

SECTION II.

FORCE.

A writer who wishes to arouse and to hold interest must be careful not to use more words than are absolutely necessary. To multiply words without cause is to be tedious, and "tediousness," as Dr. Johnson says, "is the most fatal of all faults; negligences or errors are single and local, but tediousness pervades the whole; other faults are censured and forgotten, but the power of tediousness propagates itself."¹

FORCE may, it is true, be promoted by the presentation of a thought in several forms, provided that each form is so different from every other as to have the freshness of novelty. What has been said indirectly may be repeated directly; the abstract may be reproduced in concrete form, the literal in figurative; an object may be looked at from several points of view; an argument may be presented from several sides. The discourse should continually grow in interest, the less general coming after the more general, the address to the passions or the feelings after the explanation to the understanding, the most striking phrase last of all. Of this kind of repetition Burke was a master, as the following citations show:—

"But power, of some kind or other, will survive the shock in which manners and opinions perish; and it will find other and worse means for its support. The usurpation which, in order to subvert ancient institutions, has destroyed ancient principles, will hold

¹ Johnson: Lives of the Poets; Prior.

power by arts similar to those by which it has acquired it. When the old feudal and chivalrous spirit of *fealty*, which, by freeing kings from fear, freed both kings and subjects from the precautions of tyranny, shall be extinct in the minds of men, plots and assassinations will be anticipated by preventive murder and preventive confiscation, and that long roll of grim and bloody maxims, which form the political code of all power, not standing on its own honour, and the honour of those who are to obey it. Kings will be tyrants from policy when subjects are rebels from principle."¹

"Example, the only argument of effect in civil life, demonstrates the truth of my proposition. Nothing can alter my opinion concerning the pernicious tendency of this example, until I see some man for his indiscretion in the support of power, for his violent and intemperate servility, rendered incapable of sitting in parliament. For as it now stands, the fault of overstraining popular qualities, and, irregularly if you please, asserting popular privileges, has led to disqualification; the opposite fault never has produced the slightest punishment. Resistance to power has shut the door of the House of Commons to one man; obsequiousness and servility, to none."²

De Quincey also furnishes an example of effective repetition:—

"In that great social organ, which, collectively, we call literature, there may be distinguished two separate offices that may blend and often *do so*, but³ capable, severally, of a severe insulation, and naturally fitted for reciprocal repulsion. There is, first, the literature of *knowledge*; and, secondly, the literature of *power*. The function of the first is — to *teach*; the function of the second is — to *move*: the first is a rudder; the second, an oar or a sail."⁴

Another method of repetition consists in reiterating a striking word or phrase until it comes to the reader almost like a refrain. Matthew Arnold, for instance, tells

¹ Burke: Reflections on the Revolution in France.

² Ibid.: Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents.

³ See page 70. xvi.

⁴ De Quincey: Leaders in Literature; Alexander Pope.

us over and over again that "sweetness and light" constitute "culture," that the foes of culture are "Philistines," that poetry is "a criticism of life," that the soul of Hellenism is "beauty," and that of Hebraism "conduct." These catchwords all readers of Arnold are sure to remember, as he meant they should do; but his harping on one string irritates some of his most intelligent readers. In the work of an inferior writer such repetitions are intolerable.

A still simpler form of iteration — excellent in its place, but not suitable to modern prose — occurs in the Bible, in the old ballads, in Milton and other poets.

"Another form of rhyme," says Emerson, "is iterations of phrase, as the record of the death of Sisera:—

"At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead."

"The fact is made conspicuous, nay, colossal, by this simple rhetoric.

"They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end."

"Milton delights in these iterations:—

"Though fallen on evil days,
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues."

"Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth its silver lining on the night?
I did not err, there does a sable cloud
Turn forth its silver lining on the night." *Comus*.

"A little onward lend thy guiding hand,
To these dark steps a little farther on." *Samson*.¹

Another excellent example of iteration may be taken from Shakspere:—

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

"Orlando. If ever you have look'd on better days,
If ever been where bells have knoll'd to church,
If ever sat at any good man's feast,
If ever from your eyelids wiped a tear
And know what 'tis to pity and be pitied,
Let gentleness my strong enforcement be:
In the which hope I blush, and hide my sword.

Duke S. True is it that we have seen better days,
And have with holy bell been knoll'd to church
And sat at good men's feasts and wiped our eyes
Of drops that sacred pity hath engender'd:
And therefore sit you down in gentleness
And take upon command what help we have
That to your wanting may be minister'd."¹

Such are some of the ways in which repetition may be used with effect; but with the ordinary writer it often serves to hide poverty of thought. An assertion which was hardly worth making once is ^{Unskillful repetition.} repeated in slightly varying forms until the bewildered reader doubts whether behind so much smoke there is living fire. A writer who repeats himself in this way may know what he is doing; but usually he does not stop to inquire whether there is enough difference between two expressions to warrant him in using both. To please the ear is so much easier than to satisfy the mind, to shadow forth an idea in several shapes is so much less troublesome than to present it in one good shape, that unnecessary repetitions abound. If all such were expunged, it is painful to think how many books would shrink to half their size, how many sermons and orations would dwindle into five-minute discourses, how many newspaper "reports" into paragraphs, how many boys' and girls' compositions into nothing.

