed an offence against ease as defined for the purposes of this book. Sometimes the fault springs from ignorance, sometimes from a distorted sense of humor. For example:—

"Blessed are the meek?" That was one of His *observations*."⁹

"He [Protogenes, the grammarian] *puts in a very unpleasant appearance* elsewhere."⁹

¹ John Morley: Edmund Burke, chap. v. English Men of Letters Series.

² Henry D. Thoreau: The Maine Woods; The Allegash and East Branch.

³ Student's theme.

⁴ Irving: The Sketch Book; The Angler. ⁵ See page 43.

⁶ Scott: The Talisman, chap. xxvii.

⁷ Mrs. W. K. Clifford: Aunt Anne, chap. xiii.

⁸ Quoted from the discourse of an English open-air preacher.

⁹ Trench: Lectures on Plutarch, lect. i.

"Our friend, the Roman *cit*, has therefore thus far, in his progress through life, obtained no breakfast, if he ever contemplated an idea so *frantic*. . . . I could bring *waggon-loads* of sentiments . . . which prove, more clearly than the most *eminent pike-staff*, . . . that if a man . . . misses coffee and hot rolls at nine, he may easily *run into* a leg of mutton at twelve."¹

"The House of Socrates (*Domus Socratica* is the expression of Horace) were those who next attempted to popularize Greek prose, — *viz. the old gentleman himself, the founder of the concern*, and his two apprentices, Plato and Xenophon. We acknowledge a *sneaking hatred* towards the whole household, founded chiefly on the intense feeling we entertain that all three were *humbugs*. We *own the stony impeachment*."²

A class of faults not unlike those just referred to is noted by Lowell in his essay on Dryden:—

"'I remember when I was a boy,' he [Dryden] says in his dedication of the 'Spanish Friar,' 1681, 'I thought inimitable Spenser a mean poet in comparison of Sylvester's Du Bartas, and was rapt into an ecstasy when I read these lines:—

"Now when the winter's keener breath began
To crystallize the Baltic ocean,
To glaze the lakes, to bridle up the floods,
And periwig with snow the baldpate woods."

I am much deceived if this be not abominable fustian.' . . . The 'prithee, undo this button,' of Lear, coming where it does and expressing what it does, is one of those touches of the pathetically sublime, of which only Shakespeare ever knew the secret. Herrick, too, has a charming poem on 'Julia's Petticoat,' the charm being that he exalts the familiar and the low to the region of sentiment. In the passage from Sylvester, it is precisely the reverse, and the wig takes as much from the sentiment as it adds to a Lord Chancellor. So Pope's proverbial verse,

'True wit is Nature to advantage drest,'

unpleasantly suggests Nature under the hands of a lady's-maid. We have no word in English that will exactly define this want of

¹ De Quincey: The Casuistry of Roman Meals.

² *Ibid.*: Essay on Style.

propriety in diction. *Vulgar* is too strong, and *commonplace* too weak. Perhaps *bourgeois* comes as near as any."¹

Writers conspicuous for ease are not always conspicuous for force; nor are a writer's most forcible passages always those most remarkable for beauty of expression.

"Barry Cornwall," writes Mrs. Browning, "has done a good deal, with all his genius,² and perhaps as a consequence of his genius,² to emasculate the poetry of the passing age. To talk of 'fair things' when he had to speak of women, and of 'laughing flowers' when his business was with a full-blown daisy [dame, or dairymaid], is the fashion of his school. His care has not been to use the most expressive, but the prettiest word. His Muse has held her Pandemonium too much in the cavity of his ear. Still, that this arises from a too exquisite sense of beauty as a *means* as well as an object, is evident."³

"At one of the country houses which Burns visited after his Edinburgh sojourn," says Mrs. Oliphant, "he was asked 'whether the Edinburgh literati had mended his poems by their criticisms.' 'Sir,' said he, 'these gentlemen remind me of some spinners in my country, who spin their thread so fine that it is neither⁴ fit for weft nor woof.' . . . Cowper's much more decided and lengthy expression of indignation was called forth by an impertinence, the alteration of a line in his 'Homer,' by 'some accidental reviser of the manuscript.'

