

carry a message to the understanding," to the heart, or to the imagination, he spends it well; but if, by multiplying words, he obscures the meaning of the "message," or weakens its force, he purchases ease at the cost of things far more important.

## CHAPTER III.

## ARRANGEMENT.

SUCCESS in either spoken or written discourse depends even less upon choice or number of words than upon ARRANGEMENT. In a theoretically perfect arrangement, the order of the language would distinctly indicate the relative importance of each constituent part of the composition. Of such an arrangement no human language is susceptible; but a writer should come as near to it as is permitted by the peculiarities of the language in which he writes.

The ideal arrangement.

## SECTION I.

## CLEARNESS.

CLEARNESS requires that the words and the groups of words which are near to one another in thought shall be near in expression, and that those which are separate in thought shall be separate in expression. A writer who conforms to this principle will give to each word the position that shows its relation to other words, and to each part of a sentence the position that shows its relation to other parts.

Obscurity may be caused by an arrangement that puts a pronoun before the noun which it represents. For example:—

Position of pronouns.

"In adjusting *his* rate of wages for the future, the working man should realize that politics does not enter into the matter."<sup>1</sup>

"He had just failed in securing a house there, and Coleridge's company was a great temptation to him, as that of *her* sister was to his wife."<sup>1</sup>

Occasionally a pronoun may, without causing obscurity, be put before the noun which it represents:—

... "illiterate writers, who seize and twist from *its* purpose some form of speech which once served to convey briefly and compactly an unambiguous meaning."<sup>2</sup>

In this sentence, it would be hard to change the position of "from *its* purpose" without causing obscurity or clumsiness; "its," moreover, comes so near to "some form of speech," that the reader catches the meaning at once.

Obscurity is caused by neglect of the rule that connectives of the class known to grammarians as "correspondents" — such as *not only, but also; either, or; neither, nor; both, and; on the one hand, on the other hand* — should be so placed as to show what words they connect. For example:—

"Lothair was unaffectedly gratified at *not only* receiving his friends at his own castle, but under these circumstances of intimacy."<sup>3</sup>

"They were a family which *not only* had the art of accumulating wealth, but of expending it with taste and generosity."<sup>4</sup>

"This effeminate tone comes from the fact that the plays were written *not* to please the common people but the dissolute court."<sup>5</sup>

"I *neither* estimated myself highly nor lowly."<sup>6</sup>

... "he *neither* attempted to excite anger, nor ridicule, nor admiration."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Oliphant: *The Literary History of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, vol. i. chap. viii.

<sup>2</sup> J. S. Mill: *A System of Logic*, book iv. chap. v. sect. iii. Not in some editions.

<sup>3</sup> Disraeli: *Lothair*, chap. xxxix.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: *Endymion*, chap. xxxviii.

<sup>5</sup> J. S. Mill: *Autobiography*, chap. i.

<sup>7</sup> Lord Dalling and Bulwer: *Sir Robert Peel*, part ii. sect. ii.

Obscurity is caused by placing subordinate expressions where they do not show at once with what words or groups of words they are connected. Position of subordinate expressions.

In each of the following sentences an adverb is out of place:—

"All criminals are *not* guilty."<sup>1</sup>

"Whatever qualities he himself, *probably*, had acquired without difficulty or special training, he seems to have supposed that I ought to acquire as easily."<sup>2</sup>

... "he recovered his harquebuss without *almost* knowing what he did."<sup>3</sup>

"He was about to go on, when he perceived, from her quivering eye and pallid cheek, that nothing *less* than imposture was intended."<sup>4</sup>

"In painting and in sculpture it is now past disputing, that if we are destined to inferiority at all, it is an inferiority *only* to the Italians and the ancient Greeks; an inferiority which, if it were *even* sure to be permanent, we share with all the other malicious nations around us."<sup>5</sup>

In each of the following sentences a phrase or a clause is out of place:—

"A strong man's will tends to create a will in the same direction *in others*."<sup>1</sup>

"The scale was turned in its favour by a speech which ranks among the masterpieces of American oratory *from Fisher Ames*."<sup>2</sup>

"Miss Meadowcroft searched the newspapers for tidings of the living John Jago *in the privacy of her own room*."<sup>3</sup>

"Although Madame Clermont had, as I knew, lost most of the money which Shelley had left her *in the Lumley's Italian Opera*

<sup>1</sup> Student's theme.

