

and rushing river of blue water sweeping through the heart of it; which, for the dark and solitary rock that bears your castle, has an amphitheatre of cliffs crested with cypresses and olive; which, for the two masses of Arthur's Seat and the ranges of the Pentlands, has a chain of blue mountains higher than the haughtiest peaks of your Highlands; and which, for your far-away Ben Ledi and Ben More, has the great central chain of the St. Gothard Alps: and yet, as you go out of the gates, and walk in the suburban streets of that city — I mean Verona — the eye never seeks to rest on that external scenery, however gorgeous; it does not look for the gaps between the houses, as you do here; it may for a few moments follow the broken line of the great Alpine battlements; but it is only where they form a background for other battlements, built by the hand of man. There is no necessity felt to dwell on the blue river or the burning hills. The heart and eye have enough to do in the streets of the city itself; they are contented there; nay, they sometimes turn from the natural scenery, as if too savage and solitary, to dwell with a deeper interest on the palace walls that cast their shade upon the streets, and the crowd of towers that rise out of that shadow into the depth of the sky."¹

SECTION VI.

PARAGRAPHS.

The usefulness of division by PARAGRAPHS as a mere mechanical device is apparent to every one who has tried to read pages of print or of manuscript that are unbroken, or that are broken into many small fragments. The unbroken text tires the eye in one way; the text too frequently broken, in another.

If the sole use of paragraphs were to rest the eye, as a speaker's changes of tone rest the ear, there would be little difficulty in determining their length or their structure;

¹ Ruskin: Lectures on Architecture and Painting, delivered at Edinburgh in November, 1853, lecture i.

ure; but if their main function is to mark changes in thought, and thus help the reader to follow a writer step by step, puzzling questions as to their length or their structure must sometimes arise.

Paragraphs are to sentences what sentences are to words. A paragraph, like a sentence, should be a unit in substance and in expression, and should be developed with clearness, with force, and with ease.

To secure clearness in a paragraph, a writer should suggest in the first sentence the main idea of the paragraph and the point of view from which it is to be considered, or should at least indicate the ^{Clearness.} direction in which the thought is to move; and he should arrange his sentences in logical order, so that each shall contribute to the development of the idea which is expressed by the paragraph as a whole, and shall occupy the place in which it can be clearly understood both in itself and in its relations to the rest of the paragraph. If a sentence can be put in one place as well as in another, there is a defect somewhere, and usually a defect of such gravity that it cannot be remedied unless the sentence, if not the paragraph, is recast.

"We may take the opportunity," writes De Quincey, "of noticing what it is that constitutes the peculiar and characterizing circumstance in Burke's manner of composition. It is this: that under his treatment every truth, be it what it may, every thesis of a sentence, *grows* in the very act of unfolding it. . . . whatever may have been the preconception, it receives a new determination or inflexion at every clause of the sentence. . . . Hence, whilst a writer of Dr. Johnson's class seems only to look back upon his thoughts, Burke looks forward, and does in fact advance and change his own station concurrently with the advance of the sentences."¹

¹ De Quincey: Essay on Rhetoric, note.

The following example of clearness in a paragraph comes from Hawthorne:—

“Half-way down a by-street of one of our New England towns stands a rusty wooden house, with seven acutely peaked gables, facing towards various points of the compass, and a huge, clustered chimney in the midst. The street is Pyncheon Street; the house is the old Pyncheon House; and an elm-tree, of wide circumference, rooted before the door, is familiar to every town-born child by the title of the Pyncheon Elm. On my occasional visits to the town aforesaid, I seldom failed to turn down Pyncheon Street, for the sake of passing through the shadow of these two antiquities, — the great elm-tree and the weather-beaten edifice.”¹

