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SOME SECRETS OF STYLE

by

HENRY BETT, M.A.

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PREFACE

I THINK it is due to the reader, and to myself, to give some account of the origin of this book. In 1927 I wrote an article in one of the quarterly reviews on "Some Elements of Style", which was afterward re-issued in my *Studies in Literature*. The article attracted the attention of the publishers of the present work, who asked me to write a small handbook on similar lines. This they issued in 1929 under the title, *How to Write Good English*, and then were kind enough to suggest that I should write a larger book on the subject. I mention these things merely to explain why I have twice returned to the theme, and why I have used for a second time (in a few cases) the same illustrative passages.

Let me add that I have deliberately avoided, for the most part, the technicalities of prosody and phonetics, because I feel sure that there are many people, genuinely interested in the question of style, who would be sadly bored by such refinements, and also because I cannot help thinking that phonetic and prosodical analysis has often been carried out in a way that is very arbitrary and very pedantic.

I wish to acknowledge the help of my son and my daughters, who have made some useful suggestions and offered some shrewd criticisms while I have been writing the following pages.

H. B.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	PREFACE	9
I.	INTRODUCTION	13
II.	SOUND AND HARMONY	29
III.	MEANING AND SELECTION	70
IV.	DERIVATION AND HISTORY	112
V.	POSITION AND EMPHASIS	136
VI.	MOVEMENT AND RHYTHM	162
VII.	QUALITY AND DESCRIPTION	206
VIII.	EPILOGUE	248
	NOTES	273
	INDEX	275

SOME SECRETS OF STYLE

I

INTRODUCTION

Ἔστι μὲν οὖν τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα· καὶ τὰ γραφόμενα τῶν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ.

ARISTOTLE, *De Interp.* I. 1.

WHAT is style? It is necessary to remember, first of all, that there is a difference between a style and style. Every writer has a style, that is, a literary manner of his own, and there are many marked contrasts between the styles of our great writers, in simplicity, and strength, and melody, and many other qualities. But however widely these styles differ, all the great writers possess in common the attribute of style. How are we to define a general quality that manifests itself so variously? Lowell has said that it is "like the grace of perfect breeding, which makes itself felt by the skill with which it effaces itself, and masters us at last with a sense of indefinable completeness". Every writer who is great simply

as a writer has the artist's power and refinement and deftness in the manipulation of language. Here the qualification must be emphasised: while Scott, for example, is assuredly one of the very greatest of all writers of fiction, he had not much gift of prose style. His novels will always live by virtue of great qualities of imagination and insight into human life, and of minute observation of human character and conduct, but they would not live long merely as great achievements in the use of the English tongue. Scott is a great writer, that is to say, but he is not great expressly as a writer of English prose. Our interest is not in his own artistic handling of language; it is in the people and the events which he describes. But when we read a great paragraph of Sir Thomas Browne our interest is quite as much in the way the thing is said as in what is said.

The whole issue depends largely upon the natural distinction which De Quincey expressed once for all when he wrote of the difference between the literature of knowledge, the function of which is to *teach*, and the literature of power, the function of which is to *move*. The last, as he says, though it may speak ultimately to the reason, always speaks "through affections of pleasure and sympathy". But there is a further

distinction to be made here, I think. The masterpieces of fiction, for example, belong unmistakably to the literature of power, for their whole appeal is to the imagination and the emotions. But the appeal is made by the representation of persons and events, and (except in the use of dialect, and of language that is specially characteristic of persons) it does not vitally depend upon any particular use of words. Poetry, however, and the higher kind of prose, make an imaginative and emotional appeal by way of subtleties of sound and suggestion and association. Here it is not merely a description of supposed facts, not merely even a description of emotional facts that is sufficient to represent these to the mind effectively, as a reporter's account in a newspaper of some tragedy may be enough to make us realise the pity and the horror of it, where the appeal to the emotions really lies in the fact itself, however baldly it may be stated. More than that, it is not merely such a poignant description of the tragedy as we might find in the pages of a great novelist, where there is added to the bare relation of the fact the insight of an imaginative genius. For if the story of that tragedy had been written by Shakespeare the whole appeal would not have depended on the mere relation of the

pitiful fact, and not even on the imaginative treatment of it, but also on the very character of the language in which it was narrated. The choice of each particular word for its sound and suggestiveness, and the way that the words were poised together in the sentence, both in respect to emphasis and to melody—these elements, at least, would have been present in a great passage of Shakespeare. What our living poet has said of poetry is true of all prose of the very highest kind as well as of poetry—it is not mere truth or mere wisdom:

> "but the rose
> Upon Truth's lips, the light in Wisdom's eyes."

All the greatest poetry and prose, therefore, has to do not only with the things described, and the imaginative treatment of these, and the rough solidity of meaning in the words which are used, but also with many more elusive attributes of language—the delicate bloom, the changing light, the faint perfume, the echoing music that belong to words. It follows that, as De Quincey remarks, "style, or (to speak by the most general expression) the management of language, ranks among the fine arts, and is able to yield a separate intellectual pleasure quite apart from the interest of the subject treated."

A study of style naturally has to do with great literature, for it is only there that style, in the higher sense of the word, is to be found. But that is not to say that a consideration of literary style is concerned with all that makes the greatness of literature. It has been said that style is the great antiseptic; the nobler kind of poetry and prose lives in the memory of men, and holds its place in the immortal literature of the world, largely by virtue of this quality of style. But it is worth while to consider rather carefully the way in which this is true. Style has to do with the form rather than with the substance of literature, and though the substance and the form are very intimately allied in every species of art, there is a sense in which form is after all the last word. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that there are two works of art which are equally great in conception, but that one of them is the more skilfully executed. It is certain that it is the one which is more perfect in workmanship that will live. That is so in literature; every thought that can be expressed in words becomes in a way the special property of the writer who utters it in the most adroitly managed words. It is rare qualities of intellect and imagination that make the essential core of great literature, and when these are accompanied

by remarkable gifts of expression, both the substance and the form are present. These may exist apart: there are writers whose powers of thought are greater than their powers of expression, and their writings may be immortal, like some of the great metaphysical classics. But it is not exactly as pure literature that they are immortal. If these books belong to literature in the wider sense of the word, as being among the great books of the world, they belong to the literature of knowledge (to use De Quincey's distinction again) rather than to the literature of power. They live by sheer weight of truth, however clumsy may be the language that is used in the expression of it.

On the other hand there are writers whose gift of expression is far in excess of their other intellectual powers, and the writings of such authors may achieve a minor immortality as literature, merely by virtue of the grace and beauty of their language. But it is only nobility of thought allied with nobility of language that makes the absolute greatness of pure literature. The former element may be disregarded in the following pages, except in so far as it is inseparable from literary form, for our concern is with literary style—that is to say, with the form and not with the substance. This cannot be said too

plainly. If anyone accuses the present study of being concerned with words rather than with thoughts, with the literary craftsmanship of the great writers rather than with their creative imagination, the answer is that it is precisely the writer's craft in the use of words that must be our preoccupation in any study of style.

Any consideration of style must therefore be specially concerned with *belles-lettres*, in the proper sense of the phrase, since style is more vital in poetry than in prose, and in some particular kinds of prose than in other kinds. For prose may be only passably good, and yet serve a sufficient purpose in the expression of thought, but if verse is only passably good, it ceases to be poetry at all in any real sense. As Horace said, a Roman lawyer of moderate ability might have an excuse for existence as a lawyer, though he did not possess the eloquence of Messala, nor the legal learning of Casselius Aulus, but a middling poet —that (as it might be maliciously rendered) neither gods nor men nor even publishers could stand!—

mediocribus esse poetis
Non homines, non di, non concessere columnae.(1)

The reason is plain. When we read the work of a philosopher, for example, we are much more

concerned with the quality of the thought than with the quality of the language, though if the philosopher is Berkeley we recognise the added grace of style. But when we read a poem of Shelley's (however much of thought and truth there may be in it), the form becomes vastly more important, because it is much more intimately one with the substance. When Butler writes of conscience, "A direction of the Author of Nature, given to creatures capable of looking upon it as such, is plainly a command from Him; and a command from Him necessarily includes in it, at least, an implicit promise in case of obedience, or threatening in case of disobedience", we feel that he is building a solid structure of words that conveys his meaning well enough. But when Wordsworth writes:

"Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
O Duty! if that name thou love
Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring and reprove",

we feel that, while he is saying much the same thing as Butler, he is not only saying it within the pattern of a metrical form, and saying it much more imaginatively, but he is also saying it in words which are more choice, harmonious, and

memorable than Butler's. We feel also that the imaginative quality of the lines is inseparable from the poet's words, each with its special sound, and use, and associations, and equally inseparable from the way in which these different words are grouped together.

It is largely the difference between use and beauty, in regard to the craftsmanship which is involved in the creation of things which are useful and things which are beautiful. If the Athenians of old built a harbour wall, the main thing was that the blocks of stone should be roughly squared; if they carved a statue of Pallas Athene it became a question of the nobler kind of craftsmanship that we call art, where the imaginative appeal of the finished work depends not only on the artistic design, but on the artistic execution—a minute precision and a subtle delicacy in the workmanship which are affected by every blow of the hammer and every stroke of the chisel.

As the element of art is more essential to poetry than to prose, generally, so it is more essential to the kind of prose that approaches poetry in its spirit and intention than to other sorts of prose. It is not that the finest prose resembles poetry in the metrical or rhythmical effects which properly belong to poetry, for the whole structure of prose

is obviously different from that of poetry, but that as there is any approach to the more ideal significance of poetry the form becomes more essential—the subtleties of meaning and the harmonies of sound are more vital.

It would be tolerable enough if we read in a guide-book to Venice: "The first sight of the Rialto from a gondola as you pass down the Grand Canal is very striking. The bridge is a single arch, spanning the Canal. It gives an impression of mingled strength and grace. On the left is the Camerlenghi Palace. As your boat proceeds the silence is only broken by the splash of the oar and the cry of the gondolier. Farther down the Canal the first view of the Doge's Palace, and, on the other side of the water, of the Church of Santa Maria della Salute, is also very impressive." But we pass into another world altogether when we read Ruskin's words: "When first, at the extremity of the bright vista, the shadowy Rialto threw its colossal curve slowly forth from behind the palace of the Camerlenghi; that strange curve, so delicate, so adamantine, strong as a mountain torrent, graceful as a bow just bent; when first, before its moonlike circumference was all risen, the gondolier's cry, 'Ah! Stali', struck sharp upon the ear, and the prow

turned aside under the mighty cornices that half met over the narrow canal, where the plash of water followed close and loud, ringing along the marble by the boat's side; and when at last that boat darted forth upon the breadth of silver sea, across which the front of the Ducal Palace, flushed with its sanguine veins, looks to the snowy palace of Our Lady of Salvation, it was no marvel that the mind should be so deeply entranced by the visionary charm of a scene so beautiful and so strange." Here the difference is plainly a difference in imaginative quality, first of all, but that difference depends for its expression upon the more delicate choice of words, and the more skilful way that the words are marshalled together. The words are nobler because they are of finer sound or of subtler significance, and these attributes finally depend upon their history and their use in the past; there is also the way that they are placed in the sentence, for it is not a mere jumble of fine language, but a deliberate and delicate arrangement.

We may say, then, that there are at least these principal factors of which serious account must be taken in any consideration of style. Every word has a sound; a meaning; a relation to the other words in the sentence; an etymological

history; and also literary associations that have gathered around it in the passage of the centuries. All these are connected, and often connected in the most subtle and sensitive way. There is sometimes a primary relation between the sound and the meaning of the word. The more delicate shades of meaning often depend upon the derivation and history of the word, and these again account in a great measure for its sound. (The sound of the word is always conditioned by the sound of the other words with which it is associated in a sentence.) Similarly the meaning of the word is influenced to some extent by the other words with which it finds itself in company for the moment. Both the sound and the meaning are affected by the movement of the words. And the aptness of a word for a particular use is also influenced by the way in which it has been used in the great literature of the past.

All these facts react upon each other. A word may be a beautiful sound in itself, but a word never stands alone, except in a dictionary, and the beauty of the sound of any word is therefore affected by the sound of the words associated with it. *Heaven* is a beautiful word, and *the starry heaven* is a musical phrase, but no one would regard *Nigger Heaven* (which is the title

of an American play) as a phrase of attractive sound. The meaning of a word, again, is a relatively fixed element, but even the meaning of a word is determined to some considerable extent by the words that are used along with it. *Imperial* conveys a general sense of "what is connected with empire", but the meaning varies widely according as you say that a statesman has "embarked on an *imperial* policy", or that his wife "carries herself with an *imperial* air", or that either of them has "drunk an *imperial* pint of wine!"

Again, the position of a word in a sentence in relation to other words has a real bearing upon its effectiveness both in sound and sense, because that position and relation largely regulate the stress that it bears. A sentence like, "They went out from our fellowship but they were not of our spirit", gives the sense of the Apostle's words, but there is nothing like the stress there (either in pronunciation or in meaning) upon the words *from* and *of* that there is in the Authorised Version: "They went out *from* us but they were not *of* us." You cannot stress the words so much, and there is no need to do so, when they are followed by descriptive nouns, as when they come almost at the end of a clause and are only followed by a pronoun.

Once again, the structure and the history of a word affect both its sound and its significance. When we read that at the Crucifixion "the veil of the temple was *rent* in twain", the word *rent* represents by its very consonants the tearing sound. The same effect is produced in the original Greek by other imitative consonants (ἐσχίσθη, a form of the word that we have in English as *schism*) much as we can reproduce the sound of rending by saying *split*. There are many words in every language that are similarly mimetic. Apart from imitative sound altogether there are also hosts of words that have developed interesting contrasts of sound and sense in the course of their history. Thus there are many pairs of words in English that have a Latin origin, but in one example the word has come to us by direct borrowing from the Latin, and in the other the word has reached us through the older form of French. It is curious to note the difference that has developed in the meaning, accompanied by a change in the sound. Thus *prosecute* and *pursue* have the same ultimate source, but *prosecute* has come to us almost unchanged from the Latin *prosequor*, *prosecutus*, while *pursue* has reached us by way of the Old French *porsuir*, though it goes back to the same Latin word. So *vindictive* and

vengeful are both from the Latin in the last resort, but *vindictive* has come to us direct as from *vindicare*, and *vengeful* derives from the French *venger*, though that in turn has come from *vindicare*. Now consider the difference between a *vindictive prosecution* and a *vengeful pursuit*. Obviously the first phrase is the more rigid, technical, and prosaic, the second is the more vivid, romantic, and poetical. But the first phrase consists of seven syllables and twenty-one letters, of which twelve are consonants, while the second phrase consists of four syllables and fifteen letters, of which nine are consonants. It is plain that there is a connection between the rigidity of the first phrase and its polysyllabic and consonantal character, and that the shortening and softening of this in the second phrase has to do with its more musical sound, and with its more poetic suggestiveness. Thus it is generally true that words directly from the Latin have a more rigid and stately character, depending largely on the fact that many of them are sonorous polysyllables, and that words which have come to us from the Latin through the older form of French have a more romantic character, largely because they have fewer syllables, fewer consonants, and more mingled vowels.

Then anyone who is familiar with great literature (and no one else is likely to bother about style) will always hear literary undertones in words. Probably no well-read person could see or use the word *dread*, or any of its adjectives, without some faint echo in his mind (to remember Milton only) of lines like:

"Return, Alpheus; the *dread* voice is past
That shrunk thy streams",

and:

"All night the *dreadless* angel, unpursued
Through Heaven's wide champaign held his way",

and:

"the *dreaded* name
Of Demogorgon",

and:

"the gate
With *dreadful* faces thronged and fiery arms."

II

SOUND AND HARMONY

It will be worth while to consider more closely some of the factors that have been already mentioned. Let us think, first, of the mere sound of words. The Mad Hatter asked Alice, "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?" He did not give the answer, and probably there was meant to be none, but there is really a point of connexion by way of sound. Almost every word that means "to write" has the original sense of *scratching* (*γράφω*, *scribo*, *écrire*, *schreiben*), and almost every word that means "raven" derives from the *croak* of the bird (*κόραξ*, *corvus*, *corbeau*, *Rabe*), and in both series of words the scraping sound and the hoarse sound are represented by R (often in company with a guttural G, K, or Ch). The Mad Hatter's riddle might therefore be answered, "Because there is an R in both raven and writing-desk, to represent a rough sound—the scratch of a pen, and the croak of the bird."

The very letters of the alphabet, that is to say, preponderate in a word according to its original meaning, and if that meaning has not changed

too much in the course of time the sound is still, as Pope said, "an echo of the sense". Plato pointed out in the *Cratylus* that the long vowels α and η suit "the expression of largeness and length"; that ρ suggests "motion and violence"; λ "slipping and smoothness"; the sibilants σ, ζ, and ψ notions of "seething, shivering, and windy sounds"; while the dentals δ and τ express "binding and rest". Many of the words which he gives as examples are naturally rendered by English words in which the same sounds predominate, and it would not be difficult to string together many words of the same sort, for example, f*ar*, l*arge*, gr*eat*; *r*un, *r*ace, *r*oll, *r*age, *r*end; *l*aunch, *l*apse, *l*evel, s*l*ide, s*l*eek; *s*immer, *s*izzle, *s*hake, *s*hiver, *s*hudder, *s*igh, *s*ough; we*d*, wel*d*, bon*d*, fas*t*, fe*tt*er, hal*t*, res*t*. Our own English philosopher Bacon acutely remarked in his *Natural History* (c. ii. 200): "There is found a similitude between the sound that is made by inanimate bodies or by animate bodies that have no voice articulate, and divers letters of articulate voices; and commonly men have given such names to those sounds as do allude unto the articulate letters; as trembling of water hath resemblance with the letter *L*; quenching of hot metals with the letter *Z*; snarling of dogs with the letter *R*;

the noise of screech-owls with the letter *Sh*; voice of cats with the diphthong *Eu*; voice of cuckoos with the diphthong *Ou*; sounds of strings with the letter *Ng*." It is easy enough to illustrate Bacon's thesis. Think of *l*apping water on the shore, sizzling iron in a smithy, ba*r*king dogs, *sh*rieking owls, *mew*ing cats, and twa*ng*ing strings, to say nothing of the cuck*oo*—though it must be confessed that when all these are brought together it makes a very bedlam of sound!

Take the letter R, which Bacon associated with "snarling of dogs". Persius similarly called it *littera canina*. It is found prominently not only in words that mean to *bark* or to *snarl*, but in words that convey a sense of *rending* or *breaking*, like the Greek ῥαίω, ῥακόω, ῥήγνυμι, and in many Latin words which have a similar sense, like *deripio*, *ruina*, *rumpo*. So in a large number of English words that suggest harsh sounds, such as *break*, *crash*, *creak*, *grate*, *groan*, *harsh*, *hoarse*, *rent*, *rasp*, *rattle*, *rip*, *roar*, *row*, *rumble*.

The sound prevails in descriptions of harsh noises generally, as in Horace's line: *Ut gratas inter mensas symphonia discors*.(2) So Shakespeare writes, in *Macbeth*:

> "The raven himself is hoarse
> That croaks the fatal enterance of Duncan."

And Dryden, in *Alexander's Feast*: "And rouse him like a rattling peal of thunder."

The sound of a trumpet naturally demands the letter *R*. Lucretius writes: *Et revorat raucum retro cito barbara bombum*(3)—an untranslatable line—and our own poets use the letter in the same way, as when Milton tells of Satan that:

> "At the warlike sound
> Of trumpets loud and clarions, he upreared
> His mighty standard",

and so in many lines like Shakespeare's, "With harsh resounding trumpets' dreadful bray", and Dryden's, "The trumpet's loud clangour excites us to arms", and Keats', "The silver snarling trumpets 'gan to chide", and Tennyson's, "The shattering trumpet shrilleth high". And so generally of anything that suggests the sounds of war, as when Marvell apostrophises Cromwell:

> "Thee, many ages hence, in martial verse,
> Shall the English soldier, ere he charge, rehearse."

So also of grating sounds like the grinding of hinges when a heavy door is opened or closed. Virgil wrote:

> *dirae ferro et corpagibus artis*
> *Claudentur Belli portae,*(4)

and again:

Tum demum horrisono stridentes cardine sacrae
Panduntur portae.(5)

The last passage was clearly in the mind of Milton when he wrote of the gates of hell:

"Open fly,
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,
The infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder."

Virgil again describes Pyrrhus breaking through the door of Priam's palace:

Ipse inter primos correpta dura bipenni
Limina perrumpit.(6)

And so generally of anything that is accompanied by a rending or roaring noise. Milton describes the effect of an eruption, and the hill that is:

"Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side
Of thundering Etna",

and represents the sound of the roaring sea:

"that parts
Calabria from the hoarse Trinacrian shore."

If you have any doubt as to the effect of those harsh R's, substitute:

"that divides
Ausonia from the dim Sicilian coast",

and observe the difference when they have gone. Similarly Keats writes of:

> "the solid *r*oar
> Of thunde*r*ous wate*r*falls and to*rr*ents hoa*r*se",

and describes a similar scene as:

> "hoa*r*se with loud to*r*mented st*r*eams
> And all the eve*r*lasting catara*c*ts
> And all the headlong to*rr*ents fa*r* and nea*r*."

The letter S derives both shape and sound from the snake; the letter therefore prevails in the names of the reptile, like ὄφις, *anguis*, *serpens*, and in words like συρίζω, σφαραγέομαι, *susurro*, *sibilo*, and our English words, *sigh*, *sizzle*, *splash*, *suck*, *swish*, *whizz*, that suggest a hissing or whistling sound, and (to a smaller extent) in words like the Latin *sinuosus*, and our words, *shuffle*, *skulk*, *squint*, which suggest a sly or twisting movement. The sibilants, therefore, naturally prevail in any description of a serpent. Virgil describes a wounded snake:

> *Saucius at serpens sinuosa volumina versat,*
> *Arrectisque horret squamis, et sibilat ore,*(7)

and Pope writes of "a needless alexandrine" that "like a wounded *s*nake dra*gs* it*s* *s*low length along". Here, of course, it is the long vowels as

well as the sibilants that matter, because they convey the sense of the slow crawl of the reptile.

Milton gives us a horrid list of serpent's names:

> "Scorpion and asp and amphisbaena dire
> Cerastes horned, hydrus, and ellops drear,
> And dipsas",

with a sibilant or two in every name; whenever he mentions the serpent, or the Tempter in the serpent's form, it is "the serpent, subtlest beast of all the field", or "the spirited sly snake", or "the serpent sly, insinuating"; when he describes how the demons were changed into serpents he tells us that there was "a dismal universal hiss, the sound of public scorn"; and when he wants to suggest a snake's movement he writes: "These their long dimension drew, Streaking the ground with sinuous trace."

The letter naturally prevails also in descriptions of a storm, when you are meant to hear the whistling winds and splashing waves, as where Virgil likens the onfall of the Greeks to a sudden tempest, when:

> *stridunt silvae, saevitque tridenti*
> *Spumeus atque imo Nereus ciet aequora fundo.*(8)

So generally of any hissing or whistling sound, as

when Wordsworth describes the whistling flight of an arrow:

> "Thousands of years before the silent air
> Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen",

and the hissing slide of skates:

> "All shod with steel
> We hissed along the polished ice in games
> Confederate."

And in any description of flight where the rustle of pinions is suggested, as when Milton writes: "Brushed with the hiss of rustling wings", and describes the flight of the fiend over chaos:

> "At last his sail-broad vans
> He spreads for flight, and, in the surging smoke
> Uplifted, spurns the ground."

There appear to be more sibilants in English than in any other language. The proportion has been increased in modern times by an inflexional change of which Addison complained—the substitution of —*s* for —*eth* in the last syllable of the third person of the present tense of the verb. We say "seeks", and "speaks", where earlier English said "seeketh" and "speaketh". There can be no doubt that this has considerably added to the proportion of sibilants: in the first Psalm,

for example, we have "walketh" . . . "standeth" . . . "sitteth" . . . "bringeth" . . . "doeth" . . . "driveth" . . . "knoweth". When the change is made to "walks, stands", and so on, there are seven more sibilant endings in the six verses. The shortening of the words has some effect upon the general sound of the sentences, but apart from this I cannot believe that the changed ending brings about any loss of euphony. I am sure that it does not in the language generally.

Tennyson thought that he disliked the sibilants, and said that he took special care in the revision of his verse to "kick out the geese". In spite of this, I think that there is probably as much alliteration upon S in his writings as in most of the English poets. One has only to turn over the pages of *In Memoriam* to find many stanzas like this:

> "Eternal process moving on
> From state to state the spirit walks;
> And these are but the shattered stalks,
> Or ruined chrysalis of one",

or this:

> "What stays thee from the clouded noons,
> Thy sweetness from its proper place?
> Can trouble live with April days,
> Or sadness in the summer moons?"

There are many other passages in Tennyson's poems where sibilants are numerous, and there is usually a very good reason for their prominence, as, for example:

> "The *s*ilent *s*now po*ss*e*ss*'d the earth,
> And calmly fell our Chri*s*tma*s* Eve",

where the S's, in combination with the L's, M's, and N's, suggest to the ear the falling stillness of the snowy night; and:

> "*S*hort *s*wallow-flight*s* of *s*ong that dip
> Their wing*s* in tear*s* and *s*kim away",

where the S's, associated with stopped letters like D, P, and T, along with the prevalent monosyllables, indicate rapidity and brevity of action —the quick, short flights of the bird.

I suggest that the explanation of Tennyson's imagined distaste for sibilants, and the trouble he took to expel them, is simply that his style ran naturally to alliteration, and that he was alert to the danger of alliterative excess. He once said, in reply to the criticism that his verse was stupidly alliterative, "Why, when I spout my lines first, they come out so alliteratively that I have sometimes no end of trouble to get rid of the alliteration." He felt instinctively that he must be on his guard against alliteration, and especially

against an excess of sibilants, which is perhaps one of the most obvious forms of alliterative excess, and took trouble to hunt out the S's, but did not succeed in reducing them below the proportion in which they are found in other poets. Milton, to whom Tennyson owed so much as an exemplar of poetic style, certainly had no objection to alliteration of this particular kind. It is rather characteristic of him, as many passages from *Paradise Lost* are sufficient to show. For example:

> "For who can yet believe, though after loss,
> That all these puissant legions, whose exile
> Hath emptied Heaven, shall fail to re-ascend,
> Self-raised, and repossess their native seat?
> For me, be witness all the host of Heaven,
> If counsels different, or danger shunned
> By me, have lost our hopes."

Here is another example from *Comus*:

> "At last a soft and solemn breathing sound
> Rose like a stream of rich distilled perfumes
> And stole upon the air, that even Silence
> Was took ere she was ware . ."

And another from *Lycidas*:

> "Whom universal nature did lament,
> When, by the rout that made the hideous roar,
> His gory visage down the stream was sent,
> Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore."

The lines which follow are almost as abundant in sibilants as these. But indeed a single line like that from the *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity:* "The *s*able-*s*tolèd *s*or*c*erer*s* bear hi*s* wor*s*hipt ark", is enough to show that Milton had no horror of sibilants.

When S is associated with L it often suggests something slow and sleepy. Our word "sleep" derives from a root that means "relaxed", and we have many words like "slack", "slide", "slink", "slip", "slouch", "slow". Consequently the blended sound is often used to indicate some movement that is slow and almost silent. Thus Tennyson describes the quiet flow of the tides which still the ripple of the river:

> "There twi*c*e a day the *S*evern fi*ll*s;
> The *s*a*l*t *s*ea-water pa*ss*e*s* by,
> And hu*s*he*s* ha*l*f the babb*l*ing Wye,
> And make*s* a *s*i*l*en*c*e in the hi*ll*s",

and the same poet writes in *Mariana*:

> "About a *s*tone-ca*s*t from the wa*ll*
> A *s*l*u*i*c*e with b*l*acken'd water*s* *s*l*e*pt."

If, however, a dental immediately follows the sibilant, and the sound is prolonged by a liquid following that, there is a feeling of stricture in

the sound. So in Greek there are words like *στραγγαλίζω*, *στρεβλόω*, *στρέφω*, which all have a sense of straining or strangling, and in Latin there are words like *strangulo*, *stringo*, which have a similar meaning. In English we have many words such as *strait*, *strain*, *stretch*, *strife*, *struggle*. In German again there are many words like *straff*, *sträuben*, *strecken*, *streiten*, which all convey a sense of stretching or striving.

It is not an accident that such words as these all imply *str*ain, for the S T R is a *str*angled, *str*ident sort of sound which suggests that. It has been pointed out that as a matter of psychological fact the muscular action involved in pronouncing a word like *struggle* calls up in the mind an instinctive sense of physical effort. Tennyson was once criticised for rhyming *land* with *land* in the opening lines of *The Lotus Eaters*:

> " 'Courage!' he said, and pointed toward the *land*,
> 'This mounting wave will roll us shoreward soon!'
> In the afternoon they came unto a *land*
> In which it seemèd always afternoon."

The rhyme is not a rhyme at all, of course, and superficially the criticism is justified. But Tennyson said in answer to it, "The *strand* was, I think, my first reading, but the no-rhyme of *land* was

lazier." So it is: it almost suggests that the narrator is too tired to think of another word, and the lazy recurrence of the same word suits the atmosphere of weariness that marks the poem throughout. But that is not the whole issue. *Strand*, though it has itself no connotation of effort, begins with the sound that (as we have seen) characterises many of the words that do suggest strain, and there is an element of vocal strain in the utterance of it. It was the *sound* of the word *strand* which led the poet to avoid it, and to substitute a word that was "lazier".

The letter H also characterises many words which denote effort, like *hale*, *haste*, *haul*, *heave*, *heavy*, *hew*, *hie*, *hoist*, *hop*, *huge*, *hurl*, *hurry*. The initial aspirate almost suggests the gasp that goes with any strong exertion. Pope's line, "Up the *h*igh *h*ill *h*e *h*eaves the *h*uge round stone", verges on the comic, but it will serve as an extreme illustration of the point. There are many other examples, like Spenser's: "*H*is *h*eavie *h*and *h*e *h*eavèd up on *h*ye", and Dryden's:

> "When Nature underneath a heap
> Of jarring atoms lay
> And could not *h*eave *h*er *h*ead . . ."

It is noticeable how the letter L prevails in any

description of a long line, especially a streaming ray of light. Milton writes, in *Comus*:

"visit us
With thy *l*ong *l*eve*ll*ed ru*l*e of streaming *l*ight
And thou shalt be our star of Arcady."

Matthew Arnold tells us in *The Scholar Gipsy* how the wanderer:

"Turn'd once to watch, while thick the snow flakes fall,
The *l*ine of festa*l* *l*ight in Christ-Church ha*ll*."

Tennyson has a similar phrase in *In Memoriam*:

"My blessing *l*ike a *l*ine of *l*ight
In on the waters, day and night
And like a beacon guards thee home."

Shelley writes of the sun's light upon the sea:

"On the *l*eve*l* quivering *l*ine
Of the waters crysta*ll*ine."

The smooth and prolonged sound of the letter naturally suits any description of what is long and level. Hence it is appropriate in the representation of a line of light, or of a long glance into the past, as in Gray's line: "Nor cast one *l*onging, *l*ingering *l*ook behind", or indeed of any scene which

suggests length of distance, as when Shelley writes:

"round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare,
The *l*one and *l*eve*l* sands stretch far away."