<sup>2</sup> J. S. Mill: *Autobiography*, chap. i.

<sup>3</sup> Scott: *Quentin Durward*, vol. i. chap. x.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*: *Old Mortality*, vol. ii. chap. ii.

<sup>5</sup> De Quincey: *Essay on Style*.

<sup>6</sup> Goldwin Smith: *The United States*, chap. iii.

<sup>7</sup> Wilkie Collins: *The Dead Alive*, chap. x.

*House disaster*, yet she had evidently still sufficient to keep her in perfect comfort, and even luxury."<sup>1</sup>

"She wore a diamond pin *in her hair* which was bought in Paris."<sup>2</sup>

"Under such circumstances, the poor woman, amid her cares, may be excused if she looked back a little wistfully at Lucilla going home all comfortable and independent and light-hearted, with no cares, nor anybody to go on at her, *in her sealskin coat*."<sup>3</sup>

"And it was with this sense of certainty that she put on her bonnet and issued forth, though it snowed a little, and was a very wintry day, *on Mr. Ashburton's behalf, to try her fortune in Grange Lane*."<sup>4</sup>

"In a few moments more, he was mounted on a fine powerful black horse, and followed by Sampson, *on his road to London*."<sup>4</sup>

"Though they [the Lords] have been very far from a uniformly sagacious assembly, take them all in all, yet the English people are certainly very unlikely to decide in favour of a constitutional revolution which would have made the very hair of the American conscript fathers stand on end *more than a century ago, at its utter folly and rashness*."<sup>5</sup>

"Her slings and arrows, numerous as they were and outrageous, were directed against such petty objects, and the mischief was so quick in its aim and its operation, that, *felt but not seen*, it is scarcely possible to register the hits, or to describe the nature of the wounds."<sup>6</sup>

"Forty years ago, there was assuredly no spot of ground, *out of Palestine, in all the round world*, on which, if you knew, even but a little, the true course of that world's history, you saw with so much joyful reverence the dawn of morning, as at the foot of the Tower of Giotto."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Graham: *Chats with Jane Clermont*. The Nineteenth Century, November, 1893, p. 756.

<sup>2</sup> American newspaper.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Oliphant: *Miss Marjoribanks*, vol. ii. chap. xii. Tauchnitz edition.

<sup>4</sup> Captain Marryat: *The Children of the New Forest*, chap. xxi.

<sup>5</sup> The [London] *Spectator*, June 23, 1894, p. 844.

<sup>6</sup> Miss Edgeworth: *The Absentee*, chap. iii.

<sup>7</sup> Ruskin: *Mornings in Florence*; *The Shepherd's Tower*.

"Mr. Collins and Charlotte appeared at the door; and the carriage stopped at the small gate, which led by a short gravel walk to the house, *amidst the nods and smiles of the whole party*."<sup>1</sup>

"Obliged to part with their effects at the lowest prices, the Jews sadly departed, *amid the execrations of the people, and bearing away little but their destitute wives and children*, from the scenes of their birth and infancy."<sup>2</sup>

"The farce had now turned to tragedy which found swift completion in the total destruction of the colonists, who were massacred by the friends of the dead chief *while at work in the field*."<sup>4</sup>

"I . . . found it [the manuscript of "*Waverley*"] again by mere accident among other waste papers in an old cabinet, the drawers of which I was rummaging, in order to accommodate a friend with some fishing tackle, *after it had been mislaid for several years*."<sup>5</sup>

. . . "this was what the middle-aged married woman felt *who had, as may be said, two men to carry on her shoulders*, as she went anxiously down Grange Lane to conciliate Mrs. Centum, wrapping her shawl about her, and feeling the light snow melt beneath her feet, and the cold and discomfort go to her heart."<sup>6</sup>

In each of the following sentences a phrase or a clause has what is called a "squinting" construction, that is, it looks two ways:—

"The smooth monotony of the leading religious topics, as managed by the French orators, *under the treatment of Jeremy Taylor*, receives at each turn of the sentence a new flexure."<sup>7</sup>

"They attire themselves accordingly for what they may expect, and except for any native nobility in their air, *in their heavy boots and sensible shooting suits*, are scarcely to be distinguished from the keepers in attendance."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Miss Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*, vol. i. chap. xxviii.

<sup>2</sup> See pages 139, 140.

<sup>3</sup> Henry H. Milman: *The History of the Jews*, vol. iii. book xxiv.