Another example comes from Macaulay:—

“The characteristic peculiarity of his [Johnson’s] intellect was the union of great powers with low prejudices. If we judged of him by the best parts of his mind, we should place him almost as high as he was placed by the idolatry of Boswell; if by the worst parts of his mind, we should place him even below Boswell himself. Where he was not under the influence of some strange scruple, or some domineering passion, which prevented him from boldly and fairly investigating a subject, he was a wary and acute reasoner, a little too much inclined to scepticism, and a little too fond of paradox. No man was less likely to be imposed upon by fallacies in argument or by exaggerated statements of fact. But if, while he was beating down sophisms and exposing false testimony, some childish prejudices, such as would excite laughter in a well managed nursery, came across him, he was smitten as if by enchantment. His mind dwindled away under the spell from gigantic elevation to dwarfish littleness. Those who had lately been admiring its amplitude and its force were now as much astonished at its strange narrowness and feebleness as the fisherman in the Arabian tale, when he saw the Genie, whose stature had overshadowed the whole sea-coast, and whose might seemed equal to a contest with armies, contract himself to the dimensions of his small prison, and lie there the helpless slave of the charm of Solomon.”²

¹ Hawthorne: *The House of the Seven Gables*, chap. i.

² Macaulay: *Essays*; *Boswell’s Life of Johnson*.

To secure force in a paragraph, a writer should make the main idea prominent, and should keep subordinate ideas in the background; and he should so arrange his sentences that the paragraph shall ^{Force.} move from the less important and less interesting to the more important and more interesting, and thus form a climax.

The following example of force in a paragraph comes from Ruskin:—

“Having, then, resolved that you will not waste recklessly, but earnestly use, these early days of yours, remember that all the duties of her children to England may be summed in two words — industry, and honour. I say, first, industry, for it is in this that soldier youth are especially tempted to fail. Yet, surely, there is no reason, because your life may possibly or probably be shorter than other men’s, that you should therefore waste more recklessly the portion of it that is granted you; neither do the duties of your profession, which require you to keep your bodies strong, in any wise involve the keeping of your minds weak. So far from that, the experience, the hardship, and the activity of a soldier’s life render his powers of thought more accurate than those of other men; and while, for others, all knowledge is often little more than a means of amusement, there is no form of science which a soldier may not at some time or other find bearing on business of life and death. A young mathematician may be excused for languor in studying curves to be described only with a pencil; but not in tracing those which are to be described with a rocket. Your knowledge of a wholesome herb may involve the feeding of an army; and acquaintance with an obscure point of geography, the success of a campaign. Never waste an instant’s time, therefore: the sin of idleness is a thousand-fold greater in you than in other youths; for the fates of those who will one day be under your command hang upon your knowledge; lost moments now will be lost lives then, and every instant which you carelessly take for play, you buy with blood.”¹

¹ Ruskin: *The Crown of Wild Olive*; *War*.

The last sentence of a paragraph should bring out the point of the whole effectively, and it may sum up all that has been said in the paragraph which it ends. In the discussion of a difficult problem or the elucidation of a profound thought, or in a persuasive discourse of any kind, such a sentence at the end of a paragraph, particularly if the paragraph be a long one, is of especial value; the reader, having received a full explanation of the writer's meaning, is ready for the thought in a portable form. The value of such a sentence appears in the following paragraph from Carlyle: —

“Consider his [an editor's] leading articles; what they treat of, how passably they are done. Straw that has been thrashed a hundred times without wheat; ephemeral sound of a sound; such portent of the hour as all men have seen a hundred times turn out inane: how a man, with merely human faculty, buckles himself nightly with new vigour and interest to this thrashed straw, nightly thrashes it anew, nightly gets-up new thunder about it; and so goes on thrashing and thundering for a considerable series of years; this is a fact remaining still to be accounted for, in human physiology. The vitality of man is great.”¹

To secure ease in a paragraph, a writer should have ease not only in the sentences of which the paragraph is composed, but also in the movement from sentence to sentence. Sometimes he may gain ease in transition by repeating a word, sometimes by using a conjunction or other particle which makes the connection plain. The more he varies his methods, the less likely he is to call attention to them. If he achieves the result without betraying the processes, he is justly said to have “a flowing style.” “In Shakspeare one sentence