In some of these matters the phonetic classification of the consonants is alone enough to put us in the track. For example, G is a guttural—Latin, *guttur*; Greek, *γαργαρεών*; French, *g*orge; German, *G*urgel: "the throat". So *γαργαρίζω* in Greek, *g*urgeln in German, and *g*louglou in French mean to *gurgle* or *gargle*. The sound of *g*urgling is made by swirling water; *gurges* in Latin means a whirlpool, and *Γαργάφια* was the name of a gurgling fountain in Bœotia. It will be noticed that R is nearly always found along with G in these words, because it conveys in that association a sense of continual action, due to the sustained trilling of the sound, and also that such words are often used along with others in which labials are prominent, as when Wordsworth writes:

"And *f*rom the tu*rf* a *f*ountain *br*oke
And *g*u*rg*led at ou*r f*eet."

The labial letters, or sounds made with the lips (*labia*), since they are amongst the first sounds

produced by an infant, predominate in words that describe a babyish and unintelligible speech, like the Greek *βάβαξ*, "a chatterer", and *βάρβαρος*, "a barbarian", i.e. one who was not a Greek, and talked in what sounded to a Greek like a childish and meaningless way. So in our *babble*, *gabble*, *jabber*, *gibber*, *gibberish*. And since the sounds made by the lips resemble the sounds made by water when it is agitated, there are also many words like the Latin *bullo*, and *bulla*, and our *boil*, *bubble*, *drip*, *drop*, *lap*, *plop*, *ripple*. It will be noticed that in most of these words the B's and P's are associated with L's, and a moment's thought will show that the function of the liquid is to prolong the sound of the labial.

Consequently these sounds prevail in descriptions of foolish speech. The translators of 1611 render the words of the philosophers of Athens, "What will this *babbler* say?" and Prospero says to Caliban:

> "Thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst g*abble* like
> A thing most brutish."

The sounds prevail likewise in descriptions of bubbling liquids, like that of the witches' boiling cauldron in *Macbeth*:

"Dou*ble*, dou*ble*, toi*l* and trou*ble*,
Fire *b*urn and cau*l*dron *bubble*,"

and in descriptions of running water, like Tennyson's brook:

"I chatter over stony ways
In *litt*le shar*p*s and tre*bl*es,
I *bubbl*e into eddying *b*ays
I *babbl*e on the *pebbl*es."

More than a quarter of the effective consonants in this quatrain are B's, P's, and L's. This is probably the best example in English poetry, but there are many others, as when the same poet makes Sir Bedivere say:

"I heard the ri*ppl*e washing in the reeds,
And the wi*l*d water *lapp*ing on the crag",

and when Keats writes of:

"a timorous *b*rook
That *l*ingering a*l*ong a *pebbl*ed coast
Doth fear to meet the sea."

The sound and shape of M are alike derived from the sea; the murmur of the waves gives the sound, and an undulating line (as in a child's drawing of waves) is the original shape. Consequently it is often found in words like the Latin *mare* (from which our *mere* is derived, having

degenerated into the name of a lake), *murmur* (which we have adopted unchanged into English), and our own native words *hum*, *moan*, *mumble*, *mutter*—all words that suggest a low sound like the moan of the sea, or the hum of insects, or the murmur of doves.

So Virgil compares the sound of the ghosts fluttering around Lethe with the humming of bees: *strepit omnis murmure campus*,(9) and Shelley writes of:

"The *m*elodies of birds and bees,
The *m*ur*m*uring of su*mm*er seas",

and Keats of:

"The *m*ur*m*urous haunt of flies on su*mm*er eves",

and Matthew Arnold of:

"All the live *m*ur*m*ur of a su*mm*er's day",

and Tennyson of:

"The *m*oan of doves in i*mme*morial el*m*s
And *m*ur*m*uring of innu*m*erable bees."

It will be seen that in many descriptions of the sea, S is as prominent as M, obviously because the one letter suggests the hissing splash, and the other suggests the deep murmur, which both belong to the sound of the waves. A friend of

mine used to maintain that the finest line in the *Æneid* was: *Spumea semifero sub pectore murmurat unda.*(10) The effect is due to the M's and S's, along with the labials like B, F, P, and the deep vowels, all together suggesting a splashing murmur as the monster swims. Edgar Allan Poe achieves much the same effect by the same means:

"No *m*ore—no *m*ore—no *m*ore—
(*S*uch language hold*s* the *s*ole*m*n *s*ea
To the *s*and*s* upon the *s*hore)",

and Tennyson:

"The *m*oaning*s* of the ho*m*eles*s* *s*ea,
The *s*ound of *s*trea*ms* that *s*wift or *s*low
Draw down Æonian hills."

All the following lines from *The Lotus Eaters* end with M's or N's:

"All round the coast the languid air did swoon
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full-faced above the valley stood the moon;
And like a downward smoke, the slender stream
Along the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem."

The effect of these final consonants is that each line fades away gradually into silence, because the M's and N's have a continued sound. There are also the long vowels to be remembered, but

apart from these, see how the languid close of the lines alters if you substitute "did faint" for "did swoon"; "a weary mood" for "a weary dream", "a star" for "the moon"; and "the slender brook" for "the slender stream". This is simply because T, D, R, K, are much more definite as final sounds, and do not let the end of the line continue to reverberate and gradually die away, like the last, low, humming note of a distant bell.

The M's, N's, and S's prevail naturally in any description that is meant to suggest the noise of waters. So Tennyson writes again:

"Roll'd to *s*tarboard, roll'd to larboard, whe*n* the *s*urge
was *s*eething free,
Where the wallowi*n*g *m*on*s*ter *s*pouted hi*s* foa*m*-foun*t*ai*n*s
i*n* the *s*ea."

Milton has the beautiful line: "And liquid laps*e* of *m*ur*m*uring *s*trea*ms*", and Keats has another almost as delightful: "U*n*haun*t*ed by the *m*ur-*m*urous *n*oi*s*e of wave*s*", while Coleridge writes of:

"the deep *m*urm*u*red charm
That is li*s*ped ever*m*ore at hi*s* slu*m*berle*ss* foun*t*ai*n*."

The letters M and N are closely associated in sound, of course, and therefore in such uses as

these. The presence of B's, P's, F's, and V's will often be noticed, along with the M's, N's, and S's, as in Wordsworth's lines:

"Where ri*v*ulets dance their wayward round,
And *b*eauty *b*or*n* of *m*ur*m*uri*n*g *s*ou*n*d
*S*hall *pass* into her *face*."

The letters D and T naturally express thudding and clattering sounds, and are generally helped by M's and N's, as when Virgil describes the gallop of Æneas' horsemen: *Quadrupedumque putrem cursu quatit ungula campum.*(11) Tennyson has a line also describing the gallop of horses, which might almost be a translation of the last: "An*d* cla*tt*eri*n*g fli*n*ts ba*tt*er'*d* wi*th* cla*n*gi*n*g hoofs". So Tennyson writes again of the iron that is:

"heated hot with burning fears,
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
A*nd* ba*tt*ere*d* wi*th* *t*he shocks of *d*oo*m*."

In descriptions of slighter sounds of a similar kind, where it is a *pattering* rather than a *clattering*, the dentals are almost as numerous, but more modulated by N's and S's, as when Keats manages to convey the pattering hiss of a shower:

"*th*e*n* *t*he *s*ou*nds* agai*n*
We*nt* *n*oise*l*e*ss* a*s* a pa*ss*i*n*g *n*oo*nt*i*d*e rai*n*."

D is a duller dental than T, and it is therefore prominent in descriptions of the more muffled noises, and of situations in which they are appropriate. Think of Poe's lines:

"Come! let the burial rite be rea*d*—the funeral song be sung!—
An anthem for the queenliest *dead* that ever *died* so young—
A *d*irge for her the *d*oubly *dead*, in that she *died* so young",

and observe how the repeated D's sound like the thudding of clods upon the coffin. (The last words were written without thinking of the sound of the letters, but there it is again—"the thu*dd*ing of clo*d*s").

Then apart from mimetic sounds there can be no doubt that some words are specially beautiful in themselves, as mere complexes of sound. There was an interesting correspondence some years ago in a literary journal on beautiful words, and a rather striking agreement appeared among the various contributors as to the inherent beauty of some English words. Azure, bereave, desolate, forlorn, haven, holy, melodious, peace, splendour, welcome, and wilderness, were amongst the words selected. Surely everyone would feel that these are beautiful words in the very sound of them.

Indeed, the poets' choice of them is a sufficient warranty of it. A small anthology might be made out of passages in which these particular words prominently occur, as, for example:

"Until
Thine *azure* sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth",

and:

"Of one deep bliss thine ear hath been *bereft*,
Then cleave, O cleave, to that which still is left!"

and:

"The Desolater *desolate!*
The Victor overthrown!
The arbiter of others' fate
A suppliant for his own!"

and:

"*Forlorn!* the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self",

and:

"The stately ships go on
To their *haven* under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!"

and:

"A savage place! as *holy* and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover",

and:

"The blue regions of the air
Where the *melodious* winds have birth",

and:

"past
To where beyond these voices there is *peace*",

and:

"Another Athens shall arise,
And to remoter time
Bequeath, like sunset to the skies,
The *splendour* of its prime",

and:

"No nightingale did ever chaunt
More *welcome* notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands",

and:

"Encinctured with a twine of leaves,
That leafy twine his only dress!
A lovely boy was plucking fruits,
By moonlight in a *wilderness.*"

The reason for the beauty of words like these

does not altogether escape a careful analysis. It is largely due to the way in which the vowels in these words accommodate themselves to the consonants. The different classes of consonants may be placed in a kind of rough natural scale according to the order in which they are produced in the mouth—ranging, that is, from the gutturals, produced deep down in the throat, to the labials, produced at the lips. To change suddenly from one consonant to another widely removed from it in the natural scale requires an effort and produces an ugly sound, and in the words under consideration the effort and ugliness are minimised by having long vowels between such widely differing consonants, the length of the vowels being proportionate to the distance apart of the consonants in the natural scale. The relation of the vowels to each other within a word is also a factor which operates in more ways than one. For the vowels go down a natural scale in the order I, E, A, O, U. When we utter the words "p*i*t, p*e*t, p*a*t, p*o*t, p*u*t", we naturally say:

"p*i*t,
p*e*t,
p*a*t,
p*o*t,
p*u*t."

In any beautiful word the vowels will be found to combine or contrast with each other with some reference to this scale.

It is curious, by the way, that there seems to be a natural association between this descending scale and the sense of time in our grammatical construction. Many of the strong verbs in English form their tenses according to this scale: begin, began, begun; cleave, clave, cloven; drink, drank, drunk; fly, flew, flown; ring, rang, rung; sing, sang, sung; sling, slang, slung; speak, spake, spoke. That is to say, there is a high vowel for the present, a lower vowel for the past, and a still lower vowel for the finished past. Now this scale seems to assert itself instinctively in phrases which convey a sense of sad finality. So in Scott's lines:

"He turn'd his charger as he spake
Upon the river shore,
He gave the bridle-reins a shake,
Said 'Adieu for *ev*erm*o*re
My love!
And adieu for *ev*erm*o*re!' "

It is perhaps worth while to notice that "My love!" breaks, and therefore emphasises, the repetition of "for evermore", and also that the descending series is kept more faithfully in pro-

nunciation than appears from the spelling in the repeated phrase, since the second E, being unaccented, is slurred into a lower vowel sound. It is surprising to note how frequently this falling inflection occurs in a line which expresses some solemn finality. Here is another instance, from Francis Thompson:

"Nothing begins and nothing ends,
That is not paid with moan;
For we are born in other's pain,
And perish *in our own*."

Contrast with these examples the rising inflection in Browning's lines, where again there is the thought of perpetuity, but this time in a hopeful sense:

"So, the year's done with,
(*Love me for ever!*)
All March begun with,
April's endeavour;
May-wreaths that bound me
June needs must sever;
Now snows fall round me,
Quencing June's fever—
(*Love me for ever!*)"

Here the vowels of "Love me for ever", which are all accented, are O, E, O, E, E, with a rising scale toward the end. It is quite natural, when

you remember that the voice drops instinctively toward the end of a hopeless phrase, and rises towards the end of a hopeful one.

Apart from this point, however, the gamut of the vowels comes into play in many ways. It must be plain to everybody that Shakespeare's great line, "The multitudinous seas incarnadine", suggests by its sound a storm-tossed waste of waters, and the resemblance between that and the deep agitation of Lady Macbeth's soul. But why do the words suggest this? Partly, no doubt, because of the huddled syllables of the long words *multitudinous* and *incarnadine*. The mere meaning might be conveyed in some such line as, "The many waters of the ocean dye", but then the hurry of the crowded syllables would be lost, with their suggestion of stormy turmoil. But that is not all. The vowels of *multitudinous* go up and down the scale alternately (exactly as they do in many familiar phrases like *ding-dong*, *tick-tock*, *pit-pat*, and so on) and suggest the up and down movement of the waves. There can be no question that the movement of the vowels in that one long word contributes largely to the sense of agitation which the word helps to suggest.

Every word is a complex of sound, and the sentence is a complex of complexes of sound.

And as the word may be of beautiful sound, like a musical chord, the sentence, as the larger unit, may be of beautiful sound, like a musical phrase. The general beauty of the sound in a sentence must obviously depend on the grouping of the different sounds it contains, and that is very largely a matter of managing the recurrence of particular sounds in a modulated way. I am sure that few people realise how large an element alliteration is in English style. Our earliest poetry, like the epic of *Beowulf*, depended in a very large degree upon alliteration, for the line was divided into halves by a marked pause, and in each half there was an accented syllable containing the same vowel or the same consonant as one of the accented syllables in the other half of the line. This kind of verse scarcely belongs in any proper sense to our English literature, for the language of *Beowulf* would be quite unintelligible to anyone except a scholar who had made a study of old English. But there was a revival of alliterative poetry in the fourteenth century. The readiest example of it is Langland's *Piers Plowman*, which begins:

"In a somer season when soft was the sonne,
I shope me in shroudes as I a shepe were,
In habit as a heremite unholy of workes,
Went wyde in this world wondres to here."

Alliterative verse which is roughly of this type is found as late as the sixteenth century. Evidently the mode had a strong hold on the popular mind. It is quite possible that a subconscious tradition dating from our ancient poetry may still be a factor in our enjoyment of English verse.

There was a queer craze for alliteration with some writers of Elizabeth's days, which looks as if it must have been some sort of a revival of the older fashion. It was satirised in several contemporary writers. Shakespeare makes fun of it in *Love's Labour's Lost*, where Holfernes says: "I will something affect the letter, for it argues facility", and then proceeds:

"The preyful princess pierced and prick'd a pretty pleasing pricket;
Some say a sore; but not a sore, till now made sore with shooting",

and so on. Shakespeare satirised it again in the lines of Quince's prologue, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

"Whereat with blade, with bloody blameful blade,
He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast."

Thomas Wilson, in *The Arte of Rhetorike*, which was published in 1553, writes: "Some use overmuche repetition of one letter, as *pitifull povertie*

prayeth for a penie, but puffed presumpcion passeth not a poinct." The craze passed, but there have been much later writers, down to our own days, whose style has suffered from an excess of alliteration. The natural attractiveness of alliteration is seen in the way that it prevails in innumerable proverbs and popular sayings like "Care killed a cat", "Love me a little, love me long", "In for a penny, in for a pound", and so on endlessly. I once pointed out that in two proverbs the mere alliteration has kept in use a couple of archaic words that would otherwise have been entirely forgotten. We still speak of "buying a pig in a poke", though *poke* has gone out of use except in dialects, and the ordinary man does not realise that the only survival of the word in modern English is the diminutive *pocket*, which is a *pokette* or little bag attached to the clothes. So we still speak of things being "as plain as a pike-staff", though the man in the street is quite unfamiliar with either a *pike-staff*, or a *pack-staff*, (12) as it really ought to be—that is, the staff on which a pedlar rested his pack. So with familiar pairs of words like "bed and board", "dig and delve", "frills and furbelows", "hare and hounds", "kith and kin", "make or mar", "neck or nothing", "pots and pans", "sink or swim",

"watch and ward". It is manifestly the alliteration that keeps these coupled words in steady attachment from generation to generation.

The instinctive attraction of alliteration is also well illustrated by some familiar quotations and misquotations. Thus John Norris has the line "Like angels' visits, short and bright", and Blair possibly borrowed this and altered it in his "Like angels' visits, short and far between". Campbell almost certainly borrowed Blair's line, and improved it into "Like angels' visits, few and far between". It is always quoted in the latter form: the alliteration of "*f*ew" and "*f*ar" has been enough to fix Campbell's version in the popular memory. A passage from Genesis iii. 19, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread", is nearly always quoted as, "In the sweat of thy *brow* shalt thou eat bread." The alliteration is the reason for the misquotation: "*br*ead" has brought in "*br*ow". Milton's line is perpetually quoted as "To-morrow to fresh fields and pastures new". He wrote "woods", but "*f*resh" has brought in "*f*ields".

How instinctive alliteration is may be seen in numberless examples of classical English prose and poetry. In the Book of Common Prayer we have many phrases like "most *h*umble and

*h*earty thanks" . . . "not only with our *l*ips, but in our *l*ives" . . . "the *d*evices and *d*esires of our own hearts" . . . "from *h*ardness of *h*eart and *c*ontempt of Thy word and *c*ommandment" . . . "to bring *f*orth the *f*ruits of the Spirit". . . . In the Authorised Version of the Bible there are hundreds of examples like the following (to quote only from the first few Psalms): "Nor *s*tandeth in the way of *s*inners, nor *s*itteth in the *s*eat of the *s*cornful" . . . "Let us *b*reak their *b*onds asunder, and *c*ast away their *c*ords from us" . . . "I will *d*eclare the *d*ecree" . . . "*He h*eard me out of *His h*oly *h*ill" . . . "In the *m*ultitude of Thy *m*ercy" . . . "What is *m*an that Thou art *m*indful of him?" . . . "The *f*owl of the air and the *f*ish of the sea" . . . "A refuge in *t*imes of *t*rouble" . . . "The *f*aithful *f*ail *f*rom among the children of men" . . . "The lines are fallen unto me in *p*leasant *p*laces" . . . "He did fly upon the *w*ings of the *w*ind" . . . "Thy *g*entleness hath made me *g*reat." . . .

Nothing is more easily abused than this trick of alliteration; nothing is more absurd when it is abused. On the other hand nothing is more effective when it is well done, and especially when it is masked. I mean by that when the alliteration does not show itself plainly in a number of suc-

cessive words beginning with the sound, but only makes itself felt as a verbal harmony, which upon analysis resolves itself into the prevalence of particular sounds in the sentence. But however it may be used, there can be no doubt that almost every fine passage in our literature, whether in verse or in prose, owes a good deal to the alliterative method.

Probably the readiest examples in English (and some of the finest) are from Coleridge. Everyone can recognise the effect in lines like these from the *Ancient Mariner*:

> "The *f*air *br*eeze *bl*ew, the *w*hite *f*oam *fl*ew,
> The *f*urrow *f*ollo*w*ed *f*ree:
> *W*e *w*ere the *f*ir*s*t that ever *b*ur*s*t
> Into that *s*il*s*ent *s*ea",

or in these from *Kubla Khan*:

> "In Xanadu did *K*ubla *K*han
> A stately pleasure *d*ome *d*ecree,
> Where Alph the sacred *r*iver *r*an
> Through caverns *m*easureless to *m*an
> Down to a *s*unless *s*ea!"

It is to be noted that the effect of alliteration in many great passages of our literature is largely increased when the dominant sounds occur in the emphatic words, and often in emphatic words

that are repeated. Here is an example from *In Memoriam*:

"This truth came borne with bier and pall
I felt it, when I sorrow'd most,
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all",

where the effect of the stanza depends mostly on "*l*oved and *l*ost . . . *l*oved at a*ll*", though the B's and P's and F's (which are closely related letters) also bear their part. Here is another example from the same poem:

"And, even when she turn'd the curse
Had fallen, and her future Lord
Was drown'd in passing thro' the ford,
Or killed in falling from his horse",

where the music of the lines depends upon "*f*allen . . . *f*uture . . .*f*ord . . . *f*alling", all words to which a natural emphasis is given. Moreover, two other important words in the lines begin with the same sound "*c*urse" . . . "*k*illed". How much depends on the similar sounds of the emphatic words may be shown by making a simple but sacrilegious experiment. Take the lines of Wordsworth:

"But an old age serene and bright
And lovely as a Lapland night
Shall lead thee to thy grave",

and rewrite them thus:

"But an old age serene and bright
And beauteous as a Russian night
Shall lead thee to thy grave",

and it appears at once how much of the music lies in the alliterative "lovely . . . Lapland . . . lead". . . .

There are innumerable examples where the similarity of sound is not so apparent at the first glance, but where it is nevertheless a large factor in the effect of the associated words. When Coventry Patmore writes:

"The snow-drift heaps against the hut
And night is pierc'd with stars",

the effect appears at first to be wholly due to the imaginative quality of the word *pierced*, with its suggestion of the pall of darkness and the points of light which stab it through. But here again the sound is a vital element, as you see if you spell the last line in a graphic and phonetic way: "And night is pieRST with STaRS." The same thing is true, I am persuaded, of almost every great passage in our literature. We are impressed by a general beauty of a sentence or a stanza, and perhaps by the happy use of a particular word

here and there, but when we scrutinise the passage we find that these things are all qualified by a harmony of sound, which depends on the prevalence and the proportion of some particular consonants and vowels (and more particularly consonants). Take the wonderful lines of Milton:

> "Not that fair field
> Of Enna, where Proserpin gathering flowers,
> Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
> Was gathered."

Now print it in a graphic fashion:

> "NoT THaT FaiR FieLD
> OF Enna, wheRe PRoSeRpin gaTHeRing FloweRS,
> HeRSeLF a FaiReR FLoweR, by gLoomy DiS
> WaS gaTHeReD."

Curiously enough, a similar passage from Shakespeare, of a like wonderful beauty, yields almost exactly the same result:

> "O Proserpina
> For the flowers now that frighted thou let'st fall
> From Dis's wagon! Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares and take
> The winds of March with beauty."

Again print the lines graphically:

"O PRoSeRpina
FoR THe FLoweRS now THaT FRighTeD
THou LeT'ST FaLL
FRom DiS'S wagon! DaFFoDiLS
THaT come beFoRe THe SwaLLow DaReS
anD Take
The winDS oF MaRch wiTH beauTy."

Both these great passages are actually symphonies in D, F, L, R, S, T, Th. In the first passage these seven sounds are about three-quarters, and in the second passage they are nearly four-fifths, of the effective consonantal sounds—a proportion which is very much higher than the normal one.

Here is another example from Milton where the alliteration is scarcely seen at a first glance, but is nevertheless a principal element in the melody of the lines:

"The air
Floats as they pass, fanned with unnumbered plumes:
From branch to branch the smaller birds with song
Solaced the woods, and spread their painted wings
Till even."

Now there is a special importance about the sound with which a word begins and the sound with which it ends, merely because the beginning and

the end of a word naturally give prominence to the sound. Moreover, some words are more important than others, and therefore carry more emphasis. Look at the beginnings of the principal words:

"The air
FLoats as they Pass, Fanned with unnumbered
PLumes:
From Branch to Branch the Smaller Birds with Song
Solaced the Woods, and SPread their Painted Wings
Till even."

The main pattern of initial sounds in the line is:

F, L, P, F, P, L.
F, B, B, S, B, S.
S, W, S, P, P, W.

But that is not all. Look at the terminal sounds of the words:

"The air
FloatS aS they paSS, fanneD with unnumbereD
plumeS:
From branSH to branSH the smaller birDS with song
SolaS'D the wooDS, and spreaD their painteD wingS
Till even."

The whole scheme of sound, therefore, rings the

changes on B, F, L, P, and W, with a constant accompaniment of D and S, especially of final and semi-final D and S. The last point is characteristic, for Milton was fond of sibilants, as we have seen.

III

MEANING AND SELECTION

Let us now pass from the question of sound, though it will inevitably recur, to other qualities of the word. We have agreed that style is concerned, first and last, with the choice of words. The thousands of words in the language are there ready for the writer's use, and it is his business to choose the words that are best for his purpose, remembering their significance, and their sound, and their associations, all in combination with these various attributes in the other words which are grouped with them in the sentence and in the paragraph. The range of choice is limited by all these considerations until it actually becomes a fairly narrow one in most cases, if the result is to be literature, but the number of words that it is abstractly possible to use is enormous, as any dictionary is sufficient to show. It is extraordinary, by the way, what drivel is written from time to time as to the extent of the vocabulary used by different classes of people. Mr. G. Bernard Shaw, who, as the creator of the phonetic expert in *Pygmalion*, really ought to

know better, recently gave fresh currency to the statement that an English peasant only uses "about 350 words and a few expletives". The estimate, which goes back to Max Müller, is utterly absurd, as a moment's thought will show anybody. The ploughman would need most, if not all, of the 350 words for necessary references to himself, his horse, and his plough. Here are some of the obvious words relating to himself, with the necessary implications—man, woman, boy, girl, baby, father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, tall, short, fat, thin, head, brow, hair, beard, black, brown, red, grey, white, eye, ear, nose, mouth, lips, teeth, tongue, gums, cheek, chin, throat, neck, shoulder, back, body, arm, elbow, joint, hand, finger, thumb, nail, skin, rib, backbone, leg, hip, thigh, knee, ankle, foot, heel, toe, hat, coat, pocket, sleeve, shirt, breeches, stockings, boots. There are more than sixty words in that list that every man who is not an imbecile must know, all related to his own person, or necessarily involved in the knowledge of such words as are so related. Then there are the thousands of other words relating to the home, the village, the other people he knows, the farm, the animals, the crops, the soil, the processes of tillage, the weather, sights and sounds, times and

seasons, food, sleep, work, and so on. As a matter of fact, the issue has been scientifically investigated, and it has been proved that the vocabulary of a Swedish peasant amounts to at least twenty-six thousand words. It is true that this is larger than Shakespeare's vocabulary, which only contains about twenty thousand words, but this is easily explained, though it looks startling enough at first. A vast number of words used in ordinary life—as, for example, most words belonging to the daily occupations of the people—are never or hardly ever required by a poet who writes on elevated themes. It illustrates this, that Milton, the most scholarly of our poets, who himself introduced some new words into the language, only used a vocabulary of eight thousand words. The exalted and restricted nature of his subjects, as compared with the variety of Shakespeare's, explains the large difference, at least in part.

Now out of the several thousand words, at the very lowest estimate, that constitute the vocabulary of every writer, he must seek to choose the best word at each point, if he is to be a good writer. It is said that Fox was once talking of Pitt, and remarked, "I can find words, but Mr. Pitt always finds *the* word." The whole philosophy of style is really involved in that remark. Any

man who is in his right mind can find words of some sort, even though he gabbles monstrously. Any educated man ought to be able to find better words, for his knowledge should give him a wider choice of words, and a more accurate sense of the meaning of the words he employs. But a really great writer, a master of style, can find the best words of all, for he not only knows a large range of words, and what they properly mean, but he is sensitive to the finer shades of significance and sound, and he has an instinctive skill in grouping the words together in the most musical and the most suggestive way. And there must be one word, when every issue is taken into account—the sound, the meaning, the history, the associations of the word, and its relations in all these respects with the other words that are grouped with it—which is the best word, the only word, the inevitable word, in that special instance. As Flaubert once wrote, "There is only one noun that can express your idea, only one verb that can put that idea in motion, and only one adjective that is the right epithet for that noun." Though that sounds extravagant there must be a sense in which it is true, for there must be always one word which is more apt than any other for a precise use at a particular time.

Such a thing as an absolute synonym scarcely exists, since there are so many subtle differences in shades of significance as between words that mean roughly the same thing. When you add to the delicate conditions of that choice such other considerations as the sound of the word, and the sound of the word in relation to the different sounds of the words associated with it in the sentence, and the echoes which a word awakens because of its use in great passages of literature, it must be true that there is always one word which is the most perfect utterance of one particular thought in one particular connection.

As I have already suggested, there really are no exact synonyms. When several words have roughly the same meaning, differences will always develop—slight shades of difference in significance and suggestiveness. Sometimes there will be also differences in grammatical use, while there is always the original difference of sound to be considered. All these subtle variations condition the quality of the word, and make one word more fitting than another in a particular employment, when all is taken into account. Think of the words *begin* and *commence*, for example. *Begin* is a Saxon word. *Commence* is from the French *commencer* (and ultimately from the Latin). *Begin* is

at once a more familiar and a more imaginative word than *commence*, which has something of a formal and official sense. In telling a story to a friend you would not say, "I will *commence* at the *commencement*", but "I will *begin* at the *beginning*". You might refer to "the *commencement* of the Easter Term", but you would refer to "the *beginning* of your married life". Imagine the first sentence in the Bible, "In the *beginning* God created the heavens and the earth" changed into "In the *commencement* God created the heavens and the earth!" Milton could write:

> "*Begin*, then, Sisters of the sacred well
> That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring;
> *Begin*, and somewhat loudly sweep the string."

He could not possibly have written:

> "*Commence*, then, Sisters of the sacred well . . ."

Then, as a matter of English grammatical idiom, *commence* can only properly take a verbal noun after it, "I *commenced writing*", whereas *begin* can take either that or an infinitive, "I *began writing*", or "I *began to write*". Moreover, a good writer would generally avoid a too close association between either word and other words of similar sound, so that, for example, he might write,

"Hence we begin . . ." but would avoid, "*Hence* we comm*ence* . . .", or he might write, "We commence in . . ." but would avoid, "We beg*in in* . . .", because of the jingle in the latter phrases.

Now here are two words which are as nearly synonyms, perhaps, as any two words can be, but we find that they differ in all these respects—one is a native Saxon word, the other is a borrowed French word; one is the simple word, the other is the formal word; hence the one is the more colloquial and also the more poetical, and the other less so; one has rather more flexibility than the other in correct grammatical usage; and each word would more or less debar the use of other words of like sound in its immediate neighbourhood. Similar considerations apply to any pair of words, or any group of words, that are classed as synonyms because their meaning is broadly the same.

There is, therefore, such a thing as the *mot juste*, though there was a craze for it in the 'nineties which became ridiculous. I cherish the story (which is perfectly true, by the way) that on one occasion Henry James, who was the high priest of that particular cult, had been led by some of his admirers to see a wonderful view. The circle waited reverently to hear the perfect

word of description uttered. "My dear boy", said James, grasping the arm of his guide, "How—er—how"—the devotees held their breath—"how—er—how—er—my dear boy, how *awfully jolly*!" It was a very salutary phrase for those *fin-de-siècle* scribblers to hear. Nevertheless all style is a quest for the apt word, and there is often a word that is supremely apt. The gift that enables a writer to find it may make him immortal, even though his other gifts are few. That was the greatness of Gray; as our living poet has said, he was one:

> "who on worn thoughts conferred
> That second youth, the perfect word,
> The elected and predestined phrase."