<sup>4</sup> American magazine.

<sup>5</sup> Scott: *Waverley*, vol. ii. chap. xliii.

<sup>6</sup> Mrs. Oliphant: *Miss Marjoribanks*, vol. ii. chap. xii. Tauchnitz edition.

<sup>7</sup> De Quincey: *Essay on Rhetoric*.

<sup>8</sup> The *Pall Mall Budget* (1875).

. . . "he then departed, *to make himself still more interesting, in the midst of a heavy rain.*"<sup>1</sup>

"Owen, hovering betwixt his respect for his patron, and his love for the youth he had dandled on his knee in childhood, *like the timorous, yet anxious ally of an invaded nation*, endeavoured at every blunder I made to explain my no-meaning."<sup>2</sup>

"The young mind, to which growth is as natural as it is to the young body, *if it has any of that irrepressible, unconscious elasticity, which is the main characteristic of its divine remoteness from age*, will never acquiesce in a limitation it sees."<sup>3</sup>

Each of the following sentences is so badly constructed that a mere change in the position of a phrase or a clause will not remove the obscurity; to cure the difficulty the sentence must be recast:—

"Except in dealing with foreign policy, Lord Beaconsfield has of all other subjects most thoroughly mastered the management of a party and the conduct of Parliamentary business."<sup>4</sup>

"The vague and unsettled suspicions which uncertainty had produced of what Mr. Darcy might have been doing to forward her sister's match which she had feared to encourage, as an exertion of goodness too great to be probable, and at the same time dreaded to be just, from the pain of obligation, were proved beyond their greatest extent to be true!"<sup>5</sup>

"Perhaps at some future time I may be inclined to give some of these dialogues to the world; for if she did not note them down at the time, I certainly did so as they came from her lips on returning each evening to my own abode, with the words fresh in my memory, and showed her the following day what I had written."<sup>6</sup>

"There was not a soul to be seen in Grange Lane at that moment in the snow, which came on faster and faster, but one of

<sup>1</sup> Miss Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*, vol. i. chap. ix.

<sup>2</sup> Scott: *Rob Roy*, vol. i. chap. i.

<sup>3</sup> E. F. Benson: *The Rubicon*, book ii. chap. iv.

<sup>4</sup> *The Saturday Review*, Aug. 16, 1879, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> Miss Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*, vol. ii. chap. xix.

<sup>6</sup> William Graham: *Chats with Jane Clermont*. *The Nineteenth Century*, November, 1893, p. 763.

Mr. Wentworth's (who at that time was new in St. Roque's) grey sisters, and another lady who was coming down, as quickly as Lucilla was going up, by the long line of garden-walls."<sup>1</sup>

"Observe," says Blair, "the arrangement of the following sentence in Lord Shaftesbury's *Advice to an Author*. He is speaking of modern poets, as compared with the ancient: 'If, whilst they profess only<sup>2</sup> to please, they secretly advise, and give instruction, they may now, perhaps, as well as formerly, be esteemed, with justice, the best and most honourable among authors.' This is a well constructed sentence. It contains a great many circumstances and adverbs, necessary to qualify the meaning; *only, secretly, as well, perhaps, now, with justice, formerly*; yet these are placed with so much art, as neither to embarrass, nor<sup>3</sup> weaken the sentence; while that which is the capital object in it, viz., 'Poets being justly esteemed the best and most honourable among authors,' comes out in the conclusion clear and detached, and possesses its proper place. See, now, what would have been the effect of a different arrangement. Suppose him to have placed the members of the sentence thus: 'If, whilst they profess to please only, they advise and give instruction secretly, they may be esteemed the best and most honourable among authors, with justice, perhaps, now, as well as formerly.' Here we have precisely the same words and the same sense: but, by means of the circumstances being so intermingled as to clog the capital words, the whole becomes perplexed, without grace, and without strength."<sup>4</sup>

The effect of putting subordinate words in obscure positions is to leave important words where they are "clear and disentangled from any other words that would clog them,"<sup>4</sup>—a great advantage to clearness; for words so placed hold the attention. The advantage to force is still greater.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Oliphant: *Miss Marjoribanks*, vol. ii. chap. xii Tauchnitz edition.

<sup>2</sup> Is this, all things considered, the best place for *only*?

<sup>3</sup> Is a word wanting here?

<sup>4</sup> Blair: *Lectures on Rhetoric*, lect. xii.