¹ Shakspere: As You Like It, act ii. scene vii.
7*

"Simply to retrench one word from each sentence, one superfluous epithet, for example, would probably increase the disposable time of the public by one twelfth part; in other words, would add another month to the year, or raise any sum of volumes read from eleven to twelve hundred. A mechanic operation would effect that change; but, by cultivating a closer logic and more severe habits of thinking, perhaps two sentences out of each three might be pruned away, and the amount of possible publication might thus be increased in a threefold degree."¹

REDUNDANCY — the fault of using more words than are necessary to express an idea — is one of the commonest faults of composition. It assumes various forms.

The crudest form of redundancy is TAUTOLOGY,² — the repetition of an idea in the same or in different words.

Among tautological expressions are: *first* or *original aggressor*,³ *his own autobiography*,⁴ *coal collier*, *funeral obsequies*,⁵ *sylvan forest*, *umbrageous shade*, *falsely misrepresents*,⁶ *recalled back*,⁷ *mutually reciprocal*, *verdant green*, *audible to the ear*, *intolerable to be borne*,⁸ *popular with the people*.

Other examples of tautology are to be found in the following sentences: —

"Never did Atticus succeed better in gaining the universal love and esteem of all men."⁹

¹ De Quincey: Essay on Style.

² From ταὐτό, the same thing, and λέγειν, to say.

³ The Quarterly Review (1876).

⁴ American newspaper.

⁵ Disraeli's first speech in Parliament. Bulwer (Lytton): The Coming Race.

⁶ John Bright: Speech at Manchester, April 30, 1878.

⁷ Anthony Trollope: The Last Chronicle of Barset.

⁸ Hawthorne: The Scarlet Letter.

⁹ The Spectator, No. 467.

"'More power to his elbow' is the popular panacea for all the ills of the body politic."¹

"This subject, which caused mutual² astonishment and perplexity to us both, entirely engrossed us for the rest of the evening."³

"Let us glance briefly at the facts."⁴

"Sir Robert assured his son in reply, 'that from the information, intelligence, and tidings, which had been communicated to, and laid before him, he had the deepest reason to believe, credit, and be convinced, that a riotous assault would that night be attempted and perpetrated against Hazelwood-House.'⁵

"'And, gentlemen, when the timbers of the Vessel of the State are unsound and the Man at the Helm is unskilful, would those great Marine Insurers, who rank among our world-famed merchant-princes — would they insure her, gentlemen? Would they underwrite her? Would they incur a risk in her? Would they have confidence in her?'"⁶

"Let observation, with extensive view,
Survey mankind from China to Peru."⁷

Or, as the lines, somewhat unfairly, have been translated into prose: "Let observation with extensive observation observe mankind extensively."

Macaulay's example from Dr. Johnson is well known: —

"'The Rehearsal,' he said, very unjustly, 'has not wit enough to keep it sweet;' then, after a pause, 'it has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction.'"⁸

Mr. Borthrop Trumbull, the auctioneer of Middlemarch, "never used poor language without immediately correcting himself:" —

"'Oh yes, anybody may ask. . . . Anybody may interrogate.

¹ The [New York] Critic, Dec. 27, 1884. Quoted from "The Pall Mall Gazette."

² See page 40.

³ Miss Burney: Evelina, letter lxxvi.

⁴ Student's theme.

⁵ Scott: Guy Mannering, vol. ii. chap. xviii.

⁶ Dickens: Our Mutual Friend, book ii. chap. iii.

⁷ Johnson: The Vanity of Human Wishes.

⁸ Macaulay: Essays; Boswell's Life of Johnson. For the preference between these two expressions, see pp. 102-104.

Anyone may give their remarks an interrogative turn. . . . a very nice thing, a very superior publication, entitled "Ivanhoe." You will not get any writer to beat him in a hurry, I think — he will not, in my opinion, speedily be surpassed. . . . I hope some one will tell me so — I hope some individual will apprise me of the fact."¹

Words that are habitually coupled come to constitute a single idea, which requires both words for its full expression. Such are: "kith and kin," "ways and means," "end and aim," "intents and purposes," "pains and penalties," "bag and baggage," "part and parcel," "rags and tatters," "sum and substance," "metes and bounds," "rules and regulations," "safe and sound," "null and void."