This is not the sole significance of Gray in English letters, since he had a feeling for nature and a note of romance (gained largely from his interest in Norse and Celtic poetry) that made him a harbinger of the latter spring: he is one of the poets of the middle of the eighteenth century who is a precursor of the Lyrical Revival. That, however, is a relative and historical interest. What he definitely had himself, as a personal gift, was the ability to find the inevitable phrase which becomes the final utterance of familiar

thoughts. The theme of the *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* is as hackneyed a theme as a poet could have, but how perfectly expressed! "Death is the fate of all men, the rich and the great, the poor and the lowly alike"—it had been said a thousand times. But here it is said once for all:

> "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r
> And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
> Awaits alike th' inevitable hour,
> The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

Now though it sounds elementary to say so, the first thing to be regarded in the choice of the right word is the meaning of it. The obligation to use words in their proper sense rests upon everybody who uses language at all, and especially on those who desire to use it well. We are all fallible, and even famous writers sometimes transgress in respect of the obvious meaning of a word. Charlotte Brontë writes of "a *very unique* child". The ex-schoolmistress ought to have known that there can be no degrees here. A thing is unique—the *only* thing of its kind—or it is not. It cannot be more or less so. George Eliot writes of "the workhouse, euphuistically called the 'College' ". She meant *euphemistically*. Euphuism is the affected Elizabethan style of which Lyly's

Euphues set the fashion—the kind of thing that Shakespeare satirised in Armado's talk, in *Love's Labour's Lost.* Euphemism is the giving of a better name to a thing than it deserves, as when the Greeks called the Furies the Eumenides, "the gracious ones", and when Ancient Pistol preferred "convey" to "steal". Macaulay, in the essay on Milton, writes of "the *observation* of the Sabbath". He meant the *observance* of it. It is true that a rule may be *observed* or kept, and also that the way that this is done may be *observed* or noted, but the two senses of the verb require two different nouns, and we ought to speak of the keeping of the regulation as our observance of it, and of any notice we take of the way that it is kept as our observation of the fact.

Byron writes in *Childe Harold*:

> "The desert, forest, cavern, breaker's foam,
> Were unto him companionship; they spake
> A mutual language . . ."

He means "a common language". The same misuse of the word occurs in the title of one of Dickens' novels, *Our Mutual Friend.* The word *mutual* (which is ultimately from the Latin *muto*) ought to mean what is interchanged. Mr. Smith may have a high regard for Mr. Brown, and Mr.

Brown may have a high regard for Mr. Smith; in that case the regard is mutual. But if Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown are both on friendly terms with Mr. Robinson, he is their common friend. Mr. Robinson is not a reciprocal relation, interchanged between Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown; he is a person to whom they have a common relation. It may be remarked, however, that there is ample warrant for the loose use of *mutual* in Shakespeare. He writes of "a wild and wanton herd of youthful and unhandled colts":

> "If they but hear perchance a trumpet sound,
> Or any air of music touch their ears,
> You shall perceive them make a *mutual* stand",

and again of the baying of "the hounds of Sparta":

> "Besides the groves,
> The skies, the fountains, every region near
> Seem'd all one *mutual* cry",

and again where Nestor says:

> "It is supposed
> He that meets Hector issues from our choice,
> And choice, being *mutual* act of all our souls,
> Makes merit her election, and doth boil,
> As 'twere from forth us all."

In fact, *mutual* in Shakespeare always means *common*.

Though words are used in their correct significance, the meaning of a sentence may be obscured by placing the words in a wrong order. In a note on Gray's lines:

> "Ye towers of Julius, London's lasting shame,
> With many a foul and midnight murther fed",

that very scholarly writer, Mr. J. W. Hales, remarks that "the oldest part of the Tower of London is said to have been built by Julius Cæsar without any authority". This means that Julius Cæsar had no authority to build it. What the author meant, of course, was that Julius Cæsar is said to have built it, without there being any authority for the statement. Similarly, Lecky wrote, in the *History of European Morals*, "Another hermit, being very holy, received pure white bread every day from heaven; but, being extravagantly elated, the bread became worse and worse, till it became perfectly black." This means that the bread became extravagantly elated. Lecky meant that the hermit did. The sentence should have read, "but as he was extravagantly elated at this", or something like that. So, again, Swift makes Gulliver say, "It contained a warrant for

conducting me and my retinue to Traldragdubh or Trildrogdrib, for it is pronounced both ways, as nearly as I can remember, by a party of ten horse." This means that the party of ten horse pronounced the name of the Lugnaggian town both ways. The confusion might have been saved by putting the clause about the pronunciation of the name into brackets, thus: "(for it is pronounced both ways, as nearly as I can remember)", or between dashes, as is done in some modern editions, thus: "—for it is pronounced both ways, as nearly as I can remember—", or better, by rewriting the sentence, and saying: "It contained a warrant for conducting me and my retinue, by a party of ten horse, to Traldragdubh." . . . Here we may consider the matter of punctuation.

There is everything to be said for careful punctuation as a visual aid in reading. But punctuation should never really be made responsible for the meaning. There are some comic examples, which have become almost classical, where the sense is perverted by the lack of a comma, or altered by a change in the position of it. Such is the sentence in which the school inspector illustrated the importance of punctuation to the illiterate mayor who thought it useless

—he told a boy to write on the blackboard, "The mayor says the inspector is a fool". "Now," said he, "put a comma after the word *mayor*, and another after the word *inspector*." But ambiguity should always be avoided by the arrangement of the words without reference to punctuation at all. It is always wrong to make the meaning of a sentence depend on a comma, or any other point. The meaning should be unmistakable because of the relative position of the words, apart from anything so adventitious as punctuation.

This is really a minor example of the principle of clarity. Since words are used to convey meaning, the very first requirement is that the meaning should be clear, and the arrangement of the words in the sentence, as well as the choice of the actual words which are used, should be such as to make the meaning quite plain. For perspicuity means, as Quintilian said, that "care is taken, not that the hearer may understand, if he will, but that he must understand, whether he will or not".

There can be no real justification for obscurity of style unless it is meant to represent some confusion or some perplexity. Then obscure language may appropriately suggest an entanglement in the facts of the situation described, or an

inconsequence in the thoughts of the person represented. But otherwise there is no possible excuse for an involved and difficult style, where, as George Herbert says:

> "he that reads, divines,
> Catching the sense at two removes."

This is the condemnation of Meredith. Someone has said wittily that Browning was born with a stammer, but that Meredith cultivated one. That is about the truth of it. Meredith's style, with all its occasional felicity, is deliberately and affectedly obscure. He took pains to write in an oblique and perplexed way, as much as some men have taken pains to write clearly. I believe (though I shall certainly be thought a Philistine for saying so) that this alone will debar Meredith from any very high and permanent place in our literature.

With Browning the issue is different. His alleged obscurity has become an amazing legend. There is a story to the effect that Douglas Jerrold, when recovering from a bad illness, was left alone for the first time, while his wife went out. He was turning over some new books, and started to read *Sordello*. He read a page or two and found that he could not understand the lines at all. Then he had the awful suspicion that his

mind had become affected during his illness. On his wife's return he thrust the book into her hand and said, "Read this!" She looked at a page or two, and confessed that she did not know what it meant. "Thank God!" said Jerrold, "then I have not lost my reason!" There is another story which relates that Tennyson said there were only two lines in the poem which he could understand; the first, "Who will, may hear Sordello's story told", and the last, "Who would has heard Sordello's story told", and they were both lies!

But the obscurity of Browning (which in any case has been much exaggerated) is not assumed and cultivated, like Meredith's; it is his proper idiom. The same thing is true, by the way, of Carlyle. Browning had a genius for the grotesque, and his peculiar style fits the subjects with which his imagination dealt so well—the wandering thoughts of the old bishop as he lies dying, about his sons, and his dead mistress, and his dead rival, and his tomb in St. Praxed's and the incense and the blessed mutter of the Mass; the rambling talk of Brother Lippo, the painter in his friar's gown, running after the girls in the street when midnight is past, seized by the watch, and excusing himself for his escapade by telling his captors about his life and work, until

the sky begins to lighten with the dawn. Browning was at his best with themes like these, where the whole interest lies in an odd inconsistency, an element of the psychologically grotesque, as one might say, and an uneven, turbid, elliptical style is appropriate to such themes. But apart from the gargoyles of literature, such as Carlyle and Browning, whose very genius lies in a singularity of mind which is naturally expressed by an oddity of language, there is no excuse for a perverse and contorted style.

There is an eminent thinker alive to-day—nothing in the world would induce me to name him!—who writes in a style which is most singularly elusive and oblique. The result is that the task of reading his books is a really formidable one. One can read a sentence over a second and even a third time, and be perfectly well aware of every possible meaning of every single word in it, and yet wonder finally what the sentence does precisely mean. I am charitable enough to suppose that this style is the result of extreme subtlety of mind, but I confess that the effect upon me is sometimes rather like that produced upon the company at the Cheerybles' party when the old workman who was returning thanks got mixed, and finished a very confused sentence by

saying, "Leastways, in a contrairy sense, which the meaning is the same." After all, language was given us, despite the witty Frenchman's epigram, to express and not to conceal our thoughts, and to express them as clearly and unmistakably as may be. The very greatest poetry and prose always have the mark of clarity.

Now the first principle of clarity, as I suggested before, is to use words in their proper meaning, and the meaning of a word depends finally on its etymology. It is well to know the derivation of a word, and usually it is well to pay some attention to it in the way the word is employed. All depends on the degree to which the etymology of the word presents itself to the eye and to the mind. Thus when we use the word *alarm* we do not generally think of the original sense of the word, even if we know it. It is from the Italian *all'arme*—"To arms!"—the cry that *alarms* the camp when it is attacked, and bids the warriors stand to their weapons. But when we speak of being "*alarmed* by a sudden noise", there is no suggestion in the word of a military kind. The etymology is out of sight, except to one who is specially interested in the derivation of words. If we speak of "a costermonger's barrow" there is now no reference to apples, the

costards which the *costardmonger* used to sell; and if we speak of "a parson's surplice" there is now no reference to a robe worn *above a furred garment*, but that is the original meaning of it (*superpellicium*, from *pellis*). On the other hand, the etymology of a word like *decade* stands out in the very form of it. In a debate as to the revision of some regulation at stated periods, when a *decade* had been suggested as a suitable term, I once heard an eminent ecclesiastic say that if such a period were thought too long, "a *decade* of five or seven years might be substituted!" The word bears its own witness that it means a precise period of ten years, and can mean nothing else.

Occasionally we read in the newspapers that the population of a town or a province "has been *decimated*" by an epidemic, or some other disaster. The word originated from a Roman punishment: sometimes when a cohort had mutinied, every tenth man was put to death. Now the word is often used when there is no reference to that exact proportion, and when it merely means that a large number of the particular population perished. Here, I think, there is some defence for the usage: if it were said that half the population or a quarter of the population

died we should not expect it to be an exact arithmetical statement, but a rough approximation; and it might be pleaded that *decimated* is used in a like way. "A tenth of the people" may mean only roughly a tenth, but a scholar would be likely to avoid such a use of *decimate* because of its precise historical meaning.

Many people who have an instinct for accuracy would avoid "under the circumstances", because they would feel the force of the Latin prefix; the phrase would sound to them like "*beneath* the sur*round*ings". It is only fair to point out, though, that there is something to be said in defence of the phrase, for there is an idiomatic use of "under" in English in the sense of "subject to". When the Apostle Paul writes of the Jews as "under the law", or you refer to a friend as being "under the doctor", or a newspaper records that a criminal is "under sentence of death", that does not suggest any local sense of *below* in contrast to *above*. It is this idiomatic sense of "under" that accounts for the phrase "under the circumstances", though I confess that I should avoid it myself, with the feeling that the *circum* is rather too obvious.

It is an odd fact that sometimes when the etymology of two words is exactly parallel a

marked disparity in quality and usage has developed between them. To give a very trivial illustration of this, there is a considerable difference in the associations of the words, and consequently a considerable difference in the suggestions aroused in our minds, when we speak of a *surtout* and when we speak of an *overall*. The one word immediately suggests to my mind Mr. Micawber "in a brown *surtout* and black tights and shoes", as he first appeared at Murdstone and Grinby's; and then the England of a hundred years ago, the stagecoach to Canterbury, the King's Bench prison, and so forth. The other word suggests to me a plumber in his *overalls*, as he recently appeared in my house to repair the water pipes in the kitchen, with his due accompaniment of a grimy apprentice, a bag of tools, and a good deal of hammering. The imagination is staggered by the thought of Mr. Micawber in *overalls*, or the plumber in a *surtout*. Yet *surtout* and *overall* derive in exactly the same way, and have the same original meaning (*super-totus*, *sur-tout*, *over-all*). But the more dignified word is from the French, and the other is a Saxon compound.

It is generally true that we ought not to use words in a way which perverts their proper etymo-

logical meaning, but there are some instances where such a variation of meaning has become established in the language. Thus "impertinent" means "not holding to the point", and we keep to the original meaning in "pertinent"—"a pertinent remark" is a remark which is apt. But "an impertinent remark" does not now usually mean a remark that is not apt, but a remark that is rude. "Impertinent" has come to mean "insolent". That significance is now settled, and it would be foolish not to recognise the accomplished fact. Similarly "indifferent" properly means "impartial"—"that they may truly and indifferently minister justice" in the suffrage for magistrates in the Book of Common Prayer means "that they may truly and impartially minister justice". Now we still retain this, more or less, as one sense of the word: when I say that I am indifferent as to some issue, I mean that I am impartial in the matter, that I have no strong conviction either way, and that I am not pledged to this side or that. But "indifferent" has developed another sense, and has come to mean less than excellent, rather poor, rather bad. To say that a poet writes indifferent verse means that he writes mediocre verse: if it is not abominably bad, it is at least not very good. Now this use again has

so established itself that no man in his senses would propose to condemn it.

These are fairly clear cases, but there are some which are still on trial, as it were. "Practically" ought strictly to mean "in practice, in actual fact", as opposed to "in theory, in abstract principle". But it has almost come to mean "virtually; in all but some minor, nominal, or theoretical sense". "I have practically finished writing the book" means "I have finished it all but some small matter of revision", or something of that sort. The great humorist, Sir W. S. Gilbert, was a magistrate as well as a writer of the libretto of light opera, and once when he was on the bench in the Edgware Police Court and a case regarding a man's maintenance of his wife was being heard, a witness told the Court that the husband was "practically living with another woman". "What do you mean?" said Gilbert. "Practically living with another woman! Do you suggest that he can do that sort of thing *theoretically*?" The point is obvious, and everyone who has a feeling for accuracy in language will be inclined to sympathise with the rebuke. But there is another side to the question, after all. What the unfortunate witness meant was that the man was living with another woman as her

husband, to all intents and purposes, though he was not, and could not be, married to her; that in practice, though not under the forms of the law, he was living with the woman as his wife. I cannot believe that any objection on the score of a strict and etymological use of the word is now going to stop the development by which in general use "practically" has come to mean "as a matter of general fact, though there may be some slight qualification to make". Probably no one but a pedant will object to it fifty years hence, for when all is said, general usage is the one and only standard that exists in language.

We have seen that words sometimes change their proper historical meaning, and when the change is sanctioned by a general and established usage it must be accepted. On the other hand, we ought to resist any perversion of the meaning of a word as long as we can. One influence that leads to a perverted use and eventually to a perverted meaning of words is the desire for emphasis. I have often seen on the bills advertising a play at a provincial theatre the words, "Personal Appearance of Mr. Vincent Crummles", and lately I saw "Positive Personal Appearance of Mr. Vincent Crummles". A member of my family assured me that she recently saw a poster

announcing the "Absolutely Positive Personal Appearance" of a famous actor. The absurdity of these phrases is obvious, if you think for a moment: "Absolute" has no meaning except in contrast to "relative"; "positive" and "personal" have no meaning except in contrast to "negative" and "impersonal". Now it is difficult enough to realise what an impersonal appearance of anybody would be like, but the mind staggers at the thought of a relatively negative impersonal appearance. What the quoted words are meant to convey is, of course, that the actor is coming himself, and not sending an understudy, and "absolutely", "personal", and "positive" are used to underline that. The words have merely the emphatic quality of italics. And so with a good deal of slang, and indeed of profanity.

Sometimes a fine word suffers abuse at the hands of really good writers. As Doll Tearsheet remarked, "A captain! God's light! these villains will make the word as odious as the word *occupy*, which was an excellent good word before it was ill-sorted." Undoubtedly some words are rather spoiled by becoming the literary fashion of the moment. For there is an odd preference for particular words, and particular uses of words, among literary folk from time to time. A corre-

spondent recently complained, in the pages of the *Manchester Guardian*, that three times in one issue of that great journal the word *gesture* had been used in a sense "for which there is no warrant except in journalese"—if I remember aright, a recent educational arrangement was "an encouraging gesture"; by refusing to attend a lunch a cricket team had "made their gesture"; and some action of a politician was "a significant gesture". The editorial defence was that language is a living thing which develops new uses, and that "an action may express a mode of the mind as a literal gesture does, and therefore may be described as a gesture itself". A perfectly sound contention. The usage seems to have developed within the last thirty years or so, but there is little doubt that it has come to stay, and it is pedantic to quarrel with it. On the other hand, the use of the word in this sense three times in a single issue of a newspaper suggests that it has become an obsession, and it would be well for every person on the staff of the paper to hesitate when he thinks of using it.

There is a mere vogue in words, and the good writer will be on his guard against it: he will prefer to be, like Justice Shallow, somewhat in the rearward of the fashion. There are many

curious examples of this craze for particular words. *Meticulous* had a run some years ago. Arnold Bennett probably had a good deal to do with it. The worst of it was that the meaning of the word was, and is, very often misunderstood. *Mentality* is a word that is being greatly overworked at the present time. I do not think it is redundant; properly used it expresses what would be difficult to express otherwise, except by the use of half a dozen words. But, on the other hand, it is used dozens of times when "thought", "intellect", or "intelligence" would be far better terms to describe what is meant.

The tendency is also for words to become debased by colloquial use, for speech is naturally less careful and less deliberate than any form of written words. There is a difference which is quite inevitable between the spoken and the written language. It is safe to say of any great writer that his own written style is one in which he never quarrelled, or drove a bargain, or made love, and most certainly one in which his mother or his nurse never spoke to him. Even John Bunyan, who wrote the simplest Saxon, must have talked more simply and more loosely than he wrote. The fact is that the written style, however simple it may be, is naturally rather more con-

scious and more dignified than the spoken style, exactly as there are natural differences even in the latter. Any good speaker, however simple his diction may be, is rather more deliberate, rather more correct, and distinctly more aware of himself, in addressing an audience, than in ordinary conversation. So in the matter of writing. The contracted words, the loose, rapid, and elliptical constructions that we use in common speech, no one would use in writing a serious book. Moreover, as we are more careful of accuracy when we write, we are also more careful of the order in which we place the words we use, the sound of them when grouped together into phrases, and the general suggestiveness of those phrases to the mind. There is more artifice in written prose than in the kind of prose which M. Jourdain had talked all his life, without knowing what it was. The artifice should not become too obvious, and give the effect of artificiality, but there is artifice in prose, and there is still more artifice in poetry. "With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the skies! How silently, and with how wan a face!" is, after all, only a more beautiful and a more imaginative way of saying, "The moon rises slowly, looks pale, and makes no noise." The fashion in which Sir Philip Sidney

says it is a more beautiful and more imaginative way of saying it, because it is a way in which there is a more deliberate artistry, which is therefore more aware of the imaginative and the beautiful. This is a point of some importance. However we rightly emphasise the quality of intuition and inspiration in poetry, the fact remains that every great poet has been a great craftsman, and the noblest passages he has ever written were wrought out with art, doubtless with the art that conceals art, which is the highest kind of art, but nevertheless with a deliberate purpose of loveliness, and a definite artifice dedicated to the creation of it.

That artistry consists largely in the choice of words that are apt, stately, musical, memorable, daring. Quintilian described Horace as *felicissime audax* in his use of words, and there is probably always something bold as well as something fortunate in a particularly memorable phrase. If the choice is too reckless the words seem misplaced and ridiculous; if it is too timid the words become merely commonplace. But if the words surprise us, as Keats said that poetry ought to do, "by a fine excess, and not by singularity", the result is not readily forgotten. Many a fine passage in literature owes its memorable quality

to some verbal audacity, some ardent and daring use of a word. George Macdonald once wrote, in reference to Byron (though the phrase surely has much more application to the work of other and greater poets), of "the physical force of words". There is perhaps nothing which exhibits poetic genius more strikingly than this compelling use of words—as if the poet took a word and (in spite of itself and all its regular rules of behaviour) *made* it mean what he wanted. This is very noticeable in Shakespeare. No doubt it was conditioned in his case by the looseness of Elizabethan syntax, but that does not explain everything. There are many examples (most of all, I think, in *Antony and Cleopatra*) where he forces a noun to serve as an adjective, or a noun or an adjective to serve as a verb, sometimes with a very striking effect, as in the lines:

> ". . . What I would have spoke
> Was beastly *dumb'd* by him",

and:

> "That sleep and feeding may prorogue his honour
> Even till a *Lethe'd* dulness!"

and:

> "Eros,
> Wouldst thou be *window'd* in great Rome, and see
> Thy master thus?"

There are some striking examples of this bold usage of words in Keats. One is in a couplet from *Endymion* which is remarkable on other grounds, for it is a piece of very memorable music:

> "Like old Deucalion *mountained* o'er the flood,
> Or blind Orion hungry for the morn."

There is another in *Lamia*:

> "Or friends or kinsfolk on the *citied* earth
> To share our marriage feast?"

And another in *Isabella*:

> "And for them many a weary hand did swelt
> In *torchèd* mines and noisy factories."

And another in *Hyperion*:

> "Couches of rugged stone, and slaty ridge
> *Stubborn'd* with iron."

Occasionally this kind of thing is done with effect by a poet of our own days, as when Coventry Patmore writes:

> "Leave to your lawful Master's itching hands
> Your *unking'd* lands."

But only a master of language can do this well, and it is better not attempted by anyone else. It is a desperate throw in the game, which nothing

but success can justify. With Francis Thompson it became a mannerism, and this, like the extremity of his Latinism, goes to show how he strained after effects of greatness that he could only rarely accomplish. Consider how effective are most of the examples from Shakespeare and Keats, and how tortured and unnatural are the numerous instances in Thompson, as where he writes:

> "*Unbanner* your bright locks,—advance
> Girl, their gilded puissance",

and:

> "Is it not thou that dost the tulip drape,
> And *huest* the daffodilly?"

and:

> "Ere Autumn's kiss *sultry* her cheek with flame,"

and:

> "I, the flesh-girt Paradises,
> *Gardenered* by the Adam new."

Sometimes words are used in this masterful fashion with a deliberate effect of the comic, as when Dr. Johnson reproached Langton for spending his time with "a set of wretched *unidea'd* girls", and probably it is only so that they can pass muster in prose. For prose wears a

more sober livery than poetry, and the audacities that may be carried off in verse are only tolerable in prose as a quaint and humorous affectation, with much the same effect as vivid slang. If Shakespeare had made Falstaff say to Pistol, "I have grated upon my good friends for three reprieves for you and your coach-fellow Nym, or else you had looked through the grate like a pair of monkeys", there would have been nothing in the words to stick in the memory; when he makes him say, "like a geminy of baboons", we remember the vivid quaintness of the phrase, and we feel that it is consonant with the wild humour of the fat knight. But such a phrase could hardly find a place in serious prose. It is deliberately and delightfully grotesque. The same passport serves sometimes for the entry of such words and such constructions into the lighter kind of verse—that is to say, their quality of the quaint and humorous, as when Coleridge describes the drowsy cry of the watchmen: "Those hoarse *unfeather'd* nightingales of Time!", and when Tennyson writes of the armorial crest of the squire: "Whose blazing wyvern *weathercock'd* the spire."

It illustrates the complexity of the issue that some of the worst things ever written have been due to an avoidance of the ordinary word, and

the mistaken choice of what the writer thought was a more dignified word or phrase. Our eighteenth-century poets were so much afraid of the plain word, which seemed to them unworthy of the dignity of verse, that they achieved some wonderful examples of unconscious humour in the avoidance of it. Young writes, in the *Night Thoughts*:

> "All the distinctions of this little life
> Are quite *cutaneous*",

i.e. skin-deep.

Armstrong writes, in *Diet*:

> "Not that which Cestria sends, *tenacious paste*
> *Of solid milk*",

i.e. Cheshire cheese.

The greater poets of the period are almost as bad. Thomson describes the cragsman in the Hebrides who:

> "to the rocks
> Dire-clinging, gathers his *ovarious food*",

i.e. eggs. (That heartless reduction of "ovarious food" to mere eggs reminds me irresistibly of Barrie's grocer, who advertised "Eggs, new laid, 1s. 3d.; eggs, fresh, 1s. 2d.; eggs, warranted, 1s.; *eggs*, 10d.")

Pope writes, in *The Rape of the Lock*:

"The peer now spreads *the glittering forfex* wide
T'inclose the lock; now joins it, to divide";

i.e. the scissors. In the next line the scissors become "the fatal engine", and a few lines farther on "the unresisted steel". But it is only fair to add that there is some excuse for Pope here, because the whole poem is professedly a piece of studied artificiality. Cowper writes:

"Such is the clamour of rooks, daws, and kites,
The explosion of *the levelled tube* excites",

i.e. a gun. It is Cowper also who has the amazing lines:

"The stable yields *a stercoraceous heap*
Impregnated with quick fermenting salts",

i.e. a dung-hill. Another eighteenth-century writer, Grainger, was evidently rather ill at ease on this point of husbandry, for in *The Sugar Cane*, while he boldly speaks of dung-hills, he prefaces the reference with a solemn question:

"Of composts shall the muse descend to sing
Nor soil her heavenly plumes? The sacred muse
Nought sordid deems, but what is base."

It is Grainger again who has the lines:

> "Nor with less waste *the whisker'd vermin-race*
> A countless clan, despoil the lowland cane",

i.e. rats.

Boswell says Langton told him that when Grainger read the poem in manuscript at Sir Joshua Reynolds's, the assembled wits burst into a laugh when the poet read the passage as he had originally written it, beginning: "Now, Muse, let's sing of *rats*!" Boswell had sense enough to add (though he expressed the criticism in a characteristically pompous way) that in the poem as published the rats are "periphrastically exhibited in a still more ludicrous manner".

Even Wordsworth can approach the same pitch of absurdity, as when he writes:

> "Mark him of shoulders curved, of stature tall,
> Black hair and vivid eye and meagre cheek,
> *His prominent feature* like an eagle's beak",

i.e. his nose.

But these absurdities raise some real issues. Can the Muse sing of rats and of noses? I doubt it; except where the reference is humorous, as in a piece of grotesquerie like Browning's *Pied Piper*. Are there not some facts and some words

that do not lend themselves to poetic treatment? In Tennyson's first draft of *The Miller's Daughter* he wrote:

> "A water-rat from off the bank
> Plunged in the stream . . "

but he altered it later to:

> "Then leapt a trout. In lazy mood
> I watched the little circles die;
> They passed into the level flood,
> And there a vision caught my eye."

The leaping trout is surely a more poetic vision than a plunging water-rat.

Someone with an enquiring mind once went through a collection of English love poems, and counted the references to the different features. It appeared that the eyes were mentioned eighty-four times, the lips twenty-eight, the brow seventeen, and the nose only once! It is not recorded what this solitary reference was; probably it was Tennyson's:

> "And lightly was her slender nose
> Tip-tilted like the petal of a flower."

Mr. G. K. Chesterton has written a poem on noses and noselessness, but that again is a burlesque. Rats and noses are unpoetic themes,

and the serious poet had better avoid them, but if he will not leave these things alone he should not try to mask what is unpoetic by mere pomposity of language: if he will name them at all he should name them plainly.

But there is sometimes a difference between a plain word and an ordinary word, as there is always a difference between a stately phrase and an affected phrase. The distinction really points to an important issue. For the essential difference between verse and prose, apart from the externals of metre and rhyme, is that verse is a more exalted sort of utterance, and is therefore dedicated to the expression of the more imaginative kind of thought, and the more inspired kind of feeling. You can say in verse:

> "Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height,
> What pleasure lives in height? the shepherd sang."

But you will hardly choose verse as the medium if you want to say, " 'Come downstairs; what's the good of staying up there?' her husband remarked." As Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has said, with real discernment, while "the capital difficulty of verse consists in saying ordinary things, the capital difficulty of prose consists in saying extraordinary things; with verse, keyed

for high moments, the trouble is to manage the intervals". This is illustrated by many comic examples, like those I have quoted, in which our poets come to grief over the mention of ordinary matters of everyday life. Many others might be given. Tea, for example, is a harmless beverage, except when drunk in such quantities as once alarmed the elder Mr. Weller, but it has a noxious effect on the poets. Pope, for once, is blameless: he calls it tea:

> "Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,
> Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea",

(and, by the way, the rhyme reminds us of the older pronunciation which has survived in uncultured speech, "a cup of *tay*"). But with Cowper it is disguised either as:

> "the fragrant lymph
> Which neatly she prepares",

or as:

> "the cups
> That cheer, but not inebriate."

And Wordsworth sins as badly as anyone with:

> "And sitting on the grass partook
> The fragrant beverage drawn from China's herb."

Such examples illustrate the dangers of poetic diction, and of the dignified paraphrase which is akin to it. It is better to use a plain word at the risk of being commonplace than to use an affected paraphrase with the certainty of being pompous. But a poet ought to select his subjects and his words so as to avoid either fault. His themes should be worthy of high language, and his language should be apt for high themes.

As one singularly apt word may make the greatness of a particular passage, either in prose or in poetry, so one word that is unfit or misplaced may imperil the whole effect. Stevenson wrote to Barrie, when he had read *A Window in Thrums*, a letter of high appreciation, in which he said, among other things, "Tibbie Birse in the burial is great, but I think it was the journalist that got in the word 'official'." Tibbie says in the novel, "Though I should be struck deid this nicht, I wasna sae muckle as speired to the layin' oot. There was Mysy Cruickshanks there, an' Kitty Wobster 'at was nae friends to the corpse to speak o', but Marget passed by me, me 'at is her ain flesh an' blood, though it mayna be for the like o' me to say it. It's gospel truth, Jess, I tell ye, when I say 'at, for all I ken officially, as ye micht say, Pete Lownie may be weel and

hearty this day." Stevenson was right: the peasant woman might have said, "for all I ken 'at she's telled me", or something like that, but she would surely never have said, "for all I ken *officially*". Here, of course, it is not a question of a word that is specially subtle or suggestive or appropriate in itself, but merely of a word that is or is not consistent with the natural speech of the person portrayed. But the issue may be said to be generally one of consistency, in some sense. The wrong word is wrong because it does not accord with the sense, or the sound, or the verbal dignity, or the emotional pitch, of the rest of the passage. So one unfortunate word can sometimes ruin the whole effect of a noble paragraph or a fine verse. In one of the eclogues of John Davidson—that greatly underestimated poet—there is a delicate vignette of winter:

> "In holly hedges starving birds
> Silently mourn the setting year.
> Upright, like silver-plated swords
> The flags stand in the frozen mere."

Now does not everyone feel that these lines are spoilt by the one word "silver-plated"? It recalls silversmiths' shops, tea-pots, tea-spoons, sugar-basins, and electro-plate generally. How much

better if the poet had written "silver swords"—"Upright, unmoved, like silver swords", or something of that sort?

So we feel that a famous poem of Wordsworth's is spoiled for a moment when he writes:

> "And now I see with eye serene
> The very pulse of the machine;
> A being breathing thoughtful breath,
> A traveller between life and death."

He writes of one who is a phantom of delight, a lovely apparition, a dancing shape, and then we are brought up with a jar upon "the machine"—with its suggestion of a mangle, a locomotive, a factory, and all the rest of it. Why did he not say "the very secret of her life", or "the very pulses of her soul", or something like that? Probably, if the truth must be told, because he wanted a rhyme for *serene* and could not think of another.(13) One other point may be noted here. The word *machine* is a misfit in Wordsworth's beautiful verses mainly because of its associations, but probably also in part on account of its linguistic origin. The simpler word would have been better, and the simpler word would almost certainly have been a Saxon word.

IV

DERIVATION AND HISTORY

As we have already seen, there are three distinct elements in the English language as it exists to-day—the native Saxon, the words borrowed directly from Latin, and the words of Latin origin which have come to us through French. Unquestionably this mixture has produced a genuine enrichment of the language, and that in more ways than one. Sir Philip Sidney wrote, in the *Apology for Poetry*, "I know some will say it is a mingled language. And why not so much the better, taking the best of both the other? Another will say that it wanteth grammer. Nay, truly, it hath that praise that it wanteth not grammer; for grammer it might have, but it needes it not; being so easie of itselfe, and so voyd of those cumbersome differences of cases, genders, moodes, and tenses, which I think was a peece of the Tower of Babilon's curse that a man should be put to schoole to learne his mother tongue. But for the uttering sweetly and properly the conceits of the minde, which is the end of speech, that hath it equally with any other tongue in the world." As

these words suggest, the mixture of linguistic elements has not only enlarged the vocabulary of English, but has also simplified the grammar of it. When Saxons and Danes and Normans all settled successively in the same land, and were gradually welded into one people, speaking one language, the grammatical superfluities were largely got rid of in the process of fusion. In Old English the noun had six forms, the nominative, genitive, and dative, in the singular and in the plural. To-day the noun has only two forms, the singular and the plural, the same form as the plural (though not historically the same) being used for the possessive, with an apostrophe to distinguish it. In Old English the three genders were arbitrary, as in most languages. To-day gender in English is natural, the masculine form being used only of a man, the feminine only of a woman, the neuter only of a thing (except, of course, in a personification, which is not really an exception at all). It is only necessary to think of the cases and the genders in other languages to realise how greatly all this is to the advantage of English.

Another advantage in the grammatical structure of English has come from the development of auxiliary verbs like *be*, *do*, *have*, *shall*, and *will*.

We can say, for example, "I *am* writing", and "I *was* writing", and "I *have been* writing", and "I *had been* writing", where older English could only say "I write" and "I wrote", and obviously a much wider range of significance is due to this extended construction. Then in Old English "I do desire" and "I did desire" were simply alternative forms of the present and past tenses, equivalent to "I desire" and "I desired". Now the auxiliary has acquired a deliberative and emphatic quality, so that "I do desire" and "I did desire" imply "I do really desire", "I did specially desire", or something of that sort. There is an implicit protest of earnestness, often with the suggestion that this has been doubted or denied. The use of *shall* and *will* is particularly complex and is supposed to be specially difficult for those born north of the Tweed. When Angus is being given an appointment on a London paper, in Barrie's amusing novel *When a Man's Single*, the editor asks, "By the way, you are Scotch, I think?" "Yes", said Rob. "I only asked", the editor explained, "because of the *shall* and *will* difficulty. Have you got over that yet?" "No", said Rob, sadly, "and never will." "I shall warn the proof readers to be on the alert", the editor said, laughing; and Barrie adds that Angus

did not see what he was laughing at. The correct usage here is easy enough. *Shall* expresses a simple future. *Will* expresses an intention as well. "I shall never do it" merely states that this is to be my fate. "I will never do it" states that this is not merely to be my fate, but is also my purpose. But there are a great many other delicate distinctions in the use of *shall* and *will*, which come naturally to an Englishman, but are difficult enough to explain and rationalise. There cannot be any doubt, however, that they give a great many subtleties of expression to the language.

But even more important is the double strain in our vocabulary. Think of a few familiar words like *father*, *mother*, *life*, *love*. These are in Latin, *pater*, *mater*, *vita*, *amor*; in French, *père*, *mère*, *vie*, *amour*; in German, *Vater*, *Mutter*, *Leben*, *Liebe*. The German words are plainly of the same origin as our English ones; the French words are as plainly derived from the Latin. But we have also in English the words: *paternal*, *maternal*, *vital*, *amorous*, which are from the Latin. This means a choice of synonyms, so that we may say either *fatherly* or *paternal*, *motherly* or *maternal*, *living* or *vital*, *loving* or *amorous*; it also means that there is a difference of quality between the words which largely governs the use of them. Roughly,

they mean the same, but there are subtle nuances which make themselves felt in any delicate use of language. There can be no doubt at all that this mixture of Teutonic and Latin elements in the language is a very considerable factor in English style. The Norman Conquest brought in a number of Norman-French words, and (what is much more important) it was the entry of these which predisposed the language to receive the innumerable words which were afterwards introduced from both French and Latin. The actual grammatical structure of a sentence in modern English often rests almost wholly on the Saxon verbs and prepositions and conjunctions, but many of the other words in the sentence, especially those which convey abstract ideas, and those which contribute the rhetorical and resonant element, are ultimately from the Latin. The reasons for this are plain. As the language of an old civilisation, which had long been in use by philosophers and poets, Latin had developed a wealth of abstract words. English left to itself would doubtless have evolved such terms out of its own resources, as German has done. There is an indication of the way that this might have come to pass in Wyclif, who uses *againstand* for "resist", *againrising* for "resurrection", *forthinking* for

"repentance", *unworship* for "dishonour", and *kindly* for "natural" (as in the Book of Common Prayer, where "the kindly fruits of the earth" means "the *natural* fruits of the earth"). William Barnes, the Dorsetshire poet, seriously urged that a purely Saxon vocabulary should be restored, and suggested (among others less desirable) the words *folkdom* for "democracy", *redecraft* for "logic", *manqualm* for "epidemic", *wirespell* for "telegram", *wortlore* for "botany", and the perfectly delightful *fireghost* for "electricity". But before English had a literature, in any large sense of the word, the influx of words from French and Latin had begun; scholars especially went on borrowing the Latin words with which they were so familiar, and these were adopted into the language, largely to represent generalised conceptions. It is very noticeable that many of the words borrowed from Latin have a more generic meaning than the native words, and therefore it is to the Latin element that the language owes much of its power to express abstract thought. On the other hand, since the Saxon words are generally more specific, it is on these that much of the vividness of our speech depends. *Religion* is Latin, but *God*, *soul*, *sin*, *forgiveness*, *heaven*, *hell*, are Saxon. *Morality* is Latin, but *right* and *wrong*,

good and *evil*, *truth* and *falsehood*, *love* and *hate*, are Saxon. *Humanity* is Latin, but *man*, *woman*, *husband*, *wife*, *child*, *baby*, are Saxon. *Material* is Latin, but *wood*, *stone*, *iron*, *leather*, *wool*, *cloth*, are Saxon. *Colour* is Latin, but *white*, *black*, *blue*, *red*, *yellow*, *green*, are Saxon. The other point is equally obvious. It was the words borrowed from the Latin that were "sounding words", as Dryden said, fitted for the expression of "magnificence and splendour", and a writer who wanted a sonorous and stately word naturally chose it from the Latin strain. The very nature of the language explains why. In Latin there are five consonants to four vowels; in English there are six to four. But against this has to be set the fact that English has more than five monosyllables to two polysyllables. In Latin the proportion of monosyllables to polysyllables appears to be about one in fifty. The general effect is undoubtedly that Latin is much more stately, rigid, and resonant than English. A great many of our English monosyllables in constant use are nouns, verbs, and prepositions, and it must be remembered that the use of the latter, particularly, gives English more freedom of movement than Latin has, and therefore renders it capable of more variety of effect in the grouping of words.

Generally, however, a long word is more dignified than a short one. And since letters are, "like soldiers, apt to desert and drop off on a long march", as Seneca said, there is a general tendency for words to shorten and so to lose dignity. This is true even when the letters remain, as a matter of spelling, but are not pronounced. "Contemplation", for example, as it was pronounced down to the seventeenth century—*con-temp-lat-i-on*—as in Milton:

> "Guiding the fiery-wheelèd throne
> The cherub Contemplatiòn",

is a statelier word than our *con-temp-la-shun*. So in Herrick's:

> "A lawn about the shoulders thrown
> Into a fine distractiòn",

where *dis-tract-i-on* is a much finer sound than our *dis-tract-shun*, and so in many examples in Shakespeare. The loss of dignity increases with the process of shortening. It is amusing to remember that when the errand-boy says "Yes, 'm", the one letter is the sole survivor of nine, for *mea domina* has become progressively *madame*, *madam*, *ma'am*, *'m*. In the earlier stages of language the exact opposite sometimes happens, and a word creates new derivatives by lengthening itself.

Thus the single letter *e*—the Latin preposition that means *from*—is the root of our word "stranger" (*e*, *ex*, *extrà*, *extraneus*, *étranger*, *stranger*). But the tendency in latter times is always toward shortening and simplifying words, as the modern usage is enough to show in words like *bus*, and *tram*, and *train*, abbreviated from "omnibus-coach", and "tramway-car", and "railway-train".

The mere contrast between a long word and a short one, apart from anything else, has its effect in every language. It is obvious, for example, in the famous phrase of Tacitus, *ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellunt*, and the effect is preserved in English, "They made a *solitude* and called it *peace*." The deliberate opposition of five syllables to two in the Latin, and three syllables to one in the English, assuredly has a marked bearing on the impressiveness of the phrase. Our language has probably more scope for this kind of effect than most others, because the contrast between a long word and a short one in apposition is generally provided by the contrast between a Latin word and a Saxon one, as in Herrick's "The liquefaction of her clothes", and Lovelace's "When love with unconfinèd wings", and Wordsworth's "An incommunicable sleep." Change to

'the waving of her clothes", "with free wings", "an unshared sleep", and a good deal is lost, largely because a shorter word is substituted for a longer one. There are other details present, as we shall presently see, but the mere length of a word tells in its association with other words.

One of the main factors which conditions English style, therefore, is the difference between the Latinised language that is marked by dignity, and the Saxon language that is marked by simplicity. The difference is broadly that the Latin words in our language are usually long words, stately in sound, and abstract in significance, while the native words are generally short words, more simple in sound, and more concrete in significance. Some of the finest effects in our literature are due to the contrast and combination of Latin and Saxon words, with these different characteristics. Many examples might be quoted to illustrate this. In the Book of Common Prayer there are many doubled phrases, of which one word is Saxon and the other Latin, like *trust* and *confidence*, *truth* and *justice*, *sickness* and *mortality*, and it is noticeable that the noun of Latin origin generally comes last, doubtless because it is longer and more resounding. There are also many similar phrases where one word is Saxon and the

other has come from the Latin through old French, like *assemble* and *meet*, *vanquish* and *overcome*, *violent* and *unruly*. And there are many others where both words are really of Latin origin, but one of them has reached us so long ago through French, and has been so assimilated, that it looks like native English, and the other has come directly from the Latin, and retains a Roman cast of countenance, like *peace* and *concord*, *joy* and *felicity*, *praise* and *magnify*. It is evident that there is a difference of quality between these associated words, as you feel if you say *trust* and *faith* for *trust* and *confidence*, or, on the other hand, *veracity* and *justice* for *truth* and *justice*. Or if in the second group you say *vanquish* and *conquer* for *vanquish* and *overcome*, or *violent* and *turbulent* instead of *violent* and *unruly*. Or again, in the third group, if you say *peace* and *friendship* for *peace* and *concord*, or *joy* and *gladness* for *joy* and *felicity*. It is not suggested that there is any particular loss in some of the substituted phrases, but merely that there is a characteristic difference, both in sound and suggestiveness.

Some Latin words have been introduced from time to time into the language, and have not managed to establish themselves in English permanently. Thus Sir Thomas Browne, referring

to an incident in Scripture, says that "to burn the bones of the King of Edom for lime seems no irrational ferity"; and Dr. Johnson, writing of the King of Prussia's tall grenadiers, says that he made them marry tall women so "that they might propagate procerity". John Bunyan would doubtless have written, for the first phrase, "seems no foolish hurt", and for the second, "that they might beget giants". But the point to remark at the moment is that we all freely use *irrational* and *propagate*, while it would be a deliberate affectation to-day to use *ferity* and *procerity*. The Latin adjective and verb have established themselves in English, while the two Latin nouns have not.

But restricting ourselves to Latin words which are perfectly naturalised in the language, let us think of some of these with their Saxon synonyms —words like *burdensome* and *onerous*, *feeling* and *sentiment*, *fiery* and *igneous*, *hide* and *conceal*, *manly* and *masculine*, *place* and *locality*, *shady* and *umbrageous*, *sin* and *iniquity*, *unfriendly* and *inimical*, *watery* and *aqueous*, *womanly* and *feminine*, *work* and *occupation*. Consider the difference between "my burdensome work" and "my onerous occupation", between "an unfriendly feeling" and "an inimical sentiment", between "this shady place" and "this umbrageous locality", between "hiding

a sin" and "concealing an iniquity". Surely everyone must feel that in each example the Saxon words are the more suggestive, emotional, and poetic. If your mind can possibly harbour a doubt about this issue, try a base experiment and recite:

> "But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
> Quenched in the chaste beams of the *aqueous* moon",

and:

> "An *igneous* soul which working out its way,
> Fretted the pygmy body to decay
> And o'er informed the tenement of clay",

and:

> "You have the Pyrrhic dance as yet
> Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone?
> Of two such lessons why forget
> The nobler and *the more masculine* one?"

and:

> "All that remains of her
> Now is pure *feminine*."

But this has gone far enough! It is an outrage, and we can almost see the ghosts of four English poets, like Hamlet's father, "look frowningly".

Almost the earliest example of Dr. Johnson's literary manner occurs in the preface to his

translation of Lobo's *Voyage to Abyssinia*, where he says that "the reader will here find no regions cursed with irremediable barrenness or blessed with spontaneous fecundity". Take these adjectives and substitute simpler Saxon equivalents—*hopeless* for *irremediable*, and *ready* for *spontaneous*. Instead of ten syllables you have four, and instead of twelve effective consonants you have five. The general effect is the loss of a quality which is, at its best, stateliness, and, at its worst, pomposity, and a gain in simplicity and ease. But look at the nouns—the Saxon word *barrenness* and the Latin word *fecundity*. We happen to have purely Saxon words for both these notions; we can say *barrenness* and *fruitfulness*, but we have also Latin equivalents in *sterility*—it is a wonder that Dr. Johnson did not use it—and *fertility*, as well as *fecundity*. This again illustrates the fact that we often have the choice in English between a Saxon word and a Latin word, so that we can make a phrase out of Latin words, or out of Saxon words, or out of a blend of both. We can say *irremediable sterility*, and *spontaneous fertility*, or *hopeless barrenness* and *ready fruitfulness*, or *hopeless sterility* and *ready fertility*. I am not recommending these phrases—Heaven forbid that I should recommend some of them!—I am only illustrating the way that we can

ring the changes on Dr. Johnson's phrase and the words it suggests. And so in innumerable other examples. We can say *fraternal affection* or *brotherly love*, and we can also say *fraternal love* or *brotherly affection*. We can say a *mortal enemy* or a *deadly foe*, and, again, we can say a *deadly enemy* or a *mortal foe*.

Some very distinct effects are produced by these means. Thus when Burke writes: "to act with effect and energy, rather than to loiter out our days without blame and without use", the contrast between "effect . . . energy" and "blame . . . use" is much more telling than if he had written "to act with effect and energy, rather than to loiter out our days without censure and without utility". When he writes of the Keep of Windsor "girt with the double belt of kindred and coeval towers", and goes on to say that "England is safe from the levellers of France" as long as "this awful structure shall oversee and guard the subjected land", it is much more effective than if he had written "kindred and aged towers" and "this awful building" and "the yielded land", or if, on the other hand, he had written "related and coeval towers" and "this reverend structure" and "the subjected territory".

The happy effect produced by the apposition

and contrast between words of Latin origin and words of Saxon origin might be illustrated endlessly from the poets. Think of phrases in Shakespeare, like "a thing ensky'd and sainted" . . . "in the dark backward and abysm of time" . . . "th' inconstant moon" . . . "the insane root" . . . "the pendent boughs" . . . "the antique world" . . . "his loved mansionry" . . . "her weedy trophies" . . . "with restless violence" . . . "in cold obstruction" . . . "in shallows and in miseries" . . . . "her fair and unpolluted flesh" . . . "the last syllable of recorded time" . . . "in states unborn and accents yet unknown". There are many examples of this in all our poets. The quality of many phrases in Milton, such as "the grisly terror" . . . "his original brightness" . . . "the dark opprobrious den" . . . "the dark, unbottomed, infinite abyss" . . . "bitter constraint and sad occasion dear" . . . is largely due to the combination of the two elements in our language.

Often, as these examples show, the delicate effect is due to the contrasted quality of a Latin and a Saxon adjective, or of a Latin adjective and a Saxon noun, or of a Saxon adjective and a Latin noun. The following phrases are all from Wordsworth . . . "transient sorrows" . . . "temperate will" . . . "uncharter'd freedom" . . . "unfilial

fears" . . . "household motions" . . . "worldly grandeur" . . . "timely mandate" . . . "strong compunction". . . . Now change these into "passing sorrows" . . . "calm will" . . . "lawless freedom" . . . "unchildlike fears" . . . "domestic motions" . . . "mundane grandeur" . . . "opportune mandate" . . . "potent compunction", or, the other way about, into "transient dolours" . . . "temperate volition" . . . "uncharter'd liberty" . . . "unfilial terrors" . . . "household movements" . . . "worldly greatness" . . . "timely bidding" . . . "strong regret". . . . There is no absolute superiority, on one side or the other, in most of these alternatives—"passing" and "calm" are as poetical words as "transient" and "temperate", and indeed more so; and "potent" and "dolour" may be as effectively used in poetry as "strong" and "sorrow", if they are used at the right time and in the right place. But there cannot be the slightest doubt that every one of Wordsworth's phrases that has been quoted gains largely from the subtle contrast in quality between the Latin adjective and the Saxon noun, or the Saxon adjective and the Latin noun, as the case may be.

The same point might be abundantly illustrated from contemporary verse, the best of which owes much to this adroit balance between words of

different length and different origin. Think of phrases like "ephemeral tears" . . . "some fugitive breath" . . . "the volatile song" . . . "the doomed, reluctant leaf" . . . "all things sealed and recondite" . . . "Earth's imperturbable heart". . . . All these are from the verse of that genuine poet, Sir William Watson, and they all illustrate the effective contrast between the two elements in our speech.

I have suggested that the Latin word is nearly always the more stately and resonant, and that the Saxon word is nearly always the more vivid, passionate, and poignant. When Coleridge makes the Ancient Mariner say that he was

> "Like one that on a lonesome road
> Doth walk in fear and dread,
> And having once turned round walks on,
> And turns no more his head;
> Because he knows a frightful fiend
> Doth close behind him tread",

the sense of dread is conveyed by the simple Saxon words, as one may easily see by making a pompous paraphrase of the last two lines: "Because he is conscious of the proximity of a terrific demon." Why is *a terrific demon* less awful than *a frightful fiend?* Because the former phrase

is more artificial, and therefore the thing seems less real. An English novelist of the baser sort might write, if he were describing an imaginary experience: "He saw an apparition, and it reduced him to a condition of mortal terror"—he might *write* that (for men are capable of almost anything when they get a pen into their hands), but if he had really seen the thing himself he would *say*: "I've seen a ghost, and I'm frightened to death!" That is to say, the simpler native speech is more natural than the Latinised literary idiom whenever the feelings are deeply stirred. The more poignant passages in our literature all depend mainly upon Saxon words. So it is (to think of Wordsworth only) in simple and moving lines like:

> "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very Heaven!"

and:

> "The silence that is in the starry sky,
> The sleep that is among the lonely hills",

and:

> "To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears",

and:

"She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove;
A maid whom there were none to praise,
And very few to love."

Many years ago, when Francis Thompson was beginning to be known, some wicked person wrote (in the *Saturday Review*, I think) a parody of this poem in an exaggeration of Thompson's manner. The first verse was, if I remember it aright:

"By fonts of Dove, ways incalcable,
Did habitate
A maiden largely inamable
And illaudate!"

It is a caricature, of course, but it is enough to illustrate the point. The natural and simple feeling has all gone, and is replaced by an absurd imitation of stateliness, because most of the Saxon words have gone, and Latin words have taken their place.

There is also a marked difference between the words which we have borrowed from the French (though these derive ultimately from the Latin), and the words borrowed directly from Latin. Nearly always differences of meaning have been developed; but there are also differences of quality

and sound to be considered. This is illustrated by a very interesting group of borrowed words where two forms exist in English. Thus from *captivus* we have "captive" and "caitiff"; from *factio*, "faction" and "fashion"; from *factum*, "fact" and "feat"; from *legalis*, "legal" and "loyal"; from *potio*, "potion" and "poison"; from *persecutus*, "persecute" and "pursue"; from *quietus*, "quiet "and "coy"; from *redemptio*, "redemption" and "ransom"; from *regalis*, "regal" and "royal", from *traditio*, "tradition" and "treason"; from *zelosus*, "zealous" and "jealous". Now in almost every case we feel that the former word is the more rigid and formal, and the latter word the more poetical and romantic. Compare "a legal fact" and "a loyal feat"; "a quiet faction" and "a coy fashion"; "a regal redemption" and "a royal ransom"; "a zealous captive" and "a jealous caitiff". I am not forgetting the differences of meaning, but surely it is plain that the first phrase in each example is more stiff and stately, and the second phrase more pliable and graceful. This is largely due, it will be noted, to the way that the words which have come to us through old French have shed their consonants and mixed their vowels. There is at least one exception to the rule that the word directly from the Latin is

less poetical, and the reason for this is interesting. *Potion* is the Latin *potio*; *poison* is the same word through the old French. Now *potion* is the more poetic word. Why? Because *poison* has been adopted into general use in both a technical way and a familiar way—for example, we speak of "alkaloid poisons", and of "rat poison". *Potion* is the rarer word, and therefore the more stately word; and Keats's line: "It came like a fierce potion, drunk by chance", would lose something in dignity if you substituted the word "poison", though it is, as a sound, the finer word.

The borrowing of words from the French has gone on from the Norman Conquest to the present day. *Chauffeur*, *chassis*, and *garage* have come in during the last thirty years, in connection with the motor industry. *Liaison* and *camouflage* came in during the years of the War. Words like these date themselves, but many French words absorbed during the last two centuries, or even during the last century, have been so thoroughly assimilated that we hardly think of them as French. There is a famous example in Pope where the rhyme shows that the word had been borrowed recently:

> "Dreading e'en fools, by flatterers besieged,
> And so *obliging* that he ne'er *obliged*."

Obviously the word was of late introduction and kept its foreign pronunciation. Pope said *obleeged*, and indeed old-fashioned people said that until within living memory. But who thinks of *oblige* to-day as a French word?

Such processes of adoption and adaptation are always going on, and we do not realise how recently some words have entered English, or have been promoted from slang into the literary language, until our attention is called to the fact, and it is dated, by some contemporary protest. Thus Swift lamented, only two hundred years ago, in the *Tatler* (No. 230), that the war had introduced words like *ambassadors*, *battalions*, *communications*, *operations*, *preliminaries*, *speculations*, and said that these words would not be able to survive many more campaigns. He also complained of *banter*, *bully*, *mob*, and *sham*, as undignified words in a sermon. All these words are familiar enough to-day, and the slangy character of the last group is almost lost. "A bantering criticism", "a mere bully", "a furious mob", "a literary sham", would hardly strike anyone to-day as specially undignified phrases, and certainly not as slang. Writing as late as 1851, Archbishop Trench suggested that there were no exact equivalents in English for *badinage*, *coterie*,

malice, *persiflage*, *ruse*, and some other French words. It is very doubtful whether the ordinary reader to-day, encountering these words in a newspaper or a novel, would think of any of them as obviously foreign. He would realise that they are French if this were pointed out to him, but it is a question whether he would otherwise, and it is pretty certain that if left to himself he would never feel that "malice" and "ruse" were French words.

V

POSITION AND EMPHASIS

But whatever the source or sound or significance of a word may be, and however these condition each other, the word never stands by itself, and therefore the position of it in the sentence is a matter of importance. The particular word is one of a group of words, and the special place that it holds in the group seriously affects its prominence and value. Now the strategic positions in the sentence are naturally the first and the last. Ben Jonson shrewdly remarked, in *Discoveries*, that "our composition must be more accurate in the beginning and end than in the midst; for through the midst the stream bears us". That is certainly true; there is a special importance about the beginning and the end of a sentence or a paragraph. The first note in a piece of music strikes our attention because it is the first; the last note lingers in our ears because it is the last. It is remarkable how much many striking passages in literature really owe, when we examine them closely, to a memorable opening, or an arresting close, however splendid

may be the thoughts and words that lie between.

Everyone will recognise that there is a special importance about the beginning of a book. For one thing it is well to rouse the reader's interest at once, according to the Horatian canon, by a sudden plunge into the subject. I have been amazed to find how many young people in our days are shy of Scott, and I believe it is largely because of his long introductions. *Ivanhoe* is probably read a good deal more by modern youth than most of the novels, but it would have stood a still better chance if it had begun: " 'The curse of Saint Withold upon these infernal porkers!' said Gurth the swineherd", instead of beginning with a few pages of disquisition and description. The modern writer has generally learned this lesson. Mr. G. Bernard Shaw's play *Saint Joan* starts with an exclamation by Robert de Baudricourt: "No eggs! No eggs! Thousand thunders, man, what do you mean by no eggs?" Here is a quaint and unexpected beginning, which arrests our attention at once. In such examples as these, however, it is a matter of the general design of the book or the play rather than a matter of style—that is to say, it is not a question of the special arrangement of words in relation to each other, but a question as to whether a particular

block of words should be placed at the beginning or farther on. But the choice of the particular word that shall come first in a sentence is a detail that does matter in style, and that matters a good deal.

Now an important word, or a word that may become important because it is capable of bearing a heavy emphasis, does not naturally come at the beginning of a sentence unless it is either an apostrophe or an imperative. In these instances it does bear a strong stress, and therefore makes a good beginning, like "*Lord*, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations!" and "*Lift* up your heads, O ye gates!" Where neither of those forms is appropriate, or perhaps possible, a similar effect is sometimes brought about by inversion; an emphatic word that would naturally stand in the middle of the sentence is brought to the beginning, where it becomes still more emphatic. This is not a mere writer's trick. There is a psychological reason for it, as for most of these things. When the man in the street is expressing his low opinion of some acquaintance he probably will not say "Well, I don't think much of him, for my part", but rather, "*Him?* Well, for my part I don't think much of *him*." This brings the emphasis at both the beginning

and the end on the pronoun that designates the despised person.

Our poets do the same thing when they invert the natural order of words in order to gain this initial and final emphasis. "Home they brought her warrior dead" is much more solemn and memorable than "They brought home her dead warrior." Why? Because at the beginning and at the end of the sentence, which have a natural prominence as the beginning and the end, there is an important word. The whole stress of meaning here is on the fact that the warrior was *dead*, and that they brought him *home*. The one fact is emphasised because it meets you at the very beginning of the sentence and of the line; the other because it meets you at the very end. In this particular example (and often in poetry) there is also the detail that the first and last syllables are accented as a part of the very structure of the verse.

We read in the Apostle's speech in Acts ii. 23: "*Him*, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." (This exactly reflects the order in the original Greek, by the way, where τοῦτον stands at the beginning of the clause.) The order of the words brings a

good deal more emphasis on the pronoun than if it had been, "Ye have taken Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" . . . When Satan says in *Paradise Lost*:

"Me though just right, and the fixed laws of Heaven,
Did first create your leader—next, free choice,
With what besides in council or in fight
Hath been achieved of merit . . ."

the pronoun at the beginning of the line has much more stress and significance than if it had come in the middle of a line:

"Although just right and the fixed laws of Heaven,
Made me your leader . . ."

Me stands in the forefront, and also carries a special emphasis, because the regular accent on the second syllable of the line is thrown back upon it; for the line cannot be read: "Mè thóugh jùst ríght àndthé fìxed láws òf Héaven", but must necessarily be read: "Mé thoùgh júst ríght àndthè fíxed láws òf Heáven."

This verbal inversion occurs with effect many times in stately prose as well as in poetry. "He is blessed whose transgression is forgiven", or "He whose transgression is forgiven is blessed" would be the ordinary arrangement of the sentence, but

"*Blessed* is he whose transgression is forgiven" is a much more emphatic way of saying it. "The Lord is great and highly to be praised" is a good deal less impressive than "*Great* is the Lord, and highly to be praised". There are many other examples in the Authorised Version of the Bible where an inversion like, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory", or "Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord", makes a magnificent beginning for a sentence.

The same effect is accentuated when a word which carries a good deal of emphasis as an imperative is made to recur at the beginning of successive verses, like the *Ask me no more* of Carew's lovely lyric: "Ask me no more where Jove bestows" . . . "Ask me no more whither do stray" . . . "Ask me no more whither doth haste" . . . "Ask me no more if east or west" . . . and the *Forget not yet* in Wyat's poem: "Forget not yet the tried intent" . . . "Forget not yet when first began" . . . "Forget not yet the great assays" . . . "Forget not! O forget not this" . . . "Forget not then thine own approved" . . . and the repeated *Follow!* in Campion's "Follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow!" . . . "Follow her whose light thy light depriveth" . . . "Follow those pure

beams, whose beauty burneth" . . . "Follow her while yet her glory shineth" . . . "Follow still, since so thy fates ordainèd". . . . If you doubt the importance of the word's position in these examples, try a distressing experiment and read, "You shall not ask where Jove bestows" . . . "Do not forget the tried intent" . . . "Thy fair sun follow, O unhappy shade!". . .

A similar effect of emphasis is achieved and even more obviously, when a word is immediately repeated in the same line, as in Tennyson's

> "Break, break, break,
> On thy cold grey stones, O sea!"

It is perhaps worth remarking that the intended monotony of repetitions like these is saved from being mere monotony by an instinctive modulation of emphasis. Probably everyone reads Tennyson's apostrophe thus:

> "BREAK, *break*, break,
> On thy cold gray stones, O sea!"

So it is said that Sheridan read Dryden's lines:

> "NONE but the *brave*,
> *None* BUT the brave,
> None *but* the BRAVE deserve the fair!"

In one of Donne's sermons there is a noble

passage which ends impressively with a repetition of the same thought in four similar words. "When it comes to this height, that the fever is not in the humours, but in the spirits, that mine enemy is not an imaginary enemy, fortune, nor a transitory enemy, malice in great persons, but a real, and an irresistible, and an inexorable, and an everlasting enemy, the Lord of Hosts Himself, the Almighty God Himself—the Almighty God Himself only knows the weight of this affliction, and except He put in that *pondus gloriae*, that exceeding weight of an eternal glory, with His own hand, into the other scale, we are weighed down, we are swallowed up, irreparably, irrevocably, irrecoverably, irremediably."

Sometimes an inversion of the usual order of the words, which we have seen used to make some striking beginnings, is used to make an impressive end. So when we read that the Apostle Peter said to the lame man: "Silver and gold have I *none*", the effect is more summary and emphatic than if the words had been "I have *no* silver and gold", partly because the negative word is brought to the end of the sentence, and partly because the consonantal ending of *none* (as it is pronounced) is a more final sound than the vowel ending of *no*.

I may add that the poets sometimes pervert the natural order of words merely for the sake of finding a rhyme, which is nearly always indefensible. So Shelley wrote:

> "But from these create he can
> Forms more real than living man",

where "create he can" for "he can create" is an impossibly awkward construction. Sometimes, again, an undesirable order of words exists because the poet is determined at all costs to get a particular phrase into the line. Francis Thompson was evidently resolved to use the phrase "the cincture of God" when he wrote:

> "Its keys are at the cincture hung of God
> Its gates are trepidant to His nod",

where "at the cincture" interposed between the compounded verb "are–hung" is an order of words that one would have thought intolerable to a poet's ear. Sometimes a clumsy order of words is found without there being even the excuse of a desired rhyme or phrase in prospect. Wordsworth has the lines in one of his greatest poems:

> "I deferred
> The task, in smoother walks to stray;
> But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may",

where the natural order of the words is violated to little or no purpose. Why did he not write: "But I would serve thee now more strictly, if I may"? The only possible defence of Wordsworth's arrangement of the words would be that it brings the accent on "thee", but the awkward order is not worth while for the sake of that effect. Somebody once said that Plato's words seem to have *grown* into their places, and the perfect order of words, whether in prose or in poetry, is always one which seems natural and inevitable.

A word that does not in itself possess any striking sound, or any suggestion of finality, may make an impressive finish because it carries a special weight of emphasis in its application, as in the last line of the poem by Drummond of Hawthornden:

> "Here is the pleasant place
> And nothing wanting is, save She, *alas*!"

and when Donne writes, again, in a memorable paragraph upon the passing-bell: "Who bends not his ear to any bell, which upon occasion rings? but who can remove it from that bell, which is passing a piece of himself out of this world? No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of

the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for *thee*."

A proper name, coming at the very end of a sentence, often constitutes a noble climax. Here, I would suggest, it is not altogether that there is a heavy stress on the mere sound, and not necessarily that the word has any particular sonority, but partly that there is a kind of mental pause which is due to the concrete significance of the name. The name of a place or a person presents a definite image at which our thought halts for a moment; there is a picture in our mind, and it is more final, because it is more defined, than the more general thoughts which have gone before.

Thus Sir Philip Sidney wrote, in a famous passage: "Certainly, I must confess my own barbarousness, I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet; and yet is it sung but by some blind crouder, with no rougher voice than rude style; which being so evil ap-

parelled in the dust and cobwebs of that uncivil age, what would it work trimmed in the gorgeous eloquence of *Pindar*?" Sir Thomas Browne did the same thing. "But all this is nothing in the metaphysicks of true belief. To live, indeed, is to be again ourselves, which being not only an hope but an evidence in noble believers, 'tis all one to lie in S. Innocent's Churchyard, as in the sands of Egypt, ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever, and as content with six foot as the *moles* of *Adrianus*." So, too, Johnson wrote, in the noblest paragraph that ever came from his pen: "Far from me, and from my friends, be such frigid philosophy, as may conduct us, indifferent and unmoved, over any ground which has been dignified by wisdom, bravery, or virtue. The man is little to be envied, whose patriotism would not gain force upon the plain of Marathon, or whose piety would not grow warmer among the ruins of *Iona*." Ruskin achieves a similar effect by similar means in one of his noblest passages: "Those ever springing flowers and ever flowing streams had been dyed by the deep colours of human endurance, valour and virtue: and the crests of the sable hills that rose against the evening sky received a deeper worship, because their far shadows fell eastward over the

iron wall of Joux, and the four-square keep of *Granson.*"

The same effect is achieved in the same way in poetry, and perhaps as often, though it might be thought that metre would not so easily admit of it. Consider how much of the effect of Marlowe's famous lines would be lost if he had written:

> "Is this the face that launch'd a thousand ships
> And burned Troy's topless towers?"

instead of:

> "Is this the face that launch'd a thousand ships
> And burned the topless towers of *Ilium?*"(14)

There are many examples of this. One of Keats's finest sonnets ends:

> "and all his men
> Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
> Silent, upon a peak in *Darien.*"

And the last lines of the noble sonnet of Wordsworth, written on the occasion of Sir Walter Scott's last voyage, are:

> "Be true,
> Ye winds of ocean, and the midland sea,
> Wafting your charge to soft *Parthenope!*"

Byron ends a fine stanza in a similar way:

"Of the three hundred grant but three
To make a new *Thermopylae!*"

And a modern poet, Francis Thompson, finishes a poem with the striking lines:

"And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth, but *Thames!*"

Something of the same effect is produced by the use of a quoted phrase at the end of a sentence, if it be a proper one for the place. Thus Raleigh wrote: "O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! whom none could advise thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and hast covered them all with these two narrow words, *Hic jacet.*" I do not know whether Wordsworth had Raleigh's noble words in mind, but he accomplishes the very same effect by the same means in *Ellen Irwin*:

"By Ellen's side the Bruce is laid;
And for the stone upon his head,
May no rude hand deface it,
And its forlorn *Hic jacet!*"

So the noble paragraph which ends De Quincey's great book owes a good deal to the quotation which comes at the close of it. "One memorial of my former condition still remains: my dreams are not yet perfectly calm: the dread swell and agitation of the storm have not wholly subsided: the legions that encamped in them are drawing off, but not all departed; my sleep is still tumultuous, and, like the gates of Paradise to our first parents when looking back from afar, it is still (in the tremendous line of Milton)—

'With dreadful faces throng'd and fiery arms.' "

We have seen that the repetition of a word often makes a good beginning or a good end for a sentence. It naturally lends emphasis to a word also when it occurs in the middle of a sentence, and makes the thought which the word suggests more prominent. Milton writes in *Paradise Lost*:

"So spake the Seraph Abdiel, *faithful* found;
Among the *faithless faithful* only he",

and in *Samson Agonistes*:

"But what more oft, in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love *bondage* more than *liberty*—
Bondage with ease than strenuous *liberty*—"

and in *Lycidas*:

"For *Lycidas* is *dead*, *dead* ere his prime,
Young *Lycidas*" . . .

And Shelley:

"Wherefore hast thou left me now
Many a day and night?
Many a weary *night and day*
'Tis since thou art fled away."

And Tennyson:

"*Calm* on the seas, and silver sleep,
And waves that sway themselves in rest,
And dead *calm* in that noble breast,
Which *heaves* but with the *heaving* deep."

And Lionel Johnson, in *By the Statue of King Charles*:

"Gone, too, his Court; and yet,
The *stars* his courtiers are:
Stars in their courses set;
And every wandering *star*."

The repetition of a word or a phrase is responsible for some fine effects in prose as well as in verse. Matthew Arnold did it so often that it became a maddening mannerism, but used with restraint and in the hands of a master it can produce some great results. No one ever did it better, perhaps,

than Burke. "*The blood of man*", he wrote, in a noble passage, "should never be *shed* but to redeem *the blood of man*. It is well *shed* for our family, for our friends, for our God, for our country, for our kind. *The rest is* vanity; *the rest is* crime." (This is doubtless an echo of Genesis ix. 6, where there is a like effective repetition, "Whoso *sheddeth man's blood*, by *man* shall his *blood* be *shed*.") Burke said again, in his great speech at Bristol: "The worthy Gentleman, who has been snatched from us at the moment of the election, and in the middle of the contest, whilst his desires were as warm, and his hopes as eager as ours, has feelingly told us *what shadows* we are and *what shadows* we pursue." And he wrote in the famous passage about Marie Antoinette: "*Little did I dream* when she added titles of veneration to those of enthusiastic, distant love, that she should ever be obliged to carry the sharp antidote against disgrace concealed in that bosom; *little did I dream* that I should have lived to see such disasters fallen upon her *in a nation of gallant men, in a nation of men of honour* and of cavaliers. I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone."

Dryden has the device of repetition in *Alexander's Feast*, with an effect rather different from that in some of the other examples that have been quoted:

"He sung Darius great and good,
By too severe a fate
Fallen, fallen, fallen, fallen,
Fallen, from his high estate,
And weltering in his blood."

Here it seems to me that the suggestion is not so much that of emphasis and finality, as if to imply that the fallen monarch would never rise again (however true that might be), but rather of the depth of the fall from his high estate, as if the mind's eye sees him fallen, and fallen lower, and fallen still lower, until at last he lies upon the ground weltering in his blood. *Fallen, fallen, fallen, fallen*, as if he were falling for as long a time as it takes us to utter the repeated words. That interpretation is confirmed by the detail that probably everyone instinctively reads the words with a falling emphasis:

"Fallen,
fallen,
fallen,
fallen,
Fallen from his high estate,
And weltering in his blood."

Then the position of a word in a sentence is inextricably involved with the sound, as well as with the emphasis, and while the recurrence of the same sounds may create a singular harmony, if the recurrence is properly spaced and modulated, nothing makes for ugliness more than a mere recurrence—either an immediate repetition or a monotonous repetition of the same sound, where there is no need to emphasise it. Many of our poets have ruined a line by redoubling a particular sound without the intervention of any other sound. Thus Cowley has the line "*Though so* exalted she", and Donne, "*So though* thy circle to thyself express." Donne, again, has "*Then when* thou was infusèd harmony", and Shelley, "As *then when* to outstrip thy skyey speed." Milton has "*Then when* I am thy captive, talk of chains", and he has the same jingle again in *Comus*, and yet he criticised Bishop Hall for writing:

> "Teach each hollow grove to sound his love,
> Wearying echo with one changeless word",

and remarked scornfully: "And so he well might, and all his auditory beside, with his *teach each!*"

It is not quite so painful when the repetition is not immediate, but Goldsmith damaged a famous couplet by writing:

"*Ill* fares the land to hastening *ills* a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

Wordsworth found fault with the two participial endings in Shakespeare's line: "The sing*ing* masons build*ing* roofs of gold." But Keats thought that the repetition of the sound was justified by the continued note of the bees. Here are the divergent opinions of two great poets on the music of a third! It is enough to warn us to be careful. Landor wrote: " '*Tis* not my solace that '*tis his* desire", and De Quincey censured him for the repeated " 'tis", but did not remark that it is made worse by the "his" which follows the second " 'tis". Dean Alford wrote in a reply to a criticism of something he had said in his work on English, "The fact is, the rules of emphasis come *in*, *in in*terruption of the supposed general law of position." It would have been easy enough to avoid this dreadful iteration of *in* . . . *in* . . . *in* . . . by writing, "the fact is, the rules of emphasis enter, and interrupt the supposed general law of position". Similar lapses are not uncommon, even in great writers. Lord Morley once wrote: "After the manner *of* the author *of* the immortal speeches *of* Pericles", and even Ruskin could pass a sentence which contained the clause, "represen-

tative *of* the mind *of* the age *of* literature". There is no excuse for such a monotonous repetition of the same word. The sentences might have run: "in the manner we associate with the author of the immortal speeches which go by the name of Pericles", and "representative of the literary mind of the age", or something like that. Flaubert is said to have had sleepless nights when he found that he had inadvertently used *de* twice in a single clause—a thing much more difficult to avoid in French. He had written *une couronne de fleurs d'oranger*. In English we can often escape a repeated "of" by the use of the possessive, or by the attributive use of the substantive, for we can say "summer's days" or "summer days", if we like, and avoid "days of summer" when there is another "of", which cannot be escaped, in the same clause.

It is really the same principle which justifies what Quintilian called *antonomasia*, where in repeated allusions to a person he is referred to by way of some description, and not by his name. There is manifestly a good case for using some descriptive periphrase when it enables the writer to avoid a monotonous repetition of a name. The objection which some critics have felt to this practice is justified only when the thing is

badly done. There should naturally be some appropriateness in the alternative phrase that is used. It has been observed that when Milton avoids a repetition of the name of Satan, and substitutes some descriptive phrase, the phrase has always a real connection with the context. Thus Satan is "the infernal Serpent" when he "deceived the mother of mankind"; he is "the Arch-Enemy" after he has "defied the Omnipotent to arms"; he is "the apostate Angel" when he is vaunting himself as "irreconcilable to our grand Foe"; he is "the lost Archangel" when he finds himself in "profoundest Hell". Obviously the poet is first of all avoiding the repeated mention of Satan's name, but every time this is done by the use of some phrase that has a real association with the situation described. This illustrates the only right principle of the usage.

Thus to avoid a mere repetition of the name "Wordsworth" one is surely justified in calling him "the author of the *Excursion*", or "the poet of nature", or anything like that. But in a good writer this will not be mere substitution, and irrelevant to the text. That is to say, Wordsworth will be referred to as "the author of the *Excursion*" in some connection where it is implied that this is not the young and unknown poet of 1798,

but the older man and the renowned poet of 1815 or later. When he is described as "the poet of nature" it will be with some reference to the place held in his poetry by the sights and sounds of the natural world. The dull repetition of a name should be avoided, but it ought to be avoided by the use of some other words which have a real appropriateness in their particular place.

Another consideration which affects the position of a word is that the sound of any one word is qualified by the sound of the other words associated with it, especially those which come immediately before and after it. That very delightful writer, Mr. P. G. Wodehouse, whose mastery of the idiotic amounts to genius, records that when Ambrose Wiffin's hat was returned to him after a misadventure in the cinema, the commissionaire remarked: "Here you are, sir. Here's your rat. A little worse for wear, this sat is, I'm afraid, sir. A gentleman happened to step on it. You can't step on a nat," he added, sententiously, "not without hurting it. That tat is not the yat it was." This bright bit of conversation may serve to remind us that the sound of every word is conditioned by the sound of the words that accompany it, particularly the final

sound of the preceding word, and the initial sound of the following word. The sound of the word "hat", even if it is pronounced as it should be, really is qualified in the general sound of the sentence, by the different words that go before it. The principle is instinctively recognised in the very structure of some languages. The existence of the euphonic *ν* in Greek is an example of it. So is the French practice of *liaison*, and some related rules, where a final consonant that is usually silent is in some cases pronounced before a vowel, and where on the analogy of this (e.g. *Allait-il?*) a euphonic T is inserted where the verb does not end with the letter (e.g. *Il aime*, but *Aime-t-il?*). Even more strange is the euphonic L inserted before the indefinite pronoun *on* when a vowel precedes it (e.g. *Si l'on me voit*). This is remarkable because it is the insertion of a euphonic letter which is really a derelict and meaningless word, for it is probably the accusative pronoun. Then in English we have the two forms of the indefinite article, "a" and "an", the use of which was so brilliantly expounded by the pedagogue of Dotheboys Hall. "A acorn, a hour," said Mr. Squeers, "but when the *h* is sounded, the *a* only is to be used, as a 'and, a 'art, a 'ighway." It is interesting to remember that what Mr.

Wodehouse's commissionaire did to the word "hat" has really happened in the history of one or two English words. *Newt* derives from the old English *eft*, *evet*, or *ewt*, and *an ewt* became *a newt*. Exactly the opposite occurred with *adder*. The old English form was *nadder*, and *a nadder* became *an adder*. So with *napron*—the word occurs in Spenser—where *a napron* became *an apron*. The two forms "a" and "an" do not stand by themselves, however, for the use in poetry and in our earlier prose of the alternative forms "my" and "mine", "thy" and "thine", illustrates the same principle. Sir John Mandeville has "*my* wif" . . . "*myn* hosbond" . . . "*thi* schon" . . . "*thin* hosen". . . . In the Authorised Version there are many examples like "But it was thou, a man *mine* equal, *my* guide, and *mine* acquaintance." In the Book of Common Prayer we have the successive phrases "*Thine* unworthy servants—*Thy* goodness . . . *Thine* inestimable love—*Thy* mercies . . . *Thine* agony and bloody sweat—*Thy* Cross and Passion." The use of "my" and "mine", "thy" and "thine", in Shakespeare strikes one as very irregular; the clue appears to be that we have forms like "mine host", "mine honour", "mine eye", "mine ear", generally, but that "my" is preferred where there is a strong

emphasis on the word, because of the antithesis, as in: "*My* ear should catch your voice, *my* eye your eye." It has been pointed out that the pause which we are forced to make between "my" and a following vowel is a kind of emphasis in itself; we can say *minear* for "mine ear", but we have to say *my-ear* for "my ear". In all the earlier examples it is a matter of interposing a consonant between a word which would otherwise end with a vowel, and a following word which begins with one. But the general principle reaches a good deal farther than that. Every beautiful phrase owes something to the easy and natural transition in sound between the different words that constitute it.

VI

MOVEMENT AND RHYTHM

ANOTHER very important element in the sentence or in the stanza is the movement of the words. It makes a great difference whether the words move with ease or with difficulty, and whether the motion is slow or rapid. Dionysius of Halicarnassus pointed out long ago how the slow pace of the blinded Polyphemus as he groped around the entrance of his cave is represented by Homer in the dragging line:

Κύκλωψ δὲ στενάχων τε καὶ ὠδίνων ὀδύνῃσι,(15)

and how the struggles of Achilles, loaded with his armour, against the torrent that sought to overwhelm him, are described in the stumbling lines:

Δεινὸν δ' ἀμφ' Ἀχιλῆα κυκώμενον ἵστατο κῦμα,
Ὦθει δ' ἐν σάκει πίπτων ῥόος.(16)

Milton does the same thing when he is describing Satan struggling through chaos:

"So he with difficulty and labour hard
Mov'd on: with difficulty and labour he;
But, he once passed, soon after, when Man fell,
Strange alteration!"

The huddled syllables "with difficulty and labour", repeated in a second line, represent by their stumbling and uneasy pronunciation, the toilsome struggle of the Fiend.

Again, Milton manages in a line like: "Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death", to give a sense of the heaped disorder of chaos. This is produced partly by the quick succession of short words, and partly by the omission of the copulative. If you rewrite the passage:

> "The rocks and caves, the lakes and fens and bogs
> And shades of death",

it sounds more deliberate, and therefore less of a scrambled waste. The effect is still further reduced if you rewrite the passage again so as to reduce the monosyllables:

> "The rocky caverns, and the boggy fens,
> And shadowed lakes of death."

So when Milton describes Satan's journey through chaos:

> "the Fiend
> O'er bog or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
> With head, hand, wings, or feet, pursues his way,
> And swims or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies",

there is the effect both of wild disorder and of struggling haste. Again, it is a matter mainly of the use of monosyllables, and of the absence of connecting words.

Longinus remarked that a sense of animation and hurry is given to a sentence when the copulative is omitted, and alleged an example from Xenophon: "Locking their shields together they thrust, fought, killed, died." Many examples of this might be quoted. If Cæsar's famous despatch had read, *Veni*, et *vidi*, et *vici*, it would not have nearly such a sudden and summary effect. The insertion of the conjunction slows down the movement, for the very action of making a definite connection between the verbs really separates them. "I came, *and* I saw, *and* I conquered", suggests that there were three separate moments—an arrival, a survey, and a victory. "I came, I saw, I conquered," suggests a rapidity of action which merges all these into one. When we read in "the song which Moses and the children of Israel sang unto the Lord" in Exodus xv. 9: "The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil", there is much more effect of fierce haste in the words than if the sentence had read: "I will pursue, *and* I will overtake, *and* I will divide the spoil." In Antonio's letter: "Sweet Bassanio, my ships have all miscarried,

my creditors grow cruel, my estate is very low, my bond to the Jew is forfeit", the omission of the conjunctions again creates the sense of a hurried sequence of misfortune. If it had been "My ships have all miscarried, and my creditors grow cruel, for my estate is very low; moreover, my bond to the Jew is forfeit", it would have sounded more like a deliberate and reasoned statement of distress, and therefore less like a hurried message from a man overwhelmed with a succession of disasters, and "all his ventures fail'd". There are half a dozen "ands" in the first stanza in which Tennyson describes the awakening of *The Sleeping Beauty*, but it is very noticeable how the movement speeds up in the next quatrain when they are all omitted:

> "The hedge broke in, the banner blew,
> The butler drank, the steward scrawl'd,
> The fire shot up, the martin flew,
> The parrot scream'd, the peacock squall'd."

The pace slows down again somewhat, although the verse is a description of bustle, when the conjunctions reappear in the next lines:

> "The maid and page renew'd their strife,
> The palace bang'd, and buzz'd and clackt,
> And all the long-pent stream of life
> Dash'd downward in a cataract."

It is natural for the conjunctions to be left out also when there is a quick and passionate heaping up of epithets, either in a lament or in a denunciation. So Lear describes himself as "A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man". It would sound rather less pathetic if he had said that he was: "A man both poor and infirm, both weak and despised." Shelley denounces George the Third as "an old, mad, blind, despised and dying king". It would sound rather less virulent if he had written: "The king was old; he was both mad and blind; moreover, he was a despised and dying man."

The general movement of a sentence also affects the sound and the suggestiveness of the particular words. Contrast the lines (both examples are from Shakespeare):

> "Now see that noble and most sovereign reason,
> Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh",

with:

> "a sullen bell
> Remember'd knolling a departed friend."

In the first example the words move rapidly, and suggest the irregular sound of jangling chimes; in the second, the words move slowly, and suggest the solemn note of a funeral knell. Here it is

largely a matter of the longer and lower vowels in the second passage, as against the shorter and higher vowels of the first.

The same general principle as to movement applies not only to the immediate association of words in a phrase, but to the general character of the motion in a whole stanza or a whole paragraph. There is a marked contrast between the manly, forthright, rather staccato rhythm of Othello's speech before the Council:

"Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors,
My very noble and approved good masters,
That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter,
It is most true; true, I have married her:
The very head and front of my offending
Hath this extent, no more",

and the uneasy, hesitant, insinuating rhythm of Iago's sentences when he is speaking to Othello:

"I do beseech you—
Though I perchance am vicious in my guess,
As, I confess, it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not—that your wisdom yet,
From one that so imperfectly conceits,
Would take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble
Out of his scattering and unsure observance."

But here it is not wholly rhythm, for there are

more than twice as many sibilants in the traitor's speech as in Othello's, and these help to create the sense of sly insincerity.

Why is Dryden's verse more vigorous than Pope's? Ultimately because Dryden's was the more masculine mind, no doubt, but the effect of vigour is largely due to the variety of pauses in Dryden's lines, as against the monotonous regularity of the pauses in Pope's. Contrast the most famous passages of satire in the two poets:

"A man so various, that he seem'd to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome.
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong;
Was everything by starts, and nothing long;
But, in the course of one revolving moon,
Was chemist, statesman, fiddler, and buffoon;
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.
Blest madman! who could every hour employ,
With something new to wish, or to enjoy!"

Here the pauses fall in the different lines thus: in the first line after the fifth syllable; in the second line after the second; in the third line after the fifth; in the fourth line after the sixth; in the fifth line after the first; in the sixth line after the third, fifth, and seventh; in the seventh line after the fifth, seventh, and ninth; in the

eighth line there is no pause until the end; in the ninth line after the third; and in the tenth line after the sixth. Now take the same number of lines from Pope:

"Alike reserved to blame, or to commend,
A timorous foe, and a suspicious friend,
Dreading ev'n fools, by flatt'rers besieged,
And so obliging, that he ne'er obliged;
Like Cato, give his little senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause;
While wits and templars every sentence raise,
And wonder with a foolish face of praise:
Who but must laugh, if such a man there be?
Who would not weep, if Atticus were he?"

Here the pauses fall thus: in the first line after the sixth syllable; in the second line after the fourth; in the third line after the fourth; in the fourth line after the fifth; in the fifth line after the third; in the sixth, seventh, and eighth lines there is no pause until the end; in the ninth line after the fourth; and in the tenth line after the fourth.

Here are five lines out of ten where the pause comes after the fourth or after the sixth syllable of the line, against two lines out of ten in Dryden. The pause falls at five different places in the ten lines of Pope; it falls at eight different places in the ten lines of Dryden. Now there can be no

doubt at all that this contributes in a marked manner to what we feel to be the vigour, freedom, and naturalness of Dryden's verse, while the more regular fall of the pause in Pope's lines creates an impression of smooth artifice, and therefore, so to speak, of a high polish on the surface rather than of a strong grain beneath.

Hazlitt has pointed out, with his usual insight, that this "smooth, equable uniformity" is the defect of much of the prose of the eighteenth century, as well as of the verse. Addison was supposed to be the supreme example of excellence in prose, and Addison's style "was not indented, nor did it project from the surface. There was no stress laid on one word more than another—it did not hurry on or stop short, or sink or swell with the occasion: it was throughout equally insipid, flowing, and harmonious, and had the effect of a studied recitation rather than of a natural discourse." Wide as the difference is between their styles, much the same criticism applies to Johnson as to Addison. The one represents the monotony of ease, the other the monotony of pomp. The one ambles and the other marches, but the pace is depressingly regular in both. As Hazlitt has said again, it was the "pomp and uniformity" of Johnson's style that distinguished him from other

writers. "All his periods are cast in the same mould, are of the same size and shape, and consequently have little fitness to the variety of things he professes to treat of. His subjects are familiar, but the author is always upon stilts." Now nothing is more fatal than monotony, whether it be the regularity of a saunter or the regularity of a strut. Hazlitt himself is perhaps the best example in English of the opposite: his style is forceful, varied, and always natural. His prose ranges from the easiest kind of conversational language to passages of memorable eloquence and beauty, but it is never artificial and it is never monotonous. Indeed, Hazlitt's style is so excellent that it seems to have come by nature, like Dogberry's reading and writing. There is an absence of any apparent effort, and an absolute lack of pose. We never find ourselves halted, even by a fine touch, as we are sometimes in Stevenson's prose, for example, when we can almost see the author smirking at us from behind the successful phrase. With Hazlitt it is all unforced and natural; he writes as we can almost fancy that a man with a mind as rich as his, and with his delicate sense of language, might have talked. Think of the essay "On My First Acquaintance with Poets". It is full of quotations and literary allusions, like

most of what Hazlitt wrote, but these are never dragged in by the head and shoulders: it is quite plain that they came naturally to his mind as he wrote. It is a marvel of musical English throughout, but one never has the feeling that the author is doing his best to write well; it is evident that the language suggests itself to him as the natural expression of his thought. This does not mean that there really is no artistry in his writing: it means that he had read great literature, and thought about it, and felt the greatness of it, and practised the art of writing himself, until a supreme skill in the use of words became instinctive with him. When you admire the agile grace of a dancer it does not mean that she does it by nature, but that she has studied and practised the steps until the graceful motions have come to look natural, and indeed to be natural, in the way of a second nature.

But let us return to the question of variety. As Sir William Watson once pointed out in a critical essay, there is a special value in "suspensions, discords, and obstructions" in the texture of sentences, when these are sparingly and adroitly employed. What is true of all these issues of style appears here with especial plainness. The unusual construction which might seem to

be a matter of pure technique—a mere trick in the handling of words—really has a psychological origin in the mind of the writer, and a psychological effect on the mind of the reader. The English version of Psalm xxvii. 13 is "*I had fainted* unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living". The first three words are not in the original Hebrew, but are supplied to complete the sense, as the italics indicate. What the Psalmist wrote was: "Unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living . . . !" The sentence is left unfinished, as if the speaker broke off with a gasp. What would have been his state unless he had believed is not said: it is left to the imagination, as if it could not be uttered, and that is much more effective than any attempt to utter it.

A broken sentence is as natural an expression of anger as of doubt and desolation. There is a classical example in Virgil, where Neptune rebukes the rebellious winds. Dryden translates the passage:

> "Audacious winds! from whence
> This bold attempt, this rebel insolence?
> Is it for you to ravage seas and land
> Unauthorised by my supreme command?
> To raise such mountains on the troubled main:
> Whom I—but first 'tis fit the billows to restrain."

There can be no doubt as to the effect of that indignant, interrupted *Quos ego*—! (17) Such an interruption of speech naturally represents any deep and poignant feeling. There is another famous example in Virgil, where Andromache questions Æneas, but this time Dryden's translation does not reproduce the effect. He renders the lines:

> "Does young Ascanius life and health enjoy,
> Saved from the ruins of unhappy Troy?"

but what Virgil wrote is literally: "What of the boy Ascanius? Does he survive and breathe the air? whom to you when Troy —— Does he still mourn the loss of his mother?" The whole pathos of the lines is concentrated in that broken phrase *Quem tibi iam Troia* (18)—as if the mournful queen could not bear to say, "When Troy fell in blood and fire."

There is rather a different use of the suspended sentence in Cicero's *Oration against Verres*. "It is an outrage to bind a Roman citizen; to scourge him is an atrocious crime; to put him to death is almost parricide; but to crucify him—what shall I call it?" The pause suggests that both the indignation of the speaker and the monstrosity

of the deed are beyond expression in mere words. It is a good example of this when Lear says:

> "No, you unnatural hags,
> I will have such revenges on you both
> That all the world shall—I will do such things—
> What they are, yet I know not; but they shall be
> The terrors of the earth."

How well the interrupted speech here, "The world shall—I will do such things—What they are, yet I know not . . ." represents the rage and impotence of the old man, who hardly knows what he is saying! It is much more effective, and much more true to life, than any unbroken fluency of vituperation.

There are also many instances where some interruption or irregularity of stress and accent produces a marked effect of emphasis. When Tennyson writes:

> "And ghastly thro' the drizzling rain
> On the bald street breaks the bleak day",

the dreariness of the last line is due almost wholly to the accentuation. The regular accent, "On thé bald stréet breaks thé bleak dáy", is plainly impossible; the line must be read: "On the báld stréet breaks the bléak dáy." That means that

"bald" and "bleak" are thrown into special prominence, through the very displacement of accent, and most of the impression of cheerlessness depends upon that detail.

As an example of irregular accent of the worse kind a line of Matthew Arnold's *The Scholar Gipsy* might be alleged: "But it needs heaven-sent moments for this skill." It is evident that the first accent cannot fall in a regular way on the second word: you cannot say "But ít needs". . . . The line must be read "But it néeds". . . . When it is read thus, however, the former words are thrown together—"but-it"—and no one could claim that this makes a gracious sound. It would have been well to avoid this ugly collision by some such change as "But there needs heaven-sent moments for this skill". On the other hand, how effectively Shakespeare uses a similar beginning!—"But thy eternal summer shall not fade." Again it is impossible to read the line with the regular accent: "But thý eteŕnal súmmer sháll not fáde", for it simply must be read: "But thý éteŕnál súmmér shall not fade", which brings the whole stress of the line on to the words which indicate permanence, and leaves the phrase "shall not fade" to fade away itself suggestively into silence.

There are many examples where the whole

effect of a line or a sentence depends upon the accentual movement. A jumbling of accents may represent something jerky and irregular: a prolongation of accent may represent something slow and weary. Why do those lines of Wordsworth:

"And ere we came to Leonard's Rock
He sang those witty rhymes
About the crazy old church-clock,
And the bewilder'd chimes",

actually sound to the ear like rather erratic chimes? I suggest that it is partly the alternate alliteration . . . *c*razy . . . *c*hurch . . . *c*lock . . . *ch*imes . . . which is really, of course, *k*razy . . . *ch*urch . . . *k*lock . . . *ch*imes . . . (with a change in the following vowel each time) and partly the ding-dong accentuation:

"Àbóut thè crázý óld chuŕch clóck
Aňd thè béwĭldér'd chímes."

On the other hand, in Tennyson's lines:

"Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies",

the necessary scansion prolongs the sound of "tir'd"—"Than *t-i-r-'d* eyelids upon *t-i-r-'d* eyes", with an effect of lassitude. "*T-i-r-'d*" *sounds* tired. Read the line "Than weary eyelids upon weary eyes", and though the meaning is the same there is not the same suggestion of weariness. A like effect is found in Matthew Arnold's lines:

> "But her heart was *tired*, *tired*,
> And now they let her be."

In both these examples the effect is helped by the repetition of the word.

Apart from any question of metre altogether, there is a difference of quantity between words in English. Thus everyone will recognise the difference as between the two syllables *cheap* and *chip*, where the vowel sound in the first word must be quite twice the length of the vowel sound in the second word. Moreover, the long sound is capable of being still further lengthened, but the short sound cannot be materially lengthened. A vendor of potato-chips, in shouting his wares, might proclaim that they were *c-h-e-a-p !* but he could hardly call them *c-h-i-p-s !* Even in a staccato line like Gilbert's the words preserve their relative length, "Awaiting the sensation of a

short sharp shock, With a chēap and chĭppy chopper on a big black block."

Compare the quantity of the syllables in *L'Allegro* and in *Il Penseroso*, where there is little difference in the length of the lines, and observe the contrast between the dancing motion of:

> "Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee
> Jest, and youthful jollity,
> Quips and Cranks and wanton Wiles,
> Nods and Becks and wreathèd Smiles",

and the solemn and stately movement of:

> "Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure,
> Sober, steadfast, and demure,
> All in a robe of darkest grain,
> Flowing with majestic train."

If you take notice of the vowels you find that in the former passage there are more I's, and more short A's, while in the latter passage the A's are longer, and there are nearly twice as many O's and U's, exactly as these sounds prevail in the phrases "a tripping, pattering, giddy dance" and "a slow, stately, awful procession". I do not defend these absurd phrases, of course, and only use them to illustrate the way that the choice of vowels, and their length, make the movement

and represent the sense in these passages of Milton.

When Wordsworth writes of the daffodils:

> "The waves beside them danced, but they
> Out-did the sparkling waves in glee—
> A poet could not but be gay
> In such a jocund company!
> I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
> What wealth the show to me had brought",

it is plain that the short vowels in the first four lines give the sense of quick movement, and represent the dancing flowers and the dancing waves, but when in the last couplet the poet's mind passes into a meditative mood the quietness of reflection is suggested by the longer and slower vowels of *gazed*, and *gazed*, and *thought*, and *show*, and *me*, and *brought*. But that is not the whole truth. The thought of the last lines itself slows down the vowels; the *me* in the last line, for example, is instinctively pronounced with a longer vowel than the *be* in the third line. It bears the accent, of course, which makes a difference, but not all the difference. If the line were read, "A poet could not *be* but gay", the word *be* would still be quicker than the word *me* in the last line, "What wealth the show to *me* had brought."

In Elizabeth's reign there was a serious attempt to write English verse in the classical metres, and even Spenser was carried away for a time by this pedantry. For it was pedantry, and nothing else. Despite some later examples, such as those by Coleridge, Clough, and Tennyson, which are exceedingly interesting in their way, the attempt cannot result (except by a lucky chance) in anything but barbarous experiments. For the plain truth is that the whole structure of English poetry is accentual, and quantity only enters into it in a very secondary fashion. It does enter into it, in a way, for when we speak of accent we really mean three things in unison—stress, pitch, and duration. "Are you going out? No, I am not." Here the main stress is on "out" and "not", but it is accompanied, in the first word, by a rising inflection, and in the second by a falling one: a question nearly always ends with a heightened pitch, and a refusal with a lowered pitch. As to duration "out" is here the longer syllable and "not" the shorter one, but that is not due to the quantity of the words themselves, but to the way that their position and meaning in the sentence affect the duration of their utterance. The one word would be shorter in Macbeth's exclamation:

"And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. *Out*, *out*, brief candle!"

and the other would be longer in Iago's speech:

"*Not* poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou owedst yesterday."

Think of the great words of the prophet: "For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the peoples." The stress upon "darkness" is in each case the same, but the duration of the second word is greater than that of the first, because there is a secondary stress upon "gross", and that would rob the following word of its proper amount of stress, unless it were somewhat prolonged, and so you have: "For, behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and gross d-a-r-k-n-e-s-s the peoples."

The displacement of accent, as we have seen, is sometimes used to produce a marked effect of sound and emphasis. But generally in poetry (where alone, of course, it can occur) it is used merely to vary the regularity of the metrical scheme. In every metre there is a regular succession of accent: it would not otherwise be metre. But if a writer keeps religiously to the succession the

result is monotony, "the right butter-woman's rank to market" as Shakespeare called it; *úp ànd dówn, úp aǹd dówn, úp ànd dówn*, like the regular trot of a horse. Consequently every great poet varies the fall of the accent within the accentual scheme. He varies it according to the meaning, of course, but the result is to produce variety.

I have seen in a very scholarly book a line of Shelley's scanned thus:

> "Òh wéep fòr Ádònáìs! Thé qùick Dréams,
> The passion-wingèd Ministers of thought . . ."

Surely that is quite impossible. The line must be read: "Òh wéep fòr Ádònáìs! Thè quíck Dréams. . . ." The article cannot carry the stress, which is all upon the thought that the *dreams* are *quick*. The accent, therefore, accords with the meaning. But the point is that Shelley chose to express his meaning by words which disturb the accentual scheme. He might have written: "Oh weep for Adonais! Rapid dreams . . ." where the accents would have fallen quite regularly. He did not, but wrote a line which has the double effect of varying the monotony of the regular stress, and bringing an extra stress upon the epithet "quick".

There are innumerable examples of this in the poets. Shakespeare wrote: "And trouble deaf

heaven with my bootless cries." The regular accentuation of this is absurdly impossible; it simply cannot be read: "Ànd tróublè déaf hèav'n wíth mỳ bóotlèss críes"; it must be scanned: "Ànd tróublé déaf héav'n wìth mỳ bóotlèss críes." Milton wrote: "O fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd flood . . ." where there is not only displacement of accent, but also a redundant syllable, and where the line can only be scanned "Ò fóuntàin Ārèthúse, ànd thóu hónoúr'd flóod . . ."

This matter of accent and emphasis has all kinds of minor relations with the general issue of style. Thus Johnson remarks, in *The Lives of the Poets*: "The words *do* and *did*, which so much degrade in present estimation the line that admits them, were in the time of Cowley little censured or avoided." He means, of course, the use of these words as auxiliaries, as in the lines of Cowley, which he quotes:

> "The bondman of the cloister so
> All that he *does* receive, *does* always owe."

All our early poets use the words thus, without any hesitation, as when Milton writes of:

> "the wondrous horse of brass
> On which the Tartar king *did* ride."

Before the time of Johnson writers had come to feel as we do about the employment of these forms, as Pope's famous couplet is enough to prove:

> "Where feeble expletives their aid *do* join
> And ten low words oft creep in one dull line."

The change in usage is obvious, but I have never met with any attempt to explain it, though the explanation is not far to seek. Wherever there is a choice of synonymous expressions a differentiation between them is sure to begin, sooner or later. Once it was possible for the past tense to say indifferently "did write" or "wrote", but the former phrase began to develop an emphasis on the "did", and to-day there is a sharp distinction in meaning. "I wrote" merely states the fact. "I did write" states it emphatically, with the suggestion that it has been doubted or questioned. That is the real reason against the use of "do" and "did" where a versifier uses them to pad out a line. The young lady whose verses were admired by Huck Finn wrote in her immortal ode to the memory of Stephen Dowling Bots:

> "Oh no! Then list with tearful eye
> While I his fate do tell,
> His soul did from this cold world fly,
> By falling down a well."

She merely meant "while I tell his fate", and "his soul flew from this cold world". The *do* and *did* are quite unnecessary, and they would also introduce a false and misleading emphasis into the lines, if anything could make them more absurd than they are.

The effects of accent and emphasis and rhythm are closely and, indeed, inextricably connected. Thus the rhythmic movement of a particular metre makes it suitable or unsuitable for the utterance of a particular sentiment. Aristotle observed that iambic verse in Greek was the most proper for tragedy, because while it raised the style above prose, it was nearer prose than any other kind of verse. There is real insight here. Any great stress of feeling makes for simplicity, and therefore any special artifice is unnatural in deeply passionate verse. Most of our tragic dramas in English verse are in blank verse, for even the artifice of rhyme is rather too obvious in a passionate tragedy.

It has been remarked that Shakespeare makes his witches and fairies speak in short lines of four accents, and generally in rhyme, as with Puck's speeches in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the spells of the weird sisters in *Macbeth*. The point of this seems to be that exactly as

decasyllabic blank verse is the nearest approach to prose, in its lack of constructive artifice, and is therefore most natural in ordinary dramatic speech, so, on the other hand, a sort of staccato rhyming chant marks off the speech of supernatural beings as something different from the ordinary speech of mortals. The witches would have seemed more like the rest of the characters in the play if they had talked as the rest of the characters do—if, for example, the first hag had said:

> "Go round about the steaming caldron first,
> And throw the poison'd entrails in the broth.
> A toad that underneath a chilly stone
> For more than thirty days and nights has gathered
> The swelter'd venom in his loathly sleep,
> Shall first of all boil i' the charmed pot",

instead of:

> "Round about the caldron go;
> In the poison'd entrails throw,
> Toad, that under cold stone
> Days and nights hast thirty-one
> Swelter'd venom sleeping got,
> Boil thou first i' the charmed pot."

On the other hand, a metre like that would be inconceivable as a medium for some of the

speeches of the mortal beings in the play, even if it were denuded of rhyme. Imagine Macbeth saying:

> "Canst thou not
> Minister to minds diseased,
> Pluck from memory rooted griefs,
> Raze the troubles of the brain,
> With oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the breast of perilous stuff
> Weighing on the weary heart?"

instead of:

> "Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
> Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
> And with some sweet oblivious antidote
> Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
> Which weighs upon the heart?"

There are many examples in our poetry where the metre employed is quite plainly the best one, and sometimes the only one, for that particular use. And there are some instances where the choice of metre is unfortunate. Thus the anapæsts of Cowper's *Verses, supposed to be written by Alexander Selkirk*, are most unsuited to the sentiment:

> "I am monarch of all I survey,
> My right there is none to dispute;
> From the centre all round to the sea,
> I am lord of the fowl and the brute."

No desperate solitary would ever have bemoaned his fate to such a horn-pipe of a metre. He would have been much more likely to cast his lament into another mould, such as this:

"Monarch am I of all that I survey,
My right no living creature can dispute;
For from the centre to the encircling sea,
I am the lonely lord of fowl and brute."

I am far from claiming that there is any improvement on Cowper here in any respect but the metrical one, but the changed metre certainly is an improvement, for the movement is slower, and escapes the hop, skip, and jump of those unhappy anapæsts.

As Coleridge said, in the lines which he wrote for a boy, to illustrate the different classical feet, "With a leap and a bound the swift anapæsts throng", and that swift, leaping, bounding metre is the last that should be used for what would naturally be a slow, depressed, melancholy monologue.

Think of another poem of Cowper's—one of the noblest elegies in the language—and imagine it perverted into the anapæsts of which he was so fond:

"Toll a knell for the ill-fated brave!
The brave that shall conquer no more:
All sunk 'neath the pitiless wave,
Fast by their beloved native shore!"

That this metre is hopelessly unfit for the purpose must be plain to everybody. But how splendidly the sound fits the sense as Cowper wrote the verses:

"Toll for the brave!
The brave that are no more;
All sunk beneath the wave,
Fast by their native shore!"

Here it is not the metre alone that produces the effect. That is a very simple iambic measure, with six syllables in each line, though Cowper uses it freely, sometimes adding a syllable and sometimes dropping one. The effect of the lines is due to the skilful use of the long vowels, which the metre allows:

"Tōll fōr the brāve,
The brāve that āre nō mōre . . ."

Not only are the principal vowels long, but the first is artificially prolonged by the fact that a line which ought to have six syllables according to the metrical pattern of the poem, has only

four, so that it is necessarily read: "Tōll . . . . . for the brave . . ." The long vowel of the first word is thus further lengthened until it sounds like the slow tolling of a funeral bell.

A lengthy metre seems naturally suited to the expression of space, as in Robert Bridges' lines:

"Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,
That fearest nor sea rising, nor sky clouding,
Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest?"

It is equally suited to the expression of speed, if it is sustained speed, as in Browning's verse:

"Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit."

It is curious that another poem of Browning's is also about a ride, and is in a short metre, which might seem to contradict what has been said. I do not think it does. The long lines of *How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix* suggest the length as well as the speed of the journey—the long swinging stride of the horses

who gallop all the night through. The short lines of *Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr*:

> "As I ride, as I ride,
> Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,
> Yet his hide streaked and pied,
> As I ride, as I ride
> Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,
> —Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed—
> How has vied stride with stride
> As I ride, as I ride!"

suggest not so much the sustained speed of a long journey as the mere rapidity of the ride. The jerky gallop of the verses depicts to the mind the quick movement of the horse's legs, and the motion of the rider, bobbing up and down in the saddle, without any particular suggestion that all this is prolonged for hours.

It is noticeable that in a stanza where the final line is shorter than the rest, that fact conditions the character and the use of the line, with various results. The short line naturally tends to be more epigrammatic than the others, because of its brevity, as in George Herbert's stanza:

> "Let us (said He) pour on him all we can:
> Let the world's riches, which dispersed lie,
> *Contract into a span.*"

Or the shorter line becomes an imperative, with the natural curtness of a command, as in Sir Thomas Wyat's verses:

"Forget not yet the tried intent
Of such a truth as I have meant;
My great travail so gladly spent,
Forget not yet!"

Or, when the sentiment demands it, the utterance of the shorter line is prolonged until it takes as long as the longer line, with an effect of deliberation and melancholy, as in Stevenson's quatrain:

"Be it granted me to behold you again in dying,
Hills of home! and to hear again the call;
Hear about the graves of the martyrs the peewees crying,
And hear no more at all",

where as much time as is needed for uttering the ten syllables of the second line—or even a longer time—is spent in speaking the six syllables of "A-n-d h-e-a-r n-o m-o-r-e a-t a-l-l".

The matter of length has a marked bearing, also, on the quality of prose. Longer sentences naturally occur where the theme is solemn and the language stately. Where the issues are less serious, and the style is more lively and familiar, shorter sentences are the rule. The peril is, of

course, that seriousness may degenerate into pomposity, and liveliness into flippancy: the long sentences may become ponderous, and the short sentences jaunty.

The mere length of a writer's sentences has a much greater effect on his style than is generally realised. Compare Johnson and Macaulay. Jeffrey said to Macaulay, when he was beginning to contribute to the *Edinburgh Review*, "The more I think, the less I can conceive where you picked up that style." Now, it would sound absurd to suggest that Macaulay's style is derived from Johnson's, but something might be said for that contention. The striking difference between the two styles is more a matter of the length of sentences than anything else. The difference very largely disappears if you break up Johnson's long sentences into much shorter ones, on the whole, but with some variety in the length. Macaulay was an immeasurably better writer than Johnson, but he was undoubtedly brought up on the Johnsonian style: he sometimes even talked it when a child, as on the famous occasion when he said: "I thank you, Madam, the agony is abated!" But he was a younger contemporary of Coleridge and Wordsworth; he had a great deal more imagination than Johnson, and much more

critical ability; and he hated pedantry. Consequently he escaped the Johnsonian mannerism, and wrote a lively and most readable style, but when you look into it you find that Johnson's prose, resolved into shorter, sharper sentences, is not altogether unlike Macaulay's.

Here is a passage from the *Rambler* (No. 136): "The regard which they whose abilities are employed in the works of imagination claim from the rest of mankind, arises in a great measure from their influence on futurity. Rank may be conferred by princes, and wealth bequeathed by misers or by robbers; but the honours of a lasting name, and the veneration of distant ages, only the sons of learning have the power of bestowing. While, therefore, it continues one of the characteristicks of rational nature to decline oblivion, authors never can be wholly overlooked in the search after happiness, nor become contemptible but by their own fault. The man who considers himself as constituted the ultimate judge of disputable characters, and entrusted with the distribution of the last terrestrial rewards of merit, ought to summon all his fortitude to the support of his integrity, and resolve to discharge an office of such dignity with the most vigilant caution and scrupulous justice. To deliver examples to pos-

terity, and to regulate the opinion of future times, is no slight or trivial undertaking; nor is it easy to commit more atrocious treason against the great republick of humanity, than by falsifying its records and misguiding its decrees." Now rewrite the passage, leaving out one or two Latinisms, and also (what is much more important) breaking it up into shorter sentences, interspersed with occasional longer ones: "The regard which imaginative writers claim from mankind arises largely from their influence on the future. Rank may be conferred by princes. Wealth may be bequeathed by misers, or indeed by robbers. It is only the sons of learning who can bestow the honours of a lasting name. The veneration of distant ages is in their gift. As long therefore as the love of fame is a characteristic of rational minds authors will be sought out. They will not be forgotten in the search for happiness. They will not become contemptible but by their own fault. The man who considers himself the final judge of doubtful characters should be impartial. He ought to summon all his fortitude to the support of his integrity. If he thinks himself entrusted with the distribution of the last earthly rewards of merit he should resolve to discharge an office of such dignity well. It will

need the most vigilant caution. It will require the most scrupulous justice. To deliver examples to posterity is no slight undertaking. To regulate the opinion of future times is no trivial responsibility. It is not easy to commit a more atrocious treason against the great republic of humanity than by falsifying its records and misguiding its decrees." Unless I am much mistaken that might almost—though not quite—pass muster in one of Macaulay's essays.

Let us try the experiment again. Johnson wrote in the *Rambler* (No. 21): "That eminence of learning is not to be gained without labour, at least equal to that which any other kind of greatness can require, will be allowed by those who wish to elevate the character of a scholar; since they cannot but know, that every human acquisition is valuable in proportion to the difficulty employed in its attainment. And that those, who have gained the esteem and veneration of the world, by their knowledge or their genius, are by no means exempt from the solicitude which any other kind of dignity produces, may be conjectured from the innumerable artifices which they make use of to degrade a superior, to repress a rival, or to obstruct a follower; artifices so gross and mean, as to prove evidently

how much a man may excel in learning, without being either more wise or more virtuous than those whose ignorance he pities or despises."

Once again, rewrite the passage, without much change of vocabulary, but in a series of short sentences, with longer ones (but not as long as Johnson's) interspersed: "Eminence of learning is not to be gained without labour. The labour is at least equal to that which any other kind of greatness can require. This will be allowed by all those who wish to exalt the character of a scholar. Such persons know that every human acquisition is valuable in proportion to the difficulty overcome in its attainment. Those who have gained the esteem and veneration of the world by their knowledge or their genius are by no means exempt from solicitude. This, as well as any other kind of dignity, produces it. So much may be conjectured from the innumerable artifices of learned men. These artifices are used to degrade a superior, to repress a rival, or to obstruct a follower. They are often gross and mean. Such instances prove evidently how much a man may excel in learning without being either more wise or more virtuous than those whose ignorance he pities or despises." Surely that, in a very great measure, has ceased to be like Johnson,

and has become not much unlike Macaulay. It is true, of course, that Macaulay would not have used so many abstract phrases, and that he would probably have thrown in a sharp illustration or two from persons and events. But the experiment shows how much of Johnson's ponderosity is due to his long and complex sentences, and how much of Macaulay's lighter and brighter style is due to shorter and simpler ones.

To make sure that this is not a purely subjective judgment I have tested some pages of Johnson and of Macaulay on this point, and find that Johnson has an average of 48 words in a sentence, and the length of his sentences ranges from 17 to 132 words, while Macaulay has an average of only 20 words in a sentence (much less than half Johnson's average), and his sentences vary in length from 5 to 70 words. Moreover, an effect of variety is produced by the way that Macaulay alternates the length of his sentences. Most of Johnson's sentences run to 40 or 50 words. Macaulay uses two or three short sentences of half a dozen to a dozen words, and then one of twice or thrice the length.

The point may be further illustrated by an appeal to Gibbon, from whom Macaulay perhaps learned the lesson of variety. The style of Gibbon

is not less latinised than that of Johnson; I think a careful examination would show that there are even more words of Latin origin in Gibbon than in Johnson. The fact is that Johnson's occasional use of unfamiliar words like "procerity" and "labefaction"—the only adequate comment on these is Stevenson's exclamation on encountering another vocable, "Golly, what a word!"—and his constant use of abstract nouns, has created an impression that his Latinisms are the one vice of his style, and that his unreadable ponderosity is due to these alone. I do not believe that this is so. Gibbon's magnificent style is readable enough, and does not impress anyone as elephantine, and yet, as I have said, it is quite as latinised as Johnson's, if not more so. But Gibbon writes with much more imagination than Johnson; he uses many more visual and vivid words; and above all his sentences are shorter, and more varied both in their respective length and in their internal construction. I have once more tested the matter. In a page of Gibbon the sentences average 30 words each, against Johnson's 48, and they vary in length from 8 to 59 words, as against Johnson's 17 to 132 words. It is plain that the mere length of a sentence or a stanza, as well as the internal movement of it which is due to the grouping of

the syllables and the fall of the accents, is a very considerable factor in the general effect produced, both in prose and in poetry.

Another point may be noted here. The movement and the balance of a sentence are closely connected. The rhythm and the structure are interdependent. This may be illustrated by the use of antithesis, which was so common in the prose of the eighteenth century. It is, for example, almost the whole secret of Gibbon's constructive style. This may be illustrated from every page of his writings. These examples are all from the early part of his great work. A tax was so oppressive that "whilst the revenue was increased by extortion, it was diminished by despair". The armies of Rome in the days of Constantine "were chiefly composed of veterans who had almost forgotten, or of new levies who had never acquired, the use of arms and the practice of war". The dignity of officials in the Empire was "displayed in a variety of trifling and solemn ceremonies, which it was a study to learn, and a sacrilege to neglect". The Emperor Constantine "possessed magnanimity to conceive, and patience to execute, the most arduous designs, without being checked either by the prejudices of education or by the clamours of the multitude". The proselytes of

Christianity often delayed their baptism until the approach of death, for there were many "who judged it imprudent to precipitate a salutary rite, which could not be repeated; to throw away an inestimable privilege, which could never be recovered". The theology of the Church "which it was incumbent to believe, which it was impious to doubt, and which it might be dangerous, and even fatal, to mistake, became the familiar topic of private meditation and popular discourse".

There is no doubt that this antithetical method is remarkably effective when it is in the hands of a master, though it naturally tends to become wearisome when it is maintained through thousands of pages. The effectiveness of it is due, I would suggest, to a quality which is next of kin to wit. Wit is essentially a quickness of mind which seizes upon some opposition, and puts it into a sharp and memorable phrase. Any example of real wit will illustrate this. There is an excellent story to the effect that when the Emperor William the Second visited the Vatican, he was entering the Pope's apartment for a private interview, and Count Herbert Bismarck tried to thrust in after him. The Papal major-domo barred the way, and the intruder said indignantly, "I am the Count Herbert von Bismarck!" The major-domo

said: "That may *explain* your conduct, but it does not *excuse* it." He was saying in effect, that Bismarck was a rude person, and that there was no excuse for his rudeness. But he said it in a clever antithesis. Now Gibbon does what is really the same kind of thing. When he wants to say that the taxes became so heavy that the actual amount of revenue received was lessened, because the impositions went beyond the capacity of the taxpayers, he seizes upon the contrast between the increase of the tax and the decrease of the revenue, rounds it off by another contrast between the greed of the government and the depression of the people, and expresses it in a sharp phrase . . . "increased by extortion . . . diminished by despair". . . . When he wants to say that the armies were composed of old soldiers who were almost past service, and of raw recruits who had no experience of war, he seizes upon the opposition again, putting it into a neatly contrasted phrase, "veterans who had almost forgotten . . . new levies who had never acquired" . . . and then, to balance these two halves of a phrase with two more, he splits the notion of military efficiency into "the use of arms . . . the practice of war". . . . This constantly gives to his style something of the pointed quality of the epigram—the quality which

makes an epigram so easy to remember, and so striking to quote.

Now contrast Gibbon and Macaulay in this matter. I think that on a scrutiny Macaulay would be found to employ the method of antithesis almost as constantly as Gibbon, but his sentences are generally shorter, and his antitheses are less exactly balanced, as a rule. As Stevenson once remarked, the pleasure we derive from a fine sentence may be heightened by "an element of surprise as, very grossly, in the common figure of the antithesis, or, with much greater subtlety, where an antithesis is first suggested, and then deftly evaded". There is no doubt that some of the effectiveness of Macaulay's style is due to this—the recurrence of the antitheses is not so regular as in Gibbon, and the parallels are not so precise. Macaulay wrote in the famous essay on Milton: "Milton was, like Dante, a statesman and a lover; and, like Dante, he had been unfortunate in ambition and in love. He had survived his health and his sight, the comforts of his home, and the prosperity of his party. Of the great men by whom he had been distinguished at his entrance into life, some had been taken away from the evil to come; some had carried into foreign climates their unconquerable hatred of

oppression; some were pining in dungeons; and some had poured forth their blood on scaffolds." Gibbon would probably have written something like this: "The author of *Paradise Lost*, like the author of the *Divina Commedia*, was both a statesman and a lover; and Milton resembles Dante in the circumstance that he was unfortunate in either character, for he was disappointed in his political ambitions, and he was distressed in his personal affections. He had survived the double blessing of health and of sight; he had seen the felicity of his domestic condition lost, and the prosperity of his political faction extinguished. The great men by whom he had been favoured at his entrance into life had experienced a variety of misfortune; of those who had been animated by the same invincible hatred of oppression, some had found safety in exile, and some in death; some pined in the misery of a solitary dungeon and some perished in the ignominy of a public scaffold."

VII

QUALITY AND DESCRIPTION

THE final quality of a word depends upon all the elements that have been previously considered. It is the resultant of sound and significance and history and usage and association, all conditioned by the position of the word and the rhythm of the sentence. We may take proper names as a first illustration of quality, since here the choice and the usage of the words cannot be affected by shades of meaning. The poets delight to use names in a decorative way, and the primary attraction is doubtless the sound. There are famous examples in Homer and Virgil. Homer recites with evident pleasure the names of the Greek captains,(19) and of the places whence they came—"Peneleos and Leitos; Arkesilaos and Prothoënor and Klonios . . . rocky Aulis . . . grassy Haliartos . . . sacred Nisa and Anthedon on the far borders . . . Aspledon and Orchomenos of the Minyai . . . the river Kephisos and Lilaia by Kephisos' founts . . . " and so on for scores of lines. Virgil does the same with the names of the nymphs of Cyrene—"Drymo and Xantho, Ligea and Phyl-

lodoce . . . Nescæe and Spio, Thalia and Cymodoce . . . Ephyre and Opis; and Asian Deïopeia, and swift Arethusa. . . ."(20) So Horace writes: "Let others praise famed Rhodes or Mitylene of Ephesus, or the walls of two-sea'd Corinth, or Thebes made illustrious by Bacchus, or Delphi by Apollo, or Thessalian Tempe."(21) And—to leap across the centuries—Villon likewise rings the changes on a series of names:

"Ou est Claquin le bon Breton?
Ou le conte Daulphin d'Auvergne
Et le bon feu duc d'Alençon?
Mais ou est le preux Charlemaigne?
Et Jehanne la bonne Lorraine
Qu'Englois bruleront a Rouan;
Ou sont ilz, ou, Vierge souvraine?
Mais ou sont les neiges d'antan?"

Of our English poets, Milton does it most of all. Some of his most musical verse depends altogether upon the sound of names. Think of lines like:

"Where the great Vision of the guarded mount,
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold",

or:

"Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides,
And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old",

or:

> "Orcus and Ades, and the dreaded name
> Of Demogorgon",

or a passage where half a dozen lines are crowded with resounding names, like this:

> "And all who since baptised or infidel,
> Jousted in Aspramont, or Montalban,
> Damasco, or Marocco, or Trebisond,
> Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore
> When Charlemain with all his peerage fell
> By Fontarabbia."

Now we must all feel that such names as these are stately and sonorous. Some names also seem uncannily apt. But it is difficult to say how much of this is mere sound, and how much is continued and complex association. "Demogorgon" surely *sounds* like a "dreaded name", but we probably import into it the associations of "gorgons and hydras and chimæras dire". It is recorded that one day, when Boiardo was out hunting, *Rodomonte* flashed into his mind as exactly what he wanted for the name of the hero of his epic, and returning home forthwith he had the bells of the village church rung to celebrate the happy invention. But even an invented name like this

does not altogether escape associations of sound and sense. The second syllable must have suggested *mountain*, and we wonder whether the first syllable did not bear with it in the poet's mind some dim association of *rosy*—a memory of Homer's ῥοδοδάκτυλος ἠώς, "rosy-fingered dawn", perhaps. It was the unhappy fate of the name *Rodomonte*, by the way, through the later use of it by Ariosto, to give a word to Italian (*rodomontata*) with the sense of "boasting, bluster", and thence to both French and English as *rodomontade*. One could scarcely find a better example of a beautiful word with an unworthy meaning.

It is almost impossible to invent a word that does not remind you of the sound of other words, and therefore of the significance of other words. Humpty Dumpty explained to Alice that the word *slithy* in his memorable poem meant something like "lithe and slimy", and that *mimsy* was "flimsy and miserable". He did not explain *chortle* (which has almost established itself in the language), but it is equally evident that the word means a mixture of "chuckle" and "snort".

Whatever we may think of Boiardo's inspiration, it is a fact that there are names which suit some characters and words which suit some

things with what seems like a predestined fitness. Some of this, no doubt, is sound, and some of it is the long habit of association in the mind between the word and the meaning. It is said that when a famous cricketer was asked why a "yorker" was called by that name, he said, "Why, what else could you call it?" So in the cartoon in *Punch* the townsman who spent his holiday on a farm, when he was watching the pigs as they rooted in the dirt, said, with disgusted conviction, "Ah, no wonder they're called pigs!" In these examples the one word had been so intimately connected in the cricketer's mind with a particular kind of bowling, and the other word in the citizen's mind with general filthiness, that the association seemed natural and inevitable. Yet one may wonder whether it is all association. Is there not something that suggests a dropping motion in the sound of the one word, and something generally ignoble in the sound of the other? But it is always difficult to assess the effect of mere association as against mere sound. If Shakespeare's name had been Wagstaff we should certainly have spoken to-day of "a poet of almost Wagstaffian genius" without feeling that there was anything quaint in tne sound of the phrase. We know that the name Keats seemed to

some critics in the early nineteenth century an impossibly common name for a poet. Does anyone feel that now? Still, there can be no question that some words are beautiful or ugly in themselves as mere sounds. It is curious that the names of many of the gems are beautiful, and a foreigner who did not know what one of the words meant would recognise the beauty of the sounds if someone read aloud to him the description of the foundations of the New Jerusalem in Rev. xxi. 18, 20. "The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoprasus; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst." It may be noted that all these are the same words in the original Greek, and practically of the same sound, except the fourth, which from the Greek *σμάραγδος* passed into Latin as *smaragdus*, and thence through the Old French *esmeralde* into English as "emerald". This is an extreme example of the indebtedness of our language to Greek, for there are not many English sentences into which one could crowd so many Greek derivatives, apart from scientific technicalities.

Probably the derivation and the history of the

words, as well as their sound and associations, have a good deal to do with the fact that many of the proper names in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* are singularly beautiful—names of persons like Bedivere, Galahad, Guinivere, Merlin, Leodegrance, Pellenore, and names of places, like Arroy, Avilion, Bedigraine, Broceliande, Lyonesse, Tintagel. I fancy that this is partly in the exotic *look* of the words, as well as in the sound. The name *Murlin*, which I have seen over a draper's shop, does not look so delightful as Merlin, and if there were a place in Lancashire called *Broseley End* it would not look nearly so charming as Broceliande. But the very look of the words is a matter of association. Murlin over a draper's store merely recalls shops and streets in a modern town. Broseley End in Lancashire, if there were such a place, would merely recall cotton-mills and smoky chimneys. But the names in Malory recall a world of romance—the one name calls up a vision of the old enchanter, and "a charm, with woven paces and with waving arms", and the other name suggests a dim, romantic forest, "the wild woods of Broceliande". There are two streets in Birmingham, a few miles from where I live, which are called Digbeth and Deritend. Now if these names had occurred in an old Arthurian

legend, I can imagine that it would have both looked and sounded romantic if we had read there, "as Sir Dinadan was at jousts and at tournament nigh the castle of Digbeth it fortuned that he was sore hurt by the thrust of a spear", and "Wit ye well, said he, that you must take your ship again, and that ship must bring you to the isle in the river fast by the place hight Deritend". I can imagine, too, that one of the imitators of William Morris, fifty years ago, might have written a decorative ballad, where these words were a refrain, and we had quaint lines telling how:

> "Gay knights and lovely damsels wend
> To Digbeth and to Deritend",

and how:

> "The lusty squires their lords attend
> To Digbeth and to Deritend",

and so forth. The fact is that the beauty which words have for us is partly in the sounds and partly in the associations, and one element in the associations of a word is what is suggested by the printed look of it, while another is the familiarity of the word, or its strangeness.

But there can be no question that some words

are splendid sounds, apart from everything else. Indeed, sound is never out of the question when either the quality of a single word is being considered, or the quality of several words as associated in a sentence. Nor is it always a matter of the beauty of the sound. Without being a fine sound in itself, a word may possess an appropriate sound for some particular use. Thus Stevenson once pointed out, in a famous essay, how much Milton's greatest prose paragraph owes to the sound of the words with which it closes: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."

In the concluding phrase, Stevenson remarked, "every word ends with a dental, and all but one with a T"; and he adds that "the singular dignity of the first clause, and this hammer-stroke of the last, go far to make the charm of this exquisite sentence". I always want to set beside this passage from Milton one of equal nobility from Landor: "There are no fields of amaranth on this side of the grave: there are no voices, O Rhodope, that are not soon mute, however tuneful: there is no name, with whatever emphasis of

passionate love repeated, of which the echo is not faint at last." Here the same effect is produced by the same means: it is the T which ends the last four words that sounds the note of a mournful finality.

Probably Latin owes more than has been generally thought of its definiteness, both in sound and suggestion, to the fact that so many forms of the verb end in a T, and that the verb so often comes at the end of the sentence. I have tested some pages of Tacitus, and I find that there are twelve sentences and twenty-one clauses that end with the letter, a total of thirty-three, while in the standard English translation of the same passages there are only three such sentences and five such clauses, a total of eight. It is pretty evident that a difference so marked as this must lend to Latin, in contrast with English, something of a harder sound generally, and in particular the suggestion of a more definite and final closure at the end of clauses and sentences.

It is indeed rather startling to find how often the effect of finality is achieved in our own language by this particular method. In the Litany we have phrases like "that those evils, which the craft and subtlety of the devil or man worketh against us be brought to naught", and

"to comfort and help the weak-hearted; and to raise up them that fall; and finally to beat down Satan under our feet". In both cases the rhyme probably helps . . . "brought . . . naught" . . . "beat . . . feet" . . . but the main effect is in the final dentals . . . "brough*t* . . . to nough*t*" . . . "bea*t* down Satan under our fee*t*". I once heard of an eccentric old clergyman who, when he read the last passage, always stamped his foot. Whatever we think of that little ritual, it does convey something of the trampling finish of the words, "and finally to beat down Satan under our feet".

Dr. Johnson's famous letter to Lord Chesterfield is one of the most effective and memorable things he ever wrote, and in it again the same effect is achieved by the same means. "The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it." Observe how much of the decided and final contempt depends upon the dentals which end the last clauses . . . "an*d* canno*t* impar*t* i*t* . . . an*d* do no*t* wan*t* i*t*". If you doubt the reality of the effect, paraphrase the clauses . . . "it is what

I am unable to share . . . it is what I do not desire".

Sir William Watson, who is a considerable critic as well as a poet of genius, once alleged as an example of "a fact in itself impressive stated with unsurpassable simplicity", the words of the prophet, "Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not", and contended that this is "infinitely more impressive than any phrase like 'because they are dead' could have been", since "because they are dead" would convey a latent impression of the children still existing as dead bodies, while "because they are not" suggests sheer annihilation. No doubt that is true and important, but it is not quite the whole truth. There are at least two other details, relating to sound and stress. The consonant that ends the word "no*t*" is a more definite and final sound than the duller dental that ends the word "dea*d*", and there also a change of verbal emphasis. "Are-dead" is an equivalent of "died"—the verb is really a sort of auxiliary here, and does not carry much emphasis. But in "are not" it is a full verb—the equivalent of "exist"—and hence is much more emphatic. The result is that in place of a single stress at the end—"are-déad", there is a double

stress—"áre nót". The double emphasis, and the pause between which it necessitates, accentuates the finality of "noT", and gives a sense of a hopeless end.

In Tennyson's great line: "In seas of death and sunless gulfs of doubT" (though *death* is more final a conception than *doubt*) the effect of finality, as far as the sound is concerned, is conveyed by the last consonant. And though the word *death* also ends with a dental, the TH is so much softer than the T that it does not nearly so well suggest an end. Read the line: "In seas of doubt and sunless gulfs of death", and the sense is really rather improved, but you lose more in sound than you gain in sense. So the greatest lines, perhaps, that Shelley ever wrote achieve a melancholy finale by the T's which end the last three words of the last stanza:

> "The world is weary of the past,
> Oh, might it die or res*t* a*t* las*t*!"

But whether there is anything particularly apt or suggestive or beautiful in the sound of a word or not, the quality of the word largely depends upon the way it has been used in the past and is used to-day. Because language is a living thing, there are processes of change always going on. Words

alter slightly in meaning, and more in usage; some go out of use, and some that have gone out of use come into use once more; some gain and some lose in force and in dignity, and so on. Sometimes in the lapse of the years a word has lost caste through the commonplace usage of it, so that it cannot any longer be employed to express grave and lofty thoughts. Wyclif renders Psalm cxxi, 4: "Lo, He schall not nappe neither slepe that kepeth Israel", but we only use the word now in a trivial and familiar way, as when we refer to "an after-dinner nap". Milton, describing the Temptation, when the Devil set Christ on the pinnacle of the Temple, writes of this as "His aery jaunt", but the word has acquired a slighter meaning since, and we only use it with a note of frivolity, as when we speak of "a little jaunt to the seaside". Dr. Watts wrote, in his greatest hymn:

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!"

Now the word *present* has acquired a trivial character through its use in such phrases as "a birthday present", and in many hymnals the

word has been changed to *offering*. It is a moot point as to how far anyone is justified in altering an author's original text, but there can be no question that *offering* here is a vast improvement on *present*. *Noise* is another word that has degenerated. Milton could write of the songs of the angels:

> "That we on earth with undiscording voice,
> May rightly answer that melodious *noise*",

and the word was used in Elizabeth's time for a company of musicians, as in Shakespeare: "Find out Sneak's *noise*; Mistress Tearsheet would fain hear some music". To-day *noise* means only discordant sounds. *Pomp* is another word that has become rather debased, and in fairly recent times. Young can describe heaven's "sacred pomp", and Charles Wesley can write of the Ascension of our Lord:

> "There the pompous triumph waits;
> Lift your heads, eternal gates!"

Always in Shakespeare, I think, and down to the eighteenth century, the word *pomp* seems to have signified merely splendid state. Now it has a note of insincerity, for it has come to mean very

often a parade of dignity, a stateliness that is pretentious, as when we speak of "a pompous manner", or "a pompous display". It is curious that this sense of the word existed in later Latin, but has only come into English apparently in modern times, long after the advent of the word itself into the language. Still, the modern use of the word is not always in the degenerate sense, for Matthew Arnold could write of "this pomp of worlds, this pain of birth", and Stevenson of "the incomparable pomp of eve". Perhaps the truth is that "pomp" still retains much of its original sense, and that it is rather "pompous" and "pomposity" that have definitely acquired a worse meaning.

Another vital matter in the quality of words is whether they are abstract or concrete, general or particular, vivid or ordinary. Thus Quintilian observes that to tell the whole is not to tell everything—that to say a city was "sacked", although the one word implies all that happened, will make little impression on our feelings. That is, if our feelings are to be deeply stirred the dreadful details must be narrated: we must be told of the actual deeds of the savage soldiery, the slain men, the ravished women, the burning homes, and all the ghastly sights and sounds.

This is undoubtedly both true and important. Motley ends his account of William of Orange with the words, "As long as he lived, he was the guiding-star of a brave nation, and when he died the little children cried in the streets." If Gibbon had written that, it might have ended with: "and even the careless felicity of childhood was not indifferent to the universal lamentation." Macaulay wrote, in a reference to the pulpit oratory of the friars, "The dexterous Capuchins never choose to preach on the life and miracles of a saint, till they have awakened the devotional feelings of their auditors by exhibiting some relic of him—a thread of his garment, a lock of his hair, or a drop of his blood." If Johnson had written that, it might have ended with: "some relic which illustrated the austerity of his vocation, the period of his age, or the agony of his martyrdom." That is to say, each reference would have been generalised into an abstraction. But how much more vivid and pathetic is the direct mention of the simple thing!—"the little children cried in the streets" . . . "a thread of his garment, a lock of his hair, or a drop of his blood." The habit of abstraction and generalisation does not always make even for dignity, and there is a serious loss in directness of appeal, both to the imagination and to the feelings.

Some fine effects result, however, from the contrast between an abstract and a concrete epithet. When Othello says:

> "In Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by the throat the circumcisèd dog,
> And smote him, thus",

the effect of the phrase is due to the contrast between the ethical word *malignant*, that describes the fierce mood of the Turk, and the visual word *turban'd*, that describes his characteristic appearance. The same thing occurs in Ophelia's words:

> "Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,
> Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,
> And recks not his own rede",

where *puff'd* describes the look of the libertine, and *reckless* describes his character. So Romeo speaks of death as "the lean abhorrèd monster", where *lean* suggests the appearance of the skeleton which symbolises mortality, and *abhorrèd* suggests the sentiment which the thought of death arouses in the mind. Many other examples might be alleged.

On the other hand a deliberate vagueness of

language is often effective in suggesting vastness and remoteness. Macaulay has remarked upon the contrast between "the exact details" of Dante and "the dim intimations" of Milton, and has added with real discernment that the former are justified because the work of the Florentine poet is in its very conception a personal narrative, while that of Milton differs from it "as the adventures of Amadis differ from those of Gulliver". Milton is relating for the most part sublime events in a sublime world of the spirit where description can do no more than suggest the vastness of what belongs to a universe of immensities and infinities. There is therefore nothing definite: all is dim, vague, monstrous. Death is "the grisly Terror" and,

> "the other Shape—
> If shape it might be called, that shape had none."

Chaos is:

> "the hoary Deep—a dark
> Illimitable ocean, without bound,
> Without dimension; where length, breadth, and highth,
> And time, and place, are lost."

So Burke has pointed out that in Milton's lines describing the appearance of Satan:

"He, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a tower. His form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appeared
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess
Of glory obscured: as when the sun new-risen
Looks through the horizontal misty air
Shorn of his beams, or, from behind the moon,
In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds
On half the nations, and with fear of change
Perplexes monarchs",

the picture consists of "images of a tower, an archangel, the sun rising through mists, or in an eclipse, the ruin of monarchs, and the revolutions of kingdoms. The mind is hurried out of itself by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect, because they are crowded and confused. For separate them, and you lose much of the greatness; and join them, and you infallibly lose the clearness." In fact any confusion of metaphor (unless the metaphors are so mixed as to produce in the mind a shock of immediate inconsistency) is like a vagueness of language, and *suggests* what cannot be said; it suggests that the reality is too vast to be depicted in any familiar image or in any definite language.

Only by the use of vague language to suggest an unimaginable scale of greatness could such a

scheme as that of *Paradise Lost* have been worthily accomplished, and only a mind capable of vast conceptions could have thought of such a scheme. It has been remarked that Milton's other poems show a fondness for words, like "old", "far", "wide", that suggest immense reaches of space and time.

These last words, it may be noted, are all adjectives, and that may serve to remind us that there is a special importance about the adjective, because it may be said, very roughly, that while the nouns supply the solidity, and the verbs the action, the adjectives are responsible for most of the quality of the description. The element of the sensuous, vivid, and picturesque, whether it is visual or imaginative, is largely supplied by the adjective.

Thus the style of Newman is generally spare and austere; that of Ruskin is generally full and ornate. In a passage of Newman's describing Athens there are 28 adjectives, or 8 per cent. of the words used; in a passage of Ruskin's describing an Alpine village there are 42 adjectives, or 12 per cent. of the words; in a passage of Newman's about conscience there are 24 adjectives, or 7 per cent. of the words; in a passage of Ruskin's on conscience there are 41 adjectives,

or 11 per cent. of the words. This is precisely what one would expect; the adjectives are rather more numerous (in each writer) in a descriptive passage than in one dealing with an ethical issue, and generally speaking the ornate style of Ruskin employs a considerably larger percentage of adjectives than the more restrained style of Newman. It is the adjective, in fact, that supplies the descriptive and decorative matter, for it conveys most of what is told us about size and shape and sound and colour, and all the particular attributes of things. Therefore, it is abundant in the richer styles, but the danger is that it should be too frequent, and then the effect is flamboyant. There lies the wisdom of Pudd'nhead Wilson's advice—"as to the adjective; when in doubt, strike it out".

Take a great passage of Ruskin's, describing an English cathedral, and omit the adjectives, as far as possible: "We will go along the walk to the west front, and there stand for a time, looking up at its . . . porches and the places between their pillars where there were statues once, and where the fragments, here and there, of a . . . figure are still left, which has in it the likeness of a king, perhaps indeed a king on earth, perhaps a . . . king long ago in heaven, and so

. . . up to the . . . . . wall of . . . . . sculpture and . . . arcades, ... with heads of dragons and . . . fiends worn by the rain and . . . winds into their . . . . . shape, and coloured on their . . . scales by the . . . . . lichen . . . . . and so . . . . . up to the . . . towers." Then see what a difference is made when the adjectives are restored: "the *straight* walk . . . its *deep-pointed* porches . . . the *dark* places . . . a *stately* figure . . . a *saintly* king . . . *higher* and *higher* . . . the *great mouldering* wall . . . *rugged* sculpture and *confused* arcades, *shattered* and *grey* and *grisly* . . . *mocking* fiends . . . *swirling* winds . . . *unseemlier* shape . . . *stony* scales . . . the *deep russet-orange* lichen, *melancholy gold* . . . *higher* still . . . the *bleak* towers." . . . It is the adjectives that give the colours and contours, and also the fanciful element in the description, that is to say, both the sensuous and the imaginative quality.

Or, again (with due apology for a literary vandalism), let us insert a few additional adjectives in one of Newman's descriptive passages, until there is as high a proportion of them as in a like passage of Ruskin—Newman is giving an account of the University of Paris: "That famous school engrossed as its (*ample*) territory the whole south bank of the Seine, and occupied one-half, and

that the pleasanter half, of the (*picturesque*) city. King Louis had the island pretty well as his own —it was scarcely more than a (*rude*) fortification; and the north of the river was given over to the (*wealthy*) nobles and the (*humble*) citizens to do what they could with its (*unattractive*) marshes; but the eligible south, rising from the (*pellucid*) stream, which swept around its base, to the fair summit of St. Genevieve, with its broad meadows, its (*leafy*) vineyards and (*flowery*) gardens, and with the sacred elevation of Montmartre confronting it—all this was the (*rich*) inheritance of the University."

Now I do not defend any of these unauthorised adjectives for a moment. But I would point out that the effect of the intrusion of these extra words is to make the style look more ample and more genial, as it were, and, on the other hand, less tense and less disciplined. The impression of a lean strength is lessened, and the sentences assume a more leisurely and florid character.

A good many of Shakespeare's most memorable lines depend largely upon the adjective for their effect, and nothing could better illustrate the striking and suggestive quality of his epithets than the way that they have haunted the minds of other poets, and have been unconsciously

reproduced. Thus everyone must feel that the only really striking use of a word in Longfellow's *The Beleaguered City* is in the lines:

"But, when the old cathedral bell
Proclaimed the morning prayer,
The white pavilions rose and fell
On the *alarmèd* air."

The phrase, however, is only a variation of one of Shakespeare's, where Agamemnon says, in *Troilus and Cressida*:

"Give with thy trumpet a loud note to Troy,
Thou dreadful Ajax, that the *appallèd* air
May pierce the head of the great combatant
And hale him hither."

The most striking use of a single word, perhaps, in Lovelace's *To Althea from Prison* is in the lines:

"When flowing cups run swiftly round
With no *allaying* Thames,
Our careless heads with roses bound,
Our hearts with loyal flames."

But once more the phrase is only a variant from Shakespeare, in the passage where Menenius says, in *Coriolanus*, "I am known to be a humorous patrician, and one that loves a cup of hot wine with not a drop of *allaying* Tiber in't."

So I have always felt sure that it was the fine epithet in Viola's speech:

> "Keep as true in soul
> As doth that *orbèd* continent the fire
> That severs day from night,"

which suggested Shelley's lines:

> "That *orbèd* maiden with white fire laden
> Whom mortals call the moon."

One may add at least a couple of instances where a haunting sentence of Shakespeare's has begotten a whole poem in another poet's mind. Tennyson's *Mariana* grew out of that casual reference in *Measure for Measure*, where the Duke says, "I will presently to Saint Luke's: there, at the moated grange, resides this dejected Mariana." And similarly Browning's *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* was developed from the words of Edgar's song in *King Lear*:

> "Child Rowland to the dark tower came;
> His word was still, Fie, foh, and fum,
> I smell the blood of a British man."

Here, however, the line may not actually be Shakespeare's; the other lines certainly belong to a traditional rhyme.

Sometimes a fine effect is not due merely to a vivid word, or the vivid use of a word, but to a contrast between the familiar and the unfamiliar, both in thought and in word, as, for example, in Matthew Arnold's lines:

> "A God, a God their severance ruled!
> And bade betwixt their shores to be
> The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea."

"The *salt* sea" is a familiar phrase for an ordinary thought. "The *unplumbed* sea" is a less familiar phrase for an ordinary thought. "The *estranging* sea" is a less familiar phrase for a less ordinary thought. The description of the sea as *deep* and *salt* is concrete, and brings to mind those quite obvious attributes that are associated with the sea in every human mind, but for the first thought the obvious word, "deep", is avoided, and a less ordinary word is used. But the description of the sea as "estranging" has an imaginative quality; it makes us think of the sea as sundering the different countries, and making men strangers to those who dwell in other lands. It is undoubtedly the contrast between the plain word and the plain fact "the *salt* sea", placed between a more imaginative word for another plain fact, "the *unplumbed* sea", and the still more imaginative

word for a more poetic conception, "the *estranging* sea" that creates the effect. "The deep, briny, unfriendly sea" would give the general sense of the line, but you would have three ordinary words, instead of two less usual and more imaginative words, with an ordinary word between.

There are many great passages of poetry where a single word seems to concentrate the whole effect of a line or a stanza—"all the charm of all the muses flowering in a lonely word". A word never does really stand alone, and as we have seen much depends on the way that a pair of words, or a group of words, qualify one another because they are a happy combination or a drastic contrast, in sound and significance and derivation. Nevertheless it is often one word that seems to carry all the melody and all the suggestiveness of a line. Think of passages like the following from Shakespeare, and consider what other word could possibly supply the place of the one in italics.

"From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of *star-cross'd* lovers take their life",

and:

"That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the *garish* sun",

and:

"O how this spring of love resembleth
The *uncertain* glory of an April day",

and:

"To be imprison'd in the *viewless* winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world",

and:

"Like to a *lonely* dragon, that his fen
Makes fear'd and talk'd of more than seen",

and:

"The graves stood tenantless, and the *sheeted* dead
Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets."

The same point might be illustrated from every great poet. The following lines from Wordsworth may serve as further examples:

"Once did She hold the *gorgeous* East in fee
And was the safeguard of the West",

and:

"Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the *farthest* Hebrides",

and:

> "Thou, thou and all thy mates, to keep
> An *incommunicable* sleep",

and:

> "Some casual shout that broke the silent air
> Or the *unimaginable* touch of Time."

Doubtless almost every part of speech may be on occasion *the* word of a clause or a sentence, but it is noticeable that all the examples given above are adjectives. I suggest that the reason is that the adjective in its very nature specially indicates the quality of the thing. The noun is merely the name, "the East", "the Hebrides", "a sleep", "a touch", but nearly all that makes these imaginatively picturesque, appealing, memorable, or unique, is conveyed in the adjectives, "the gorgeous East", "the farthest Hebrides", "an incommunicable sleep", "the unimaginable touch". Moreover, the thing is one, but the qualities of it are many, and there is a larger choice as to what may be said, and therefore as to the words in which it may be said, when you name the attributes of the thing than when you name the thing itself. To take the substantive in the last quotation as an example, even Shakespeare

could hardly find another word for it if he wanted to say *a touch*, but he could describe *a touch* as *coy*, *dreadful*, *golden*, *greedy*, *heavenly*, *mortal*, *rude*, *simple*, *soft*, *strained*, *sweet*, *uncivil*, and *welcome*—these are all adjectives that he actually used. The adjective has a greater chance, I think, of being the one suggestive word than any other part of speech.

Walter Bagehot has remarked on "the imaginative bareness" of much of the poetical art of Greece, which reached its height in Sophocles, where, in his greater passages, "a principal beauty is their reserved simplicity". There can be no doubt that one very important factor in style is restraint. I think we ought to be catholic enough in our taste to admire both Ruskin and Newman, both the ornate style and the severe style, since beauty is achieved in both. It is beyond debate that there is a noble style, both in prose and in poetry, that is marked by frugality —a lean austerity, stripped of all that is redundant. Naturally it is, as a rule, the characteristic expression of the highly disciplined mind, rather than of the opulent and imaginative mind. The real strength of a style often lies in this economy of words, and this deliberate omission of all that is ample and ornate. Indeed, Schiller has declared

that a masterly style is marked by what it leaves out—*was er weise verschweigt, zeigt nur den Meister des Stils.* And when it comes to excising words it is most often the adjective that can be spared.

It may be noted that the poets sometimes make an adjective serve as a noun by using some epithet for the thing to which it eminently belongs, as when Tennyson calls the sky "the blue":

> "and there rain'd a ghastly dew
> From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue."

This is a use that has largely decreased. Milton could write of "the dry" and "the dank" for land and water. He could use "the stony" for "hardness" in a passage like:

> "For from the mercy-seat above
> Prevenient grace descending had removed
> The stony from their hearts",

and "the sensible" for "the feeling" in:

> "our temper changed
> Into their temper, which must needs remove
> The sensible of pain."

But such a use to-day would seem affected and,

indeed, comic, as it does in Dick Swiveller's references to "the rosy", "the briny", and "the mazy". Yet there are examples which have become quite established, like "the past" for "the past (days)", and "the right" for "the right (cause)", and "the dead" for "the dead (folk)". Here the use is so familiar that we practically take the adjective as a general noun.

The use of the adjective connects naturally with the use of metaphor, because the adjective expresses the quality of a thing, and metaphor is largely a more pictorial suggestion of quality. In fact most metaphors are a pictorial extension of an adjective. "Fierce" and "terrible" express the quality, but "fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell" extends the description in a vivid and imaginative way.

While metaphor is naturally treated by writers on rhetoric as a figure of speech, it is not quite on the same plane as the rest of these, because it is involved in the very nature of language. "What is it all", asks Teufelsdröckh, "but metaphors, recognised as such, or no longer recognised? An unmetaphorical style you shall in vain seek for: is not your very *Attention* a *Stretching-to*?" The word attention, that is to say, is a metaphor, suggesting that the mind is stretched to grasp the

subject, as the hand is stretched out to seize anything. Now a great many of the metaphors which are implicit in words (like this one) escape our attention altogether, unless we are specially interested in words and their origins. We may deliberately employ a metaphorical phrase, but we often use a word without realising that it really contains a metaphor. Some of these latter instances are interesting, for many words embody faded metaphors and forgotten references. No one would condemn a reporter who, in describing a parliamentary debate, said that one speaker "employed some *dexterous* arguments", and another "indulged in some *sinister* prophecies", though these phrases really mean "right-handed arguments" and "left-handed prophecies", for the etymologies are not actually present in the mind of the reader, unless he is specially interested in the history of words. And so generally of the derivation of words, and all that they originally meant. We can speak of "a womanly virtue", though *virtue* is what becomes a *man* (*vir*, *virtus*); of "a *disgusting* sight", though disgust originally meant an unpleasant *taste* (*dis*, *gustus*), and of "a miserable *company* of men who lack bread", though *companion* meant first of all one who shares *bread* with another (*com*, *panis*). So we can refer to "a

tawdry dress" and to "a noisy bedlam" without realising that there is any allusion to two mediæval saints, but *tawdry* comes from St. Audrey—the old English form of St. Ethelreda—because finery was sold at St. Audrey's fair, and *bedlam* derives from St. Mary of Bethlehem, whose convent in London was converted into a madhouse. So no one dreams of objecting to a phrase like "a dismal day", because, though it really means "a day-of-evil day", the derivation of *dismal* from *dies mali* is not usually in the remembrance of those who utter it, or those who hear it, unless they belong to the number of those whom Cowper calls:

> "learned philologists, who chase
> A panting syllable through time and space."

Similarly no one usually thinks of astrology, or of the old doctrine of temperaments, when speaking of a person as "jovial", or "saturnine", or as "sanguine", or "melancholy"—the reference to the planets *Jupiter* and *Saturn*, and the allusion to the *blood* and *black bile* of the human body are not actively present in the mind when the words are used, even though they may be known, unless there is some special interest in etymology at the moment. Again, it would be idiotic to raise any

objection to the phrase "a weekly journal", for *journal* has come to signify merely "newspaper", but the phrase literally means "a weekly daily", for *journal* is from *jour*, and *jour* is from *dies*, though, as a Frenchman not unnaturally remarked when he was told so, it has got *diablement changé en route*! It has, and the transition is *dies*, *diurnus*, *journus*, *jour*.

But it is quite another thing where the references or the metaphors are obvious, and obviously inconsistent with each other, as when Mrs. Nickleby remarked, "It came upon me like a flash of fire, and almost froze my blood!" There are some interesting issues with regard to mixed metaphors, however, for what appears to be such at first sight exist in some great passages of our literature. There are some examples in Milton. He wrote in *Lycidas*:

> "*Blind mouths!* that scarce themselves know how to *hold A sheep-hook.*"

Ruskin has pointed out, in a famous passage, that this is not "a broken metaphor, as one might think, careless and unscholarly", but that there is a compressed significance in it, since Milton was thinking of men whose duty it was to *watch* and to *feed* the flock of Christ, and "blind" suggests

that those who ought to see cannot see, and "mouths" suggests that those who ought to feed others think of nothing but feeding themselves. No doubt this is true; we say we are "all ear", meaning that everything is concentrated for the moment in listening, and the elliptical sense of the passage in Milton is, when expanded, that:

> "Such as, for their bellies' sake
> Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold",

are "all mouth"—neither able to see the flock, nor "hold a sheep-hook", nor do anything "else that to the faithful herdman's art belongs", but only to gorge themselves.

In *Paradise Lost*, again, Milton wrote in the description of the lazar-house:

> "Sight so deform what *heart of rock* could long
> *Dry-ey'd behold?*"

Samuel Rogers said that he once pointed this out to Coleridge, who told Wordsworth that he could not sleep all the next night for thinking of it. This particular example does lie on the perilous verge, but it may be defended as an ellipsis—"what man, though he had a heart of rock, could long dry-ey'd behold sight so deform?" There is a real difference, I think, between an elliptical

use of metaphor and a contradictory use of it. It is one thing to employ a compressed phrase like "heart of rock" when it is plain that you mean "a man with a heart of rock", and then to speak of the man weeping; it would be another thing altogether to write of "a heart of rock" doing what neither a heart nor a man can do. That is what is wrong with mixed metaphors properly so called. There is a fundamental inconsistency in the images which no words supplied by the mind of the reader can make coherent. Thus Dr. Johnson was justified in his criticism of Addison's lines:

> "I bridle in my struggling Muse with pain,
> That longs to launch into a bolder strain",

for there is an obvious incompatibility between the different actions of bridling a horse, launching a ship, and beginning a song. It is a wonder, by the way, that Johnson, with his slavish classicism, ever ventured on a censure like this in view of Virgil's *classique inmittit habenas*, but his criticism is well warranted. "To *bridle a goddess* is no very delicate idea; but why must she be *bridled*?—because she *longs to launch*, an act which was never hindered by a *bridle*: and whither will she *launch*?—into a *nobler strain*. She is in the first line

a *horse*, in the second a *boat*; and the care of the poet is to keep his *horse* or his *boat* from *singing*."

Sometimes a bad metaphor is warranted merely because it is in character with the mood of the utterance. When Macbeth says:

> "Here lay Duncan,
> His silver skin laced with his golden blood,
> And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature
> For ruin's wasteful entrance; there the murderers,
> Steeped in the colours of their trade, their daggers
> Unmannerly breech'd with gore",

—the metaphors are outrageous. To compare the blood on the murdered man's body with gold lace on a silver ground, and the daggers covered with blood to a man's legs encased in breeches, is merely extravagant and ridiculous. But despite this there is here a real justification of a psychological kind. The actual murderer is pretending a horror of the deed in order to conceal his own guilt, and we feel that his insincerity is reflected in these strained and artificial metaphors. An innocent man, who felt a real detestation of the murder, would have expressed himself more naturally. The extravagance of the phrases is appropriate in the mouth of a man who protests too much, and affects what he does not really feel.

So the adjective is as unfitting as it possibly could be, considered in itself, when Othello swears:

> "Now, by yond *marble* heaven,
> In the due reverence of a sacred vow,
> I here engage my words",

but it is nobly justified by the speaker's mood, for, as Hazlitt says, "the epithet is suggested by the hardness of his heart from the sense of injury: the texture of the outward object is borrowed from that of the thoughts."

Some metaphors are far-fetched, and are only to be justified by successful use. Tennyson writes of the man of lowly origin:

> "Who breaks his birth's invidious bar
> And grasps the skirts of happy chance,
> And breasts the blows of circumstance,
> And grapples with his evil star."

Now the metaphors of breaking the bar that imprisons you, and seizing the garment of chance, personified as one who is passing by, and facing with a dauntless breast the blows of fate, are all straightforward enough, but that of grappling with a star is on the verge of the ridiculous. It might justify itself in an utterance of extreme passion, where depth of feeling speaks wildly, but

it is scarcely defensible in calm and meditative verse.

The main difference between metaphor and simile is that the metaphor implies a resemblance and that the simile states it. But a simile, like a metaphor, naturally depends for its effectiveness upon some real resemblance between the things compared, as in Dryden's happy translation of Persius:

> "Who, like the hindmost chariot-wheels, art curst,
> Still to be near, but ne'er to reach the first",

where there is a real parallel between the hind wheels which are near the front of the chariot, but never at the front, and a man who never overtakes his task, but is always a little behind-hand with it. But here it is rather a matter of imagination than of style—a question of noting an effective illustration rather than of any particular manipulation of language.

Many of the other figures of speech also seem to me to have no vital relation with the problem of style, though some of them have a very real and important connection with the imaginative power of the writer by whom they are employed. Thus when Shakespeare makes Isabella exclaim, in *Measure for Measure*: "O just but severe law!

I *had* a brother, then—Heaven keep your honour!" it is an example of one of the figures of speech tabulated by writers on rhetoric—the figure known as prolepsis, or anticipation. Isabella anticipates her brother's death, and speaks of it as if it had already happened. So Keats writes—it is probably the finest example of this kind in our literature—in *The Pot of Basil*:

> "So the two brothers and their *murdered man*
> Rode past fair Florence, to where Arno's stream
> Gurgles through straitened banks."

Though Lorenzo is alive and with them, he is already a murdered man in the intention of Isabel's brothers. Now these are fine touches of dramatic imagination on the part of Shakespeare and of Keats, but they have little to do with style. They have to do with the imaginative genius that makes great literature, undoubtedly, but they do not result from any particular choice or management of words, which is the real preoccupation of style. "He *was* my brother then", and "So the two brothers and their *slain companion*", would equally represent the imaginative factor, and it is that which makes the greatness of the passages.

VIII

EPILOGUE

It must be said emphatically at the end of this study, as it was said at the beginning of it, that the whole philosophy of style depends upon the relation between substance and form, and that it is only form with which we have been attempting to deal. In all really great literature there must be the substance of distinguished thought, and the form of distinguished language. It is true enough that there is no universal parity in this. Some writers can express their thoughts well, but their thoughts may not be of any very great value. Some writers cannot express their thoughts at all well, though their thoughts may be of the greatest possible value. But anything that deserves to be called great literature must be the fine expression of fine thought. And the form must be the last word, after all, because every single thought that can be expressed in words is classically and finally expressed, sooner or later, by the writer who embalms it in the perfect and predestinate phrase.

The reverse proof of this is that the finest

conception may be completely ruined by a crude expression of it. The substance of the most splendid poetry may be reduced to the commonplace by being rendered into commonplace language. Translate Shakespeare's wonderful lines:

> "Daffodils
> That come before the swallow dares and take
> The winds of March with beauty",

into "The daffodils which arrive before the swallow risks an appearance, and which are so beautiful that they fascinate the winds which blow in the month of March." There is nothing positively ugly in any of these words, and there is nothing really wrong with the construction, but the result is banal. The metrical effect is lost, of course, but what is much more vital is that the subtle poise and the delicate sound of Shakespeare's words are also gone. And on the other hand the most absurd doggerel may often be redeemed by translation into better language if to begin with there is any basis of thought in the doggerel. Thus there was nothing really absurd in the conception when Sir Edmund Gosse's housemaid wrote the remarkable lines;

"O moon, lovely moon, with thy beautiful face
Careering through the boundaries of space,
Whenever I see thee, I think in my mind,
Shall I ever, O ever, behold thy behind?"

The absurdity was only in the expression. It would be quite possible to convey the thought of the lines in respectable verse. For example:

"O lovely moon, high in the midnight skies,
Wandering through space the watchful stars amid!
I ask myself, Shall mortal sight surprise
The rearward secret by thy splendour hid?"

I do not allege that this is good verse, but I do say that the merely ridiculous element has gone, because that was not in the essential thought, but merely in a clumsiness (and an ambiguity!) of the language employed in the expression of it.

It seems to me that the whole history of our literature illustrates this thesis of the finality of style. Why is the eighteenth century, for example, the dreariest period in English literature? There is probably as much mere thought and naked truth in the verse and prose of that century as in those of any other. It was the vicious style of the period that has doomed it. It was because both the typical poetry and the typical prose of the age had ceased to be simple, natural, direct,

imaginative, and passionate, first, in its thought and feeling, and, last, in its use of language, that it is so commonplace.

Suppose that the course of English literature were represented in a graph. I do not think that anyone whose critical judgment is worth anything would dispute that the highest points of the line would be in the Elizabethan and in the Victorian periods. That is to say, the creative impulse which appears in our literature with Chaucer—to speak only of the poets for the moment—attains a great height in the age that reaches from Shakespeare to Milton, begins to decline in the late seventeenth century, and is at its lowest point by the middle of the eighteenth. After some fifty years it reappears with Coleridge and Wordsworth, and expends itself again in the great Victorian writers. The presence of imagination and inspiration shows itself in the nobility of language which characterises Shakespeare, Milton, the seventeenth-century lyrists, and, in the later age, the great line of poets from Coleridge and Wordsworth to Tennyson and Browning. The absence of these great qualities reveals itself in the dull language of the poets of the eighteenth century. Almost as if they were aware of their lack of skyey influences the poets of the eighteenth

century enslave themselves to a false classicism, and are more concerned about what they regard as correctness and dignity of expression than about anything else. This intellectual conventionality reveals itself in a conventional diction—a stock of supposedly poetical phrases that might almost have been kept in type for the use of those who wrote verse. "During the eighty years between 1660 and 1740," as De Quincey said, "there grew up that scrofulous taint in our diction which was denounced by Wordsworth, as technically received for 'poetic language.'" It was the period when, as Wordsworth wrote, our poets gave themselves to:

> "The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
> From languages that want the living voice
> To carry meaning to the natural heart."

Now apart from the abuse of it, which is always absurd, there really is a defence for poetic diction. It exists in all poetry, as a matter of fact, and there is a justification for its existence. To begin with it is always possible to describe anything either in a commonplace way or in a striking way. It is said that Simonides, when offered a small price for an ode celebrating a victory in a mule-race, expressed his contempt for the animals,

the ἡμίονι, "half-asses", as they were commonly called. But being given a larger fee he wrote the ode, and in it described the mules as αἐλλοπόδων θύγατρες ἵππων, "daughters of storm-footed horses". That is merely a comic example of what does continually happen in poetry, in the choice between an ordinary word and a word that has some special note of dignity or rarity or suggestiveness. When Walter de la Mare writes:

> "His hound is mute; his steed at will
> Roams pastures deep with asphodel",

we have an example of it. "Dog" and "horse" would be the usual nouns in prose, "wanders" would be the usual verb, and "silent" would be the usual adjective. The justification here is, first of all, precisely that the words are not the ordinary words, and second, that two of the words at least have a faint flavour of the distant past. A *dog* and a *horse* suggest a farmer or a sportsman to-day. A *hound* and a *steed* suggest a king, a paladin, a knight-errant of the past. The choice of words therefore hints a remoteness in the scene. The language is not meant to sound like the description of an actual scene in the present day, but like that of a scene in a remote world of fantasy. The figures are not intended to be seen

as in a modern photograph, but as in the waving folds of a faded tapestry.

It is such considerations as these which are the real warrant for poetic diction. Gray said that "our poetry has a language to itself", and within limits that is true. Words like *beauteous*, *blissful*, *demesne*, *dire*, *espouse*, *grisly*, *ire*, *jocund*, *joyous*, *list*, *lay*, *murmurous*, *poesy*, *thrall*, *verdurous*, *wist*, *woe* (to mention some almost at random) would generally seem affected in prose: no one would feel that they are out of place in verse. The rarer word, the more elevated and the more impassioned word, has a natural right to be used in the expression of the rarer moods, the more elevated thoughts and the more impassioned feelings. So when Hamlet says:

> "The fair Ophelia! Nymph, in thy orisons
> Be all my sins remembered!"

most of the quality of the phrase depends on the word "orisons", with some addition from the word "nymph". If it had been "Girl, in all thy prayers be all my sins remembered!" there would have been nothing arresting and memorable in it. The dignity of those two words makes all the dignity of the utterance.

Thus there will always be some parity between

a poet's inspiration and his language. One odd little piece of evidence which connects with the flatness of our eighteenth-century verse is the fact that many words familiar in our older poetry went right out of use in that age, and came into currency again with the Lyrical Revival at the end of the century. An edition of Spenser was published in 1715 in which the meaning of the following words was explained, as they were obsolete: *aghast*, *baleful*, *behest*, *bootless*, *carol*, *craven*, *dreary*, *forlorn*, *plight*, *yore*. And Prior, writing an imitation of Spenser in 1706, tells us that he retained a few obsolete words in order "to make the colouring look more like Spenser's"; among these were: *behest*, *prowess*, *whilom*, *ween*. All these old words, the meaning of which it was necessary to explain in the early years of the eighteenth century, are perfectly familiar to every reader of nineteenth-century poetry. The return of inspiration brought back into use the more romantic and impassioned words both in poetry and in prose, but most of all in poetry, as was natural.

The whole issue is resolved by a consideration of what poetry really is. It is the function of poetry (in De Quincey's words) to make us "feel vividly, and with a vital consciousness, emotions,

which ordinary life rarely or never supplies occasions for exciting, and which had previously lain unawakened". Now this is enough to give us a clue to the truth about poetic diction, which is merely this—poetry is in its very nature a more imaginative utterance than prose, and therefore the use of rarer and bolder words is natural to it. Words that would sound affected in prose sound natural in poetry, as words that would be pretentious in ordinary conversation are proper in oratory, because that is a more elaborate and a more exalted kind of speech. But the mere affectation of a poetic dialect is always wrong, and there is no excuse for a versifier who uses a set of stock phrases which constitute, as he thinks, the only proper language of poetry.

The great modern revival in English literature is properly dated from the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, but it had many precursors. A new simplicity, a sense of wonder, an awakening to nature and romance, a lyrical note which had been absent for a century, are found again faintly, here and there, in poets like Gray, Thomson, and Cowper. (All this is more distinctly present in Blake and Burns, but they stand apart, for they are not in the literary tradition in the same way as the other poets who have

been named.) But it has never been sufficiently recognised, in my judgment, that the new note of lyrical passion is heard distinctly, first of all, in Charles Wesley. The reason is plain. The religious spirit of the early Methodists made distinctly for reality, passion, and simplicity. The following lines date from 1749:

"I cannot see Thy face, and live,
Then let me see Thy face, and die!
Now, Lord, my gasping spirit receive;
Give me on eagle's wings to fly,
With eagle's eyes on Thee to gaze,
And plunge into the glorious blaze!"

There is nothing in our literature with that accent between Crashaw and Coleridge. Pope ruled English poetry in 1749 and for nearly fifty years after. Imagine those lines as Pope or one of his imitators would have written them, if they could ever have conceived the thought that the stanza expresses. They would probably have written something like this:

"Th' Eternal none can see and still survive,
Howe'er devotion search and wisdom strive;
Then let the vision blest my spirit slay,
And bear to brighter, better worlds away!

Thus, borne on mighty pinions through the skies,
Th' Elysian fields to see with daring eyes,
The soul, once past the realms of upper air,
Immerse within the bright effulgence there."

Now the point of this is that the spirit of the poet is reflected in his diction. No doubt it is true that the real explanation of the Lyrical Revival is a rebirth of the human spirit, which manifested itself religiously in Methodism, and politically in the French Revolution, in the same century. No doubt it is true that the literary revival was in essence a return to nature, a revival of wonder, a new spirit of passion and simplicity. But all this is immediately reflected in the choice of words and in the use of words.

It is a curious confirmation of what has been said about the artificiality of eighteenth-century poetry, that the most effective and memorable verse of the period is satire. Everyone remembers satirical verse like that of Pope on Addison. The reason is plain. When you hate there is at any rate reality in your feeling, and you do not attack the man or the abuse with muffled phrases that belong to a conventional diction. There is force, and directness, and pungency in the words because there is real feeling beneath the words. Nobody abuses his enemy in a roundabout way; he speaks

his mind plainly and bitingly because he feels what he is saying. The fundamental defect of the conventional poetry of the eighteenth century was that the sentiments which it expressed were not deeply felt, and the artificiality of the sentiment was reflected in an artificiality of language.

What is true of the poetry is equally true of the prose. Addison was supposed to represent the perfection of English prose in the eighteenth century; and Dr. Johnson said, "Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison." Now, as De Quincey once remarked with genuine discernment: "Addison shrank from every bold and every profound expression as from an offence against good taste. He dared not for his life have used the word 'passion' except in the vulgar sense of an angry paroxysm. He durst as soon have danced a hornpipe on the top of the Monument as have talked of 'rapturous emotion'. What *would* he have said? Why, 'sentiments that were of a nature to prove agreeable after an unusual rate!'" (It would be difficult, by the way, to find the word "rapture" in our poetry between Milton and Thomson—it does occur in *The Seasons*.) The point here is, again, that the absence of real

feeling is reflected in the flatness of the language that is used. That is what is wrong with most of our eighteenth-century literature.

Johnson represents all the vices of eighteenth-century prose, as Pope represents all the vices of eighteenth-century verse. Each ruled undisputed in his respective domain, and each had a crowd of imitators who were (like the seven demons in the parable) worse than their leader. Hazlitt once remarked that Johnson was "always upon stilts". That is the cardinal sin of his style. He always reminds me of Touchstone's remark, "Therefore, you clown, abandon—which is in the vulgar leave—the society—which in the boorish is company—of this female—which in the common is woman." What is wrong with Johnson's writing is that it is artificial and pompous. It is far removed from the natural speech of men. One of the oddities of our literary history is that Johnson, who bestrode the world of English letters like a Colossus in his day, is now almost forgotten as a writer, but still lives, and will always live, by virtue of his conversation. He talked good, racy, idiomatic English, as when he said that Lord Chesterfield's *Letters* "teach the morals of a whore, and the manners of a dancing-master"; when he boasted of the poets

produced by Pembroke College, "Sir, we are a nest of singing birds"; when he remarked that "the worst of Warburton is that he has a rage for saying something when there's nothing to be said"; when he told Boswell, in talking of Dr. Adam Smith, "Had I known that he loved rhyme as much as you tell me he does, I should have hugged him"; and many other examples.

Dr. Johnson once said of Dr. Birch that he was "as brisk as a bee in conversation", but that "when he took a pen in hand it benumbed all his faculties". Very much the same thing was true of himself. His pedantry and pomposity ruined him as a writer, and he is unread and unreadable to-day, but he lives in Boswell's unique biography, and lives largely by his talk. Generally, as I have said, that was lively and unaffected enough, but it would all have been spoiled if he had reduced it to writing himself, for he would have translated his sayings into the heavy medium of his own literary style. It might be worth while to try the experiment. Speaking of Churchill's large output of poor verse, he said, "He only bears crabs. But, sir, a tree that produces a great many crabs is better than a tree which produces only a few." ("In the vegetable domain of the natural world,

though no question as to excellence of quality may arise in a particular instance, yet fecundity is to be accounted an advantage and sterility a defect.") When Donaldson, a piratical Scottish publisher, was under discussion, and it was urged in his defence that he published books at a cheap rate, and that poor students were therefore able to buy them, he said, "Well, sir, he is no better than Robin Hood, who robbed the rich in order to give to the poor." ("Were that admitted as his solitary vindication, he would but resemble the hero of our legendary history, who plundered excessive wealth, that he might relieve extreme indigence.") Returning from a plain dinner, he said, "That was a good dinner enough, to be sure; but it was not a dinner to *ask* a man to." ("The repast was indeed of sufficient excellence, but it was not of the uncommon excellence that would establish it as a proper occasion on which a host should proffer to his guest, or a guest should receive from his host, an express invitation.")

This is taking no unwarrantable liberty with Johnson, for as Macaulay once observed, he sometimes did the thing himself, as when he said of *The Rehearsal*, "It has not wit enough to keep it sweet", and then, after a pause, translated the

remark into literary Johnsonese, "It has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction." The plain fact is, as Macaulay says, that Johnson wrote "in a learned language, in a language which nobody hears from his mother or his nurse, in a language in which nobody ever quarrels, or drives bargains, or makes love, in a language in which nobody ever thinks. It is clear that Johnson himself did not think in the dialect in which he wrote." It may be remarked that the Johnsonian tradition was worthily maintained (and exaggerated) for long years after Johnson's death. The elder Dickens, who was the prototype of Mr. Micawber, once wrote in a letter, "And I must express my tendency to believe that his longevity is (to say the least of it) extremely problematical", i.e. "I rather think that he will not live long." Mr. Micawber himself abounds with delicious examples. "I am at present, my dear Copperfield," remarked Mr. Micawber on one occasion, "engaged in the sale of corn upon commission. It is not an avocation of a remunerative description—in other words, it does *not* pay." "It was at Canterbury we last met," he said again, "within the shadow, I may figuratively say, of that religious edifice, immortalised by Chaucer, which was anciently the resort of

pilgrims from the remotest corners of—in short," said Mr. Micawber, "in the immediate neighbourhood of the cathedral." "This was bad enough," said Mr. Micawber once more, when he was denouncing Uriah Heep, "but as the philosophic Dane observes, with that universal applicability which distinguishes the illustrious ornament of the Elizabethan Era, worse remains behind!" The vice of this kind of speech and writing is not merely that the English is so heavily latinised that it almost loses its native character. It is also that in an effort after dignity it loses directness; instead of the plain mention of anything by its proper name, it is referred to by some general term, and often by way of some roundabout allusion.

As far as this last detail of indirect allusion is concerned, it is quite plain that all depends on the way it is done—on the imaginative quality of the reference, and on the language in which it is expressed. There is nothing but commonplace in Mr. Micawber's description of Canterbury Cathedral as "a religious edifice", and as "immortalised by Chaucer". But there is real distinction in the imaginative range and the noble language of Sir William Watson's allusion to the Cathedral:

"Roofed by the mother minster vast
That guards Augustine's rugged throne,
The darling of a knightly Past
Sleeps in his bed of sculptured stone,
And flings, o'er many a warlike tale,
The shadow of his dusky mail."

So when Mr. Micawber speaks of "that universal applicability which distinguishes the illustrious ornament of the Elizabethan Era", he is only naming Shakespeare in a roundabout way, by a clumsy attempt to say what Coleridge said finely and imaginatively when he called Shakespeare "myriad-minded".

I said that Pope represented all the vices of eighteenth-century verse. Doubtless he will always be read for his qualities of wit and wisdom, and because he had a real genius for putting these into epigrammatic verse. But it is blasphemy to call him a poet. The utter absence of those high qualities of imagination and inspiration that alone can confer the sacred name of poet must be evident to everyone who is familiar with Pope's verse. But, again, the absence of these spiritual attributes is immediately shown in Pope's diction. There is nothing direct, vivid, and passionate in his use of words, because he had no imaginative vision, and no depth of feeling. When a thing is

seen and *felt* with a poet's imagination it is described simply and vividly. The writer of the old ballad says:

"Mery it was in the grene forest
Among the levès grene,
Whereas men hunt east and west
Wyth bowes and arrowes kene."

Here you see the green leaves in the green forest, and feel the beauty of the spring, because the poet has seen and felt it all in his mind as he wrote, and therefore he used the simple, direct, vivid words. But when Pope describes a forest he only sees it as if it were a painted scene in a theatre, and all his descriptions are in generalised phrases that have become mere literary conventions. A forest is always "a grove" or "a shade". The grove is usually "forsaken" or "shady", or "sylvan". The shade is usually "glimmering", or "pathless" or "pompous". There are two things that are wrong with phrases like these—they are conventional, for they are taken from a stock of supposedly poetical phrases which every poet used; and they are indistinct, because the poet has not seen and felt the thing vividly himself, and then put what he saw and felt into his own words; instead, he has borrowed a ready-made piece of poetic diction.

This is true of nearly all the poetry of the mid-eighteenth century. With Pope the sky is "the aerial vault", or "th' etherial height"; the sunlight is "the genial beams", or "the genial ray"; the stars are "the rolling orbs"; the winds are "the auspicious gales", or "the cool gales", or "the spicy gales"; a river is "a crystal stream", or "a silver flood", or "a swelling tide"; the grass is "the verdant mead"; the birds are "the feathered choirs"; fish are "the scaly breed"; sheep are "the shepherd's fleecy care"; and a countryman is "a conscious swain". Contrast Pope's lines about winter:

> "Behold the groves that shine with silver frost,
> Their beauty withered, and their verdure lost!"

and about the stars:

> "Nor all his stars above a lustre show,
> Like the bright beauties on thy banks below,"

with passages like Sackville's:

> "Hawthorne had lost his motley lyverye
> *The naked twigges were shivering all for colde*",

and Lydgate's:

> "Whose brenning eyen *spercle of their lyght*
> *As do the sterres the frosty wynter night.*"

Surely everyone must feel the difference between the muffled conventionality of Pope's language and the sharp, direct, vivid words of the older poets.

Chaucer wrote:

> "the gardin and the well,
> That stood under a laurer alway grene
> Ful often time he Pluto and his quene
> Proserpina, and alle hir faerie,
> Disporten hem and maken melodie
> About that well, and dauncèd, as men told."

This becomes, in Pope:

> "this charming place
> Enough to shame the gentlest bard that sings
> Of painted meadows and of purling springs.
> A crystal fountain spreads its streams around,
> The fruitful banks with verdant laurels crowned.
> About this spring (if ancient fame say true)
> The dapper elves their moonlight sports pursue;
> Their pigmy king, and little fairy queen,
> In circling dances gambolled on the green,
> While tuneful sprites a merry concert made,
> And airy music warbled through the shade."

The fault of this transcription is an essential defect of imagination. Chaucer described the fairy-haunted garden naturally, as if he were

actually seeing it at the time: he did see it in his mind's eye. On the other hand, Pope described it artificially, because he only saw it so, as he might have seen an illuminated display at Ranelagh with a garden and a fountain, and ballet-dancers dressed up as fairies. But because the working of the imagination in the one poet is natural and in the other artificial, the diction of the one is natural and of the other artificial. Contrast "the gardin" and "this charming place"; "the well" and "a crystal fountain"; "a laurer alway grene", and "verdant laurels". Pope was merely using a set of stock phrases that he supposed to be poetic, and that he would have used on any other occasion whatever when it was necessary to allude to a garden, or a tree, or a fountain.

No doubt, as I have said before, it is primarily a matter of imagination, of "the vision and the faculty divine", but my point is that the imaginative quality reflects itself inevitably and immediately in the simplicity and vividness of the language, as the absence of it is betrayed by woolly phrases that have become mere *clichés* in the poetic vocabulary of the eighteenth century. It is very significant that most of the writers of that age are apologetic about Shakespeare. They feel it necessary to deprecate his extravagant

fancy and his extravagant language. When they are overawed by his genius they still feel that he is "wild", a sort of barbarian genius, an impulsive child of nature at the best. The eighteenth century was desperately afraid of emotion. The very fact that "enthusiasm" was a term of reproach, and the leading word in every invective against Methodism, is enough to illustrate that. With the end of the century there was a return of imagination and passion, and the more daring range of fancy and the greater depth of feeling inevitably found language that was simpler and bolder, more natural, more suggestive, and more musical. It could not be otherwise, for the word is always an echo of the thought in the mind and the feeling in the heart.

As we have seen, there are great periods, like the age of Shakespeare and the age of Wordsworth, marked by an astonishing revival of imagination and a species of intellectual inspiration, which react universally upon the men of genius that such an age produces, and lift the writing of the time, in all the varieties of poetry and prose, to a nobler height. But apart from such general influences, style remains emphatically a personal attribute. *Le style, c'est l'homme.* The quality of a man's mind is inevitably expressed in

the language that he uses and in the way that he uses it. That selection and that management of words are accomplished largely by instinct. Imagination and insight, a delicate sensitiveness to the quality of language, and an inspired choice of words, are gifts that cannot be imparted by any instruction, and it is certain that no one ever became a great writer by studying the laws of style. But there are laws of style, for all that, for there are natural principles, depending mainly upon the facts of sound and association, that govern the effective use of language. A study of those principles will at least teach us what to avoid when we write, and, what is more important for most people, it will enable us to appreciate better the charm of the great writers, precisely as some knowledge of the laws of harmony will help us to a worthier appreciation of the works of the great musicians. We have a rich heritage in our English language and our English literature, and it is surely worth while that we should make some endeavour to understand why, in the expression of the very same truth, one particular sequence of English words may be utterly commonplace, while another has a strange force and a haunting beauty that enshrine it imperishably in the memory of men.

NOTES

1. *De arte poetica*, 372–373.

2. "As jarring discords at a pleasant feast." *De arte poetica*, 374.

3. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, IV, 546–547.

4. "The dire portals of war shall be shut with bars of iron." *Æneid*, I. 294–296.

5. "Then at length the accursed portals, grating on their horrid-sounding hinges, are thrown open." *Æneid*, VI, 573–574. Cf. I. 448–449.

6. "He in the forefront, snatching up a battle-axe, breaks through the stubborn doors." *Æneid*, II. 479–480.

7. "But the wounded serpent twists his sinuous coils, stiffens his bristling scales, and hisses with his mouth." *Æneid*, XI. 753–754. Cf. *Georgics*, III. 425–426. *Æneid*, II. 204–209.

8. "The forests creak, foaming Nereus rages with his trident, and rouses the seas from the lowest deep." *Æneid*, II. 418–419.

9. "All the plain is murmurous with their humming sound." *Æneid*, VI. 707.

10. "Under his half-savage breast murmur the foaming surges." *Æneid*, X. 212.

11. *Æneid*, XI. 875.

12. "Not, riddle like, obscuring their intent,
But packe-staffe plaine, uttring what thing they ment." HALL, *Satires*, III. (Prologue.)

13. As Pet Marjorie made her hero die in the winter-time!

"He was killed by a cannon-splinter
Right in the middle of the winter.
Perhaps it was not at that time
I cannot find another rhyme."

14. It is perhaps worth while to notice that a similar effect is produced in the last line of Schiller's *Kassandra*:

"Eris schüttelt ihre Schlangen,
Alle Götter fliehn davon,
Und des Donners Wolken hangen
Schwer herab auf *Ilion*."

15. "But the Cyclops, groaning and travailing in pain, groped with his hands, and lifted away the stone." *Odyssey*, IX. 415–416.

16. "But terribly around Achilles arose the tumultuous wave, and the stream smote violently against his shield." *Iliad*, XXI. 241–242.

17. *Æneid*, I. 135.

18. *Æneid*, III. 339–340.

19. *Iliad*, II. 494–759.

20. *Georgics*, IV. 336–344.

21. *Odes*, I. 7.

INDEX

Abstract and concrete words, 117–118, 223.
Accent, displacement of, 175.
Addison, 36, 170, 243, 259.
Adjective, the, 226–231, 233–238.
Alford, Dean, 155.
Alliteration, 58–65.
Antithesis, 201–205.
Armstrong, 103.
Arnold, Matthew, 43, 47, 151, 176, 178, 221, 232.
Article, the indefinite, 159–160.
Associations of words, the, 28, 210–211.
Authorised Version, the, 25, 26, 45, 62, 139, 141, 143, 152, 160, 164, 173, 182, 211, 217.

Bacon, 30.
Barnes, William, 116.
Barrie, Sir James, 109, 114.
Beautiful words, 51–54, 211–212.
Beginnings, 136–139.
Bennett, Arnold, 96.
Blair, 61.
Boiardo, 208.
Boswell, 105, 261.
Bridges, Robert, 191.
Brontë, Charlotte, 78.
Browne, Sir Thomas, 14, 147.
Browning, 56, 84, 85, 86, 105, 191, 192, 231.
Bunyan, 96, 123.
Burke, 126, 152, 224.
Butler, Bishop, 20.
Byron, 52, 79, 99, 124, 149.

Cæsar, 164.
Campbell, 61.
Campion, 141.
Carew, 141.
Carlyle, 86, 238.
Carroll, Lewis, 29, 209.
Changed meaning of words, 91–93.
Chaucer, 268–269.
Chesterton, G. K., 106.
Cicero, 174.
Coleridge, 49, 53, 63, 129, 189.
Common Prayer, the Book of, 61, 91, 121, 160, 215, 216.
Conjunctions, the, 163–166.
Cowley, 154, 184.
Cowper, 104, 108, 188, 189, 190, 240, 256.

Dante, 224.
Degeneration of words, 219–223.
De Quincey, 14, 16, 18, 155, 252, 255, 259.
Dickens, 79, 263.
Dionysius of Halicarnassus, 162.
Donne, 143, 145, 154.
Drummond of Hawthornden, 145.
Dryden, 32, 42, 124, 142, 153, 168, 169, 173, 246.

Eighteenth-century literature, 251.
Eliot, George, 78.
Endings, 143–150.
Etymology, 87–91, 239–241.

Flaubert, 73, 156.
Form and substance, 17–18, 248.
Fox, 72.
French words in English, 27, 113, 132–135.

Gibbon, 199–205, 222.
Gilbert, Sir William S., 92, 178.
Goldsmith, 154.
Grainger, 104, 105.
Gray, 43, 77, 78, 254, 256.

Hall, Bishop, 154, 274.
Hazlitt, 170–172, 245, 260.
Herbert, George, 84, 192.
Herrick, 119, 120.
Homer, 162, 206, 209.
Hood, 124.
Horace, 19, 31, 207.

Interruptions, 172–175.
Inversions, 138–140.

James, Henry, 77.
Jerrold, Douglas, 84.
Johnson, Dr., 100, 124, 125, 126, 147, 170, 184, 194–200, 216, 222, 243, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263.
Johnson, Lionel, 151.
Jonson, Ben, 136.

Keats, 32, 34, 47, 49, 50, 52, 98, 100, 133, 148, 155, 247.

Landor, 155, 214.
Langland, 58.
Latin words in English, 26, 27, 113, 115, 116–132.
Lecky, 81.
Length of sentences, 194, 199.
Letters, sound of, 30–51, 214–218.
Long and short words, 120–121.
Longfellow, 230.
Longinus, 164.
Lovelace, 120, 230.
Lowell, 13.
Lucretius, 32.
Lydgate, 267.
Lyrical Revival, the, 77, 255.

Macaulay, 79, 194–200, 204, 222, 224, 263.
Malory, 212.
Mare, de la, Walter, 253.
Marlowe, 148.
Marvell, 32.
Maundeville, Sir John, 160.
Meredith, George, 84.
Metaphor, 238–246.
Metre, aptness of, 186–192.
Milton, 28, 32, 33, 35, 36, 39, 40, 49, 61, 66, 67, 68, 69, 72, 75, 79, 119, 127, 140, 150, 151, 157, 162, 163, 179, 184, 207, 208, 214, 219, 221, 224, 225, 226, 237, 241, 242.
Misuse of words, 78–80.
Monosyllables, 163–164.
Morley, Lord, 155.
Motley, 222.
Movement, 166, 177–180, 191–192.
Müller, Max, 71.

Newman, 226, 228, 229, 236.
Norris, John, 61.

Obscurity, 83–87.

Patmore, Coventry, 65, 100.

Persius, 31, 246.
Plato, 30.
Poe, Edgar Allan, 48, 51.
Poetic diction, 254–255, 266–269.
Pomposity, 103–105, 261–264.
Pope, 30, 34, 42, 104, 108, 133, 169, 185, 257, 258, 260, 265–269.
Prior, 255.
Proper names, 146–149.
Punctuation, 82–83.

Quantity, 181.
Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, 107.
Quintilian, 83, 98, 156, 221.

Raleigh, 149.
Repetitions, 141–143, 150–156.
Ruskin, 22, 147, 155, 226–228.

Sackville, 267.
Saxon words, 116–118, 129–131.
Schiller, 237.
Scott, 14, 55, 137.
Shaw, George Bernard, 70, 137.
Shelley, 20, 43, 44, 52, 144, 151, 166, 183, 218, 231.
Shakespeare, 16, 21, 45, 57, 59, 66, 67, 79, 80, 81, 94, 99, 119, 124, 127, 155, 160, 164, 166, 167, 175, 176, 182, 183, 186, 187, 188, 220, 223, 229–231, 233, 234, 236, 244, 245, 246, 249, 265, 269, 270.
Sidney, Sir Philip, 97, 112, 146.
Simonides, 253.
Spenser, 42, 181, 255.
Stevenson, R. L., 109, 193, 214.
Style, definition of, 13, 16.
Swift, 81, 134.
Synonyms, 74.

Tacitus, 120, 215.
Tennyson, 32, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 64, 85, 106, 107, 139, 142, 151, 165, 175, 177, 218, 231, 237, 245.
Thompson, Francis, 56, 100, 131, 144, 149.
Thomson, 103, 256, 259.
Trench, Archbishop, 134.
Twain, Mark, 185, 227.

Vagueness, 224–226.
Villon, 207.
Virgil, 32, 33, 35, 47, 50, 173, 174.
Vocabulary, extent of, 71–72.
Vowels, range of, 54–57.

Watson, Sir William, 77, 129, 172, 217, 264.
Watts, Dr., 219.
Wesley, Charles, 220, 257.
Wilson, Thomas, 59.
Wodehouse, P. G., 158.
Words, the sound of, 23, 24.
Wordsworth, 20, 36, 44, 50, 52, 53, 64, 105, 108, 120, 127, 128, 130, 131, 144, 145, 148, 149, 177, 180, 234, 235.
Wyat, Sir Thomas, 141, 193.
Wyclif, 116, 219.

Xenophon, 164.

Young, Edward, 220.