

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

Too few
words.

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 \wedge 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 \wedge 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 \wedge 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 \wedge that Lady Ermyntrude was neglecting her family."⁵

"Marcella smiled, and, laying her hand on Betty's, shyly drew her \wedge ."⁵

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

"In this he [Lord Plunket] closely resembled the greatest of advocates in modern times, and \wedge 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 \wedge 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).

"His political education was due to Jeremy Bentham, whom he edited and admired."¹

The writer of this sentence has made "Jeremy Bentham" stand for both the man and his works. A similar example is:—

"Piano-forte taught and tuned."²

Another false economy is that of omitting the connectives which bind clause to clause, sentence to sentence, and paragraph to paragraph. Judiciously used, these connectives³ transform a heterogeneous collection of assertions into a composition, a consistent whole, and thus enable the reader to follow a chain of ideas link by link, to perceive what is cause and what consequence, what is principal and what accessory. Strike from a page of any master of reasoning every *though, while, hence, accordingly, yet, notwithstanding, for, therefore, on the one hand, on the other hand, now, indeed*, and you will be surprised to see how much is taken away. The argument remains, of course, but it is much more difficult to follow. You have shortened the page by a line or two, but you have lengthened the time requisite for its comprehension.

The omission of words necessary to the sense or to the construction is more excusable in verse than in prose; for in verse rapidity of movement carries the reader over many a hiatus. In prose such omissions as occur in the following passages would not be allowable:—

"O Cromwell, Cromwell!
Had I but served my God with half the zeal
^ I served my King, he would not in mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies."⁴

¹ American newspaper.

² Placard in a shop-window.

⁴ Shakspeare: Henry VIII., act iii. scene ii.

³ See page 86.

"Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty Done ^ the Undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!"¹

"Ah, what avails it
To hide or to shun ^
Whom the Infinite One
Hath granted his throne?"²

"For He that worketh high and wise,
Nor pauses in his plan,
Will take the sun out of the skies
Ere ^ freedom out of man."³

Such omissions as poets allow themselves are more excusable in imaginative prose than in didactic; for when prose approaches poetry it may to a limited extent avail itself of this privilege of poetry. To a limited extent only, however; for the compactness and the rapidity of verse cannot be secured in prose. Prose has a compactness and a rapidity of its own, which are not inconsistent with perfect clearness.

The presence of unnecessary words, as well as the absence of necessary words, bewilders or fatigues the reader, and makes him lose the meaning in part, if not altogether,—in part, if he confines his attention to one of the threads of thought which cross and recross one another; altogether, if he cannot find his way through the tangle. As, however, the fault of multiplying words to no purpose or to worse than no purpose is not only a source of obscurity, but is also and with more serious results a frequent source of weakness, it will be discussed at length in the next section.

Obscurity
caused by
unnecessary
words.

¹ Browning: The Last Ride Together.

² Emerson: Ode to Beauty.

³ Ibid.: Ode sung in the Town Hall, Concord, July 4, 1857.