Many common expressions, on the other hand, are justly chargeable with tautology. Such are: "*prominent* and *leading* lawyers," "*bold* and *audacious* robbers," "*a usual* and *ordinary* occurrence."

Expressions that are not exact reproductions of what has already been said may come so near being such as to belong under the head of tautology. For example: —

. . . "he rushed into the yard without his cocked hat, — which² is a very *curious* and *remarkable* circumstance: as showing that even a beadle, acted upon by a sudden and powerful impulse, may be afflicted with a momentary *visitation of loss of self-possession* and *forgetfulness of personal dignity*."³

. . . "he [the engine-driver] preserved a *composure so immovable*, and an *indifference so complete*, that, if the locomotive had been a sucking-pig, he could not have been more perfectly indifferent to its doings."⁴

"He [Prior] had infused into it ["Solomon"] much knowledge and much thought; had often polished it to elegance, often digni-

¹ George Eliot: Middlemarch, book iii. chap. xxxii.

² See page 53.

³ Dickens: Oliver Twist, chap. vii.

⁴ Ibid.: Martin Chuzzlewit, chap. xxi.

fied it with splendour, and sometimes heightened it to sublimity: he perceived in it many excellences, and did not discover that it wanted that without which all others are of small avail, the power of *engaging attention* and *alluring curiosity*."¹

. . . "every one that resided in the valley was required to propose whatever might contribute to *make seclusion pleasant*, to *fill up the vacancies of attention*, and *lessen the tediousness of time*."²

"As she swept down into the hall, Lord Hayes, who was standing there, with a pair of white kid gloves in his hand, was *suddenly struck* and *astonished* at her beauty."³

PLEONASM,⁴ another form of redundancy, consists in the addition of words which can be omitted without affecting the construction or the meaning of the sentence. Such words are italicized in Pleonasm. the following sentences: —

"Class Day, June 22, promises to be of its usual *unique* and *memorable* brilliancy."⁵

"I have *got* a cold, *together* with fever."

. . . "she gave her happy order to her satellites *around* her."⁶

"*Both* the children stared at each other."⁷

"*Both* Governor McKinley and Mr. Reed agree that the fight has only just begun."⁸

"From all inquiries *on every hand* this forenoon the general opinion is stronger than ever that McLean's sole *and main* motive for his crime was *more or less* jealousy."⁸

"Their thoughts were fettered by *the oppressing chains* of scholasticism."⁹

¹ Johnson: Lives of the Poets; Prior. Whately calls the first part of this sentence tautological. See, however, De Quincey: Essay on Rhetoric, note 7.

² Ibid.: Rasselas, chap. i.

³ E. F. Benson: The Rubicon, book ii. chap. v.

⁴ From *πλέων*, *πλείων*, more, comparative of *πολύς*, much.

⁵ The [Harvard] Crimson.

⁶ Anthony Trollope: Tales of all Countries; Miss Sarah Jack.

⁷ Mrs. Molesworth: The Tapestry Room, chap. vii.

⁸ American newspaper.

⁹ Student's theme.

"There is nothing which disgusts us sooner than the empty pomp of language."¹

"There can be no doubt but that newspapers at present are read altogether too much."¹

"Being content with deserving a triumph, he refused to receive the honor that was offered him."¹

"Indeed, each day began to make it evident that he had, on the whole, rather a superabundance of animation than otherwise."²

"By a multiplicity of words the sentiment is not set off and accommodated, but, like David equipped in Saul's armour, it is encumbered and oppressed."³

... "he was by no means deficient in the subordinate and limited virtue, which alleviates and relieves the wants of others."⁴

"It is, therefore, as it seems to me, utterly incredible and absurd that so natural and common a result of Parliamentary distinction as the offer of a high civil appointment should have moved Stanhope into any expression of surprise or resentment."⁵

"It warns us against hasty judgment and cautions us against rash conclusions."⁶

"The author has thrown all the pathos and melancholy which his pen could express into this sad story of love."⁶

In the last five citations, the italicized words add so little to the thought that they may be justly deemed pleonastic, if, indeed, they do not make the sentences tautological.

A common form of pleonasm consists in the use of *more, most, very, too, so, as*, and other particles of comparison, with adjectives or adverbs that do not admit of comparison. For example:—

"For in resting so mainly on his army, and drawing from it such unlimited power, he contrived a new variety of monarchy."⁷

¹ Student's theme.

² Charlotte M. Yonge: *The Heir of Redclyffe*, chap. iii.

³ Campbell: *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, book iii. chap. ii. sect. ii.

⁴ Scott: *The Talisman*, chap. vii.

⁵ Lord Mahon: *History of England*, vol. i. chap. iv.

⁶ Student's theme.

⁷ J. R. Seeley: *Life and Times of Stein*, part. ii. chap. i.

"This was not very prudent, as the young Galen had elected to establish himself in Barchester, very mainly in expectation of the help which his Ullathorne connexion would give him."¹

"Mr. Freeman, the historian, made a very masterly speech."²

"A misfortune of a somewhat unique kind has befallen the Bishop of Sidney."²

"In essentials, of course, even Browne is by no means so unique among his contemporaries, and so singular, as he looks."³

"But though not more true in his political convictions than an Englishman, he is more unanswerable."⁴

"But are there many, think you, among us who would find the question so unanswerable as yourself?"⁵

Usage justifies the comparison of some words that, strictly speaking, do not admit of comparison. No one hesitates to say "safer," "so safe," "surer," "very sure."⁶

The unnecessary repetition of *and* enfeebles style. "It has the same sort of effect as the frequent use of the vulgar phrase *and so* [or *says he, says I*] ^{Pleonastic and.} when one is telling a story in common conversation,"⁷ or of *and now* in a newspaper paragraph, or of a drawling tone in speaking. The omission of *and*, on the other hand, gives rapidity. "'Veni, vidi, vici,' expresses with more spirit the rapidity⁸ and quick succession⁸ of conquest, than if connecting particles had been used."⁷ Another example may be taken from Milton:—

¹ Anthony Trollope: *Doctor Thorne*, chap. ii.

² The [London] *Spectator*, Feb. 9, 1884, p. 175.

³ Pater: *Appreciations*; Sir Thomas Browne. Is there another fault in this sentence?

⁴ Anthony Trollope: *The Widow's Mite*.

⁵ *Ibid.*: Framley Parsonage, chap. xv. For *yourself*, see page 52.

⁶ For a full discussion of this subject, see "The Foundations of Rhetoric," pp. 135, 136.

⁷ Blair: *Lectures on Rhetoric*, lect. xii.

⁸ Is this an example of tautology?

"O'er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp,
Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death—
A universe of death."¹

When, however, a writer desires to lay stress on each one of a number of objects enumerated in succession, he separates the names of those objects by conjunctions: For example:—

"Or other worlds they seemed, or happy isles,
Like those Hesperian Gardens famed of old,
Fortunate fields, and groves, and flowery vales;
Thrice happy isles!"²

A common form of pleonasm consists in the accumulation of adjectives, particularly of those which express something implied in the noun. When Homer speaks of "*wet waves*," "*white milk*," he uses superfluous adjectives; for, as everybody knows, waves are always wet and milk is always white. "Thus, too, in our own national songs, Douglas is almost always the doughty Douglas; England is merry England; all the gold is red; and all the ladies are gay."³ In Homer and the old English ballads such expressions are, however, a natural part of the style, for the substantive and the "constant epithet" together express a single idea. In a work that professedly imitates the ballad or the Homeric style, such expressions are allowable; but in modern prose they seem affected. The charge of affectation may fairly be brought against authors with whom the sun is always "glorious," moonlight always "soft," snow always "feathery," groves always "shady," impudence always "bold," heroes always "noble." Authors of this class, not content with a single adjective, habitually

¹ Milton: *Paradise Lost*, book ii. line 620. ² *Ibid.*, book iii. line 567.

³ Macaulay: *Lays of Ancient Rome*; *The Battle of the Lake Regillus*, Preface.

use two, or even three, as if they expected to make a unit by putting cipher after cipher.

So irritating is this form of pleonasm that some critics have made war upon the adjective, as if it were a part of speech peculiarly liable to abuse. They would have a young writer strike out of his compositions every adjective, as other critics advise him to omit every passage which he particularly likes.

"I remember, when I was young," says Sir Arthur Helps, "writing some paper—about sanitary matters I think it was—and showing it to an older and much wiser friend. I dare say it was full of the exuberant faults of youthfulness. He said to me, 'My dear fellow, I foresee that this is not the only thing you will write. Let me give you a bit of advice. Whenever you write a sentence that particularly pleases you, *cut it out.*'"¹

Such counsels are grounded on the unwarranted assumption that a young writer either has no judgment or is more likely to be bombastic than to be tame. Undoubtedly a young writer should avoid tawdry epithets; but he should be at least equally on his guard against uninteresting tameness. Undoubtedly the judgment of a young writer is less trustworthy than that of a writer of experience. Undoubtedly a young writer should submit his compositions to a competent critic; but a competent critic knows that to counsel him to total abstinence from this or that part of speech is to teach him temperance in nothing. It would be as wise to prohibit the use of figurative language because mixed metaphors are worse than none as to recommend the disuse of adjectives because they are often misused.²

¹ Helps: *Social Pressure*, chap. viii.

² *In pueris oratio perfecta nec exigui nec sperari potest: melior autem indoles laeta generosique conatus et vel plura iusto concipiens interim spiritus.*—Quintilian: *Inst. Orator.* ii. iv. iv.