

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.

tion, not novelty, that produces the strongest effect; and phrases, like tunes, are a long time making themselves at home in the brain."¹

Whatever the subject discussed, whatever the character of the persons addressed, a writer should avoid both diffuseness and excessive conciseness: diffuseness, because the instant a reader perceives the presence of unnecessary words, that instant his attention flags; excessive conciseness, because the mind requires a certain period of time to understand a thought and a still longer period to feel its force.

Extremes to be avoided.

SECTION I.

CLEARNESS.

A sentence which contains too few words for adequate expression may be ungrammatical:² or it may be correct in form but obscure or ambiguous in substance, that is, deficient in CLEARNESS.³

The sense may be changed or darkened by the omission of an article. "The treasurer and secretary" means one person who holds two offices; "the treasurer and the secretary" means two persons. "A black and white dog" means one parti-colored dog; "a black and a white dog" means two dogs, one black and one white. "The honest and intelligent" are those who are both honest and intelligent; "the honest and the intelligent" are two classes. The following sentences are, therefore, defective:—

¹ George Eliot: Mr. Gilfil's Love-story, chap. i.

² See pages 70-72.

³ *Supervacua cum taedio dicuntur, necessaria cum periculo subtrahuntur.* — Quintilian: *Inst. Orator.* iv. ii. xlv.

"The council and a synod¹ maintained . . . that the unity of the person implied not any unity in the consciousness."²

"His mother had watched over the child, in whom she found alike the charm and a consolation of her life."³

"The reader is requested to note a seeming contradiction in the two views which have been given of Graham Bretton — the public and a private — the out-door and the in-door view."⁴

The meaning of a sentence may also be changed or obscured by the omission of a noun, a verb, a preposition, or some other word or words. For example:—

"It was put as banter, but certainly conveyed a that Lady Ermyntrude was neglecting her family."⁵

"Marcella smiled, and, laying her hand on Betty's, shyly drew her a."⁶

"Yet, to do her justice, laxity of expression did not act upon her conduct and warp that, as it does a most mystical speakers."⁶

"In this he [Lord Plunket] closely resembled the greatest of advocates in modern times, and a second to none of the ancient masters."⁷

In this sentence, the reader is in doubt whether Lord Brougham means to say that Lord Plunket resembled one who was both the greatest of modern advocates and the equal of the ancient masters, or that he resembled the greatest of modern advocates and was himself the equal of the ancient masters.

"If the heroine is depicted as an unlovable character, there is little to be said of Guy's a that is at all attractive."⁸

If the omitted word were supplied, this sentence would still be faulty because of the use of "character" in two senses. It would be better to say, "If the heroine is depicted as unlovable, there is little to be said of Guy's character," etc.

¹ The context shows that the council was one body, the synod another.

² Hume: *History of England*, vol. i. chap. i.

³ Disraeli: *Tancred*, book i. chap. ii.

⁴ Charlotte Brontë: *Villette*, chap. xix.

⁵ Mrs. Humphry Ward: *Marcella*, book iii. chap. xi.

⁶ Charles Reade: *Hard Cash*, chap. xxvi.

⁷ Brougham: *Statesmen of the Time of George III.*; Lord Plunket.

⁸ The [London] *Spectator* (1876).