¹ Carlyle: Miscellanies; Sir Walter Scott. For other examples, see pages 150, 151.

begets the next naturally; the meaning is all inwoven. He goes on kindling like a meteor through the dark atmosphere.”¹ A style characterized by the corresponding demerit is well described, by a homely French metaphor, as *décousu*, — a thing of shreds and patches; or, to change the figure, “the sentences in a page have the same connection with each other that marbles have in a bag; they touch without adhering.”¹

The following passage from George Eliot, though not remarkable for ease in the construction of sentences, is a good example of ease in transition from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph: —

“But the sound of a sharp bark inside, as Eppie put the key in the door, modified the donkey's views, and he limped away again without bidding. The sharp bark was the sign of an excited welcome that was awaiting them from a knowing brown terrier, who, after dancing at their legs in a hysterical manner, rushed with a worrying noise at a tortoise-shell kitten under the loom, and then rushed back with a sharp bark again, as much as to say, ‘I have done my duty by this feeble creature, you perceive;’ while the lady-mother of the kitten sat sunning her white bosom in the window, and looked round with a sleepy air of expecting caresses, though she was not going to take any trouble for them.

“The presence of this happy animal life was not the only change which had come over the interior of the stone cottage.”²

The following paragraph from Cardinal Newman is an excellent example of ease at all points: —

“It is a great point then to enlarge the range of studies which a University professes, even for the sake of the students; and, though they cannot pursue every subject which is open to them, they will be the gainers by living among those and under those who represent the whole circle. This I conceive to be the advantage of a seat of universal learning, considered as a place of education. An assemblage of learned men, zealous for their own

¹ Coleridge: Table Talk. ² George Eliot: Silas Marner, chap. xvi.

sciences, and rivals of each other, are brought, by familiar intercourse and for the sake of intellectual peace, to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective subjects of investigation. They learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes, though in his own case he only¹ pursues a few sciences out of the multitude. He profits by an intellectual tradition, which is independent of particular teachers, which guides him in his choice of subjects, and duly interprets for him those which he chooses. He apprehends the great outlines of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that his education is called 'Liberal.' A habit of mind is formed which lasts through life, of which the attributes are, freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation, and wisdom; or what in a former Discourse I have ventured to call a philosophical habit. This then I would assign as the special fruit of the education furnished at a University, as contrasted with other places of teaching or modes of teaching. This is the main purpose of a University in its treatment of its students."²

To secure unity in a paragraph, a writer should conform to the general principles that secure unity in a sentence. A paragraph, like a sentence, should
 Unity. contain one main idea, should admit nothing that is not germane to that idea, and should be so framed as to present a well-rounded whole. In the following passage from Hawthorne each paragraph is a unit:—

"One afternoon, when the sun was going down, a mother and her little boy sat at the door of their cottage, talking about the Great Stone Face. They had but to lift their eyes, and there it was plainly to be seen, though miles away, with the sunshine brightening all its features.

¹ See page 179.

² Cardinal Newman: *The Idea of a University; University Teaching, Knowledge its Own End.*

"And what was the Great Stone Face?

"Embosomed amongst a family of lofty mountains, there was a valley so spacious that it contained many thousand inhabitants. Some of these good people dwelt in log-huts, with the black forest all around them, on the steep and difficult hill-sides. Others had their homes in comfortable farm-houses, and cultivated the rich soil on the gentle slopes or level surfaces of the valley. Others, again, were congregated into populous villages, where some wild, highland rivulet, tumbling down from its birthplace in the upper mountain region, had been caught and tamed by human cunning, and compelled to turn the machinery of cotton-factories. The inhabitants of this valley, in short, were numerous, and of many modes of life. But all of them, grown people and children, had a kind of familiarity with the Great Stone Face, although some possessed the gift of distinguishing this grand natural phenomenon more perfectly than many of their neighbors.