"I did not write [he says] the line that has been tampered with hastily or without due attention to the construction of it, and what appeared to me its only merit is in its present state entirely annihilated. I know that the ears of modern verse-writers are delicate to an excess, and their readers are troubled with the same squeamishness as themselves,⁵ so that if a line does not run as smooth as quicksilver they are offended. A critic of the present day serves a poem as a cook serves a dead turkey, when she fastens the legs

¹ Lowell: *Literary Essays*; Dryden.

² Query as to the position of these phrases.

³ Mrs. Browning: *Letters to R. H. Horne*, letter xxxvii.

⁴ Query as to the position of *neither*. ⁵ See page 52.

of it to a post and draws out all the sinews. For this we may thank Pope; but unless we could imitate him in the closeness and compactness of his expression, as well as in the smoothness of his numbers, we had better drop the imitation, which serves no other purpose than to emasculate and weaken all we write. Give me a manly rough line, with a deal of meaning in it, rather than a whole poem full of musical periods that have nothing but their oily smoothness to recommend them.

"I have said thus much because I have just finished a much longer poem than the last, which our common friend will receive by the same messenger that has the charge of this letter. In that poem there are many lines which an ear so nice as the gentleman's who made the above-mentioned alteration would undoubtedly condemn, and yet (if I may be permitted to say it) they cannot be made smoother without being the worse for it. There is a roughness on the plum which nobody that understands fruit would rub off, though the plum would be much more polished without it. But, lest I tire you, I will only add that I wish you to guard me from all such meddling, assuring you that I always write as smoothly as I can; but that I never did, never will, sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it."¹

Sometimes a writer, for fear that he may "sacrifice the spirit or sense of a passage to the sound of it," purposely introduces a vigorous expression which is positively inelegant,—as did Carlyle and Browning,—in order, by force of contrast, to relieve monotony or to stimulate interest; but such expressions should, as a rule, be avoided.

A writer who sacrifices ease to force may offend the taste by vulgarity of expression or of suggestion, or he may employ language too forcible for his thought: he may in one way or another make force, which should be a means, an end in itself. A writer who sacrifices force to ease may become weakly diffuse or tiresomely

¹ Mrs. Oliphant: *The Literary History of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, vol. i. chap. ii.

smooth or offensively artificial: he may in one way or another make ease, which should be a means, an end in itself. The appearance of attention to either vigor or beauty of expression is fatal to success. A writer who manifestly strives after vigor is justly called bombastic or sensational; one who manifestly strives after beauty is justly called affected or sentimental.

CHAPTER II.

NUMBER OF WORDS.

A SENTENCE should contain every word that helps to communicate thought or feeling with clearness, force, and ease, but not one word more.

The proper NUMBER OF WORDS in a sentence is determined by a great variety of considerations. Trite thoughts on familiar topics admit of briefer expression than original ideas. Intelligent persons require Conciseness relative. less explanation than ignorant ones, not only because of their superior knowledge, but also because of their superior faculty of attention. "Some hearers and readers will be found slow of apprehension indeed, but capable of taking in what is very copiously and gradually explained to them; while¹ others, on the contrary, who are much quicker at catching the sense of what is expressed in a short compass, are incapable of *long* attention, and are not only wearied, but absolutely bewildered, by a diffuse Style."²

"'We've had a very good sermon this morning,' was the frequent remark, after hearing one of the old yellow series, heard with all the more satisfaction because it had been heard for the twentieth time; for to minds on the Shepperton level it is repeti-

¹ See page 89.

² Whately: Elements of Rhetoric, part iii. chap. i. sect. ii. See also De Quincey: Essay on Style.