Herbert Spencer

1820–1903

Herbert Spencer was born in Derby, England. Educated at home by his father, a schoolteacher of liberal ideas and a scientific bent, and later briefly by his uncle, Spencer was mainly self-educated, focusing his study on engineering and mathematics. Abandoning plans to attend a university, he worked on and off for ten years as a railroad surveyor and engineer while pursuing his own reading and scientific experimentation. Spencer, a prolific writer, produced technical articles on mathematics and engineering and soon branched out to essays on government and public life. As an editorial writer for the *Economist* from 1848 to 1852, he became friendly with such luminaries as G. H. Lewes, Thomas Huxley, and George Eliot (to whom for a time he considered marriage). During this period, Spencer wrote his first book, the well-received *Social Statics* (1851) and the essay excerpted here, "The Philosophy of Style" (1852). A legacy from his uncle in 1853 freed him from the need to work, and he adopted the life of a private scholar and writer. Despite a collapse in 1855 that left him enervated and able to work only a few hours a day, Spencer produced an enormous number of articles and books on government, economics, education, psychology (*The Principles of Psychology* of 1855, used by William James as a textbook at Harvard), music, biology and other sciences, and, most of all, sociology. *The Study of Sociology* (1873) was a great popular success and was published serially in Britain and the United States. Spencer's mastery of science, his philosophical orientation to evolution and its implications, and his ability to find those implications in a wide array of current issues made him well known and influential in many spheres. Indeed, during the last twenty-five years of his life, Spencer's popular reputation as a scientist nearly rivaled Darwin's. In the United States, Spencer's influence on science education was quite strong, but he was also invoked in the schools as a champion of poetry and taste.

do we get have people like this? (K. Baraad)

Spencer's study of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's theory of evolution in 1839 was a turning point: He quickly came to see evolution as the key to all natural and human systems. Regarded as a founder of the discipline of sociology, Spencer believed that the scientific study of society depended upon developing an understanding of nature and society in evolutionary terms. It is Spencer (not Darwin) who coined the phrase *survival of the fittest,* and it is Spencer, too, who was probably the greatest promoter of social Darwinism, the idea that societies as well as species evolve toward greater organization and complexity. The main principle of evolution, for Spencer, is the change over time from homogeneity to heterogeneity—that is, to greater differentiation and individualization—in biology particularly, but in all other systems as well, from physics to art. As systems evolve toward greater complexity, they also gain greater coherence. For example, as organisms evolve, their parts (limbs and organs) become more specialized. The whole organism is less able to survive losing such a part, and of course the part cannot survive on its own. Evolution in society, in Spencer's analogy, means greater specialization or individualization for each person. But here, too, the specialized individual contributes to and is dependent upon the larger—and now more complex—system. Thus, for Spencer, the developing function of an element in a system coexists with its increasing difference from the system.

well, that's not so good but it can be used to "explain" his work at times

but could be promising here

In "The Philosophy of Style," Spencer applies these ideas to literature and composition. His main theoretical tool is the principle of economy. This is not an entirely new idea, of course; it is a linear descendent of the idea of perspicuity so much emphasized by the critics and rhetoricians of the early eighteenth century. Spencer's analysis of efficiency, however, is indeed new. The words and sentences that convey information require the reader to expend energy, Spencer explains. But just like any vehicle of transmission, language can work efficiently or inefficiently. To the extent that it works inefficiently, language requires additional energy from the reader, energy that would otherwise be used to process the message. Thus inefficient language "fatigues" the reader or otherwise saps the force of the message. As Fred Newton Scott puts it in his introduction to Spencer's essay, "The value of style is determined by a kind of ledger account in which so much mental energy is credited to idea, so much debited to the bearer of the idea."[1] Scott argues, however, that this explanation of Spencer oversimplifies his ideas. After all, says Scott, what seems like economy may be mere miserliness and not really effective. To judge style as economical, according to Spencer's principles, requires an understanding of the organic whole to which it contributes.

Scott's caution is well taken: The first part of Spencer's essay adheres to the simplistic view of efficiency, and even Scott condemns some of Spencer's points as ill-founded or even silly. For example, Spencer argues that the English phrase *a black horse* is more efficient than the French equivalent, *un cheval noir,* because the placement of the noun *cheval* raises in the mind images of horses of many colors or possibly one of the wrong color. This then requires mental energy to repair when the *noir* appears. In English, *black* raises only a generalized idea that is easily applied to *horse* thereafter. Scott points out that habitual use of one or another sequence obviates any such mistakes as Spencer imagines and, besides, that generalized concepts like "horse" don't have such particulars attached to them. In the latter sections of the essay, however, Spencer shows a sensitive attention to audience and context—precisely what seems to be missing in the earlier chapters—as he deals with efficiency in poetry and examines the functions of art.

Spencer is not at all opposed to artful writing, to rhetorical flourish, or to poetry. He is at pains to claim that *good* poetry is good precisely because it follows the rules of economy in style. He is also modest about the usefulness of his rules. The great writer spontaneously knows how to use language well, says Spencer. Others less great may find the rules helpful for revising their efforts, but not for creating them. Despite Spencer's own Romantic individualism and love of poetry, his principle of economy in style gave renewed impetus to the form-content split and influenced the growing mechanistic view of composition, particularly in the United States. The period of Spencer's fame as a scientific sociologist and psychologist coincides with the growth of the rhetorics of professional writing (and what would eventually be technical writing) in the industrial era. And, toward the end of the nineteenth century, the principle of efficiency would be applied to composition teaching in general, emphasizing appeals to the psychological faculties, clarity and correctness, and the plain