"The Great Stone Face, then, was a work of Nature in her mood of majestic playfulness, formed on the perpendicular side of a mountain by some immense rocks, which had been thrown together in such a position as, when viewed at a proper distance, precisely to resemble the features of the human countenance. It seemed as if an enormous giant, or a Titan, had sculptured his own likeness on the precipice. There was the broad arch of the forehead, a hundred feet in height; the nose, with its long bridge; and the vast lips, which, if they could have spoken, would have rolled their thunder accents from one end of the valley to the other. True it is, that if the spectator approached too near, he lost the outline of the gigantic visage, and could discern only a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks, piled in chaotic ruin one upon another. Retracing his steps, however, the wondrous features would again be seen; and the farther he withdrew from them, the more like a human face, with all its original divinity intact, did they appear; until, as it grew dim in the distance, with the clouds and glorified vapor of the mountains clustering about it, the Great Stone Face seemed positively to be alive."¹

This passage shows that it matters not how many sentences a paragraph contains, provided the paragraph is a unit.

¹ Hawthorne: *Twice-Told Tales; The Great Stone Face.*

The following paragraph contains heterogeneous matter, and is therefore not a unit:—

“Soon her absorbing desire was to be altogether shut up with Mary, except on Sundays and at practising times. For this purpose she gave herself the worst cold she could achieve, and cherished diligently what she proudly considered to be a racking cough. But Miss Frederick was deaf to the latter, and only threatened the usual upstairs seclusion and senna-tea for the former, whereupon Marcella in alarm declared that her cold was much better and gave up the cough in despair. It was her first sorrow and cost her some days of pale brooding and silence, and some nights of stifled tears, when during an Easter holiday a letter from Miss Frederick to her mother announced the sudden death of Mary Lant.”¹

The first three sentences, which deal with incidents connected with Marcella's devotion to Mary Lant during her lifetime, belong in one paragraph; the last sentence, which speaks of Marcella's sorrow at Mary's death, belongs in another. The reader's difficulty in getting at the meaning is increased by the fact that “it” at the beginning of the last sentence at first sight seems to refer to what precedes, but really refers to what follows.

It is sometimes impracticable to give to a paragraph clearness, force, and ease in an equally high degree; for, as the relative importance of these qualities varies with subject-matter and purpose, it may be difficult in a given case to secure in full measure the quality most needed without sacrificing something from one or both of the others. Unity, on the other hand, is essential to the excellence of every paragraph, whatever the subject-matter or purpose; without it a collection of sentences may be a paragraph in form, but it cannot be one in substance.

¹ Mrs. Humphry Ward: *Marcella*, book i. chap. i.

SECTION VII.

WHOLE COMPOSITIONS.

The general principles on which WHOLE COMPOSITIONS should be framed are the same for a paper of two or three pages as for a book of several volumes.

To secure clearness and force in a composition as a whole, it is necessary not only to make each paragraph clear and forcible, but also to arrange all the paragraphs in a clear and effective order, — the ^{Clearness and force.} order that accords with the sequence of thought and that holds the reader's interest from beginning to end. If this order is followed, each paragraph will be in the place where it belongs, the only place in which it can stand without injury to the total impression.

To secure ease in a composition as a whole, it is necessary not only to give ease to each paragraph, but also to make the transition from paragraph to paragraph without jar. ^{Ease.} Too much attention can hardly be paid to the manner of getting from one paragraph to another. A master of the art of transition begins and ends each paragraph so as to make it grow out of the last and into the next; he moves so easily and naturally that the reader follows without being aware of the steps he is taking.

To secure unity in a composition as a whole, it is necessary not only to make each paragraph a unit, but also to make all the paragraphs together constitute a whole, as all the sentences in each ^{Unity.} paragraph constitute a smaller whole.

“Every man, as he walks through the streets,” says De Quincey, “may contrive to jot down an independent thought, a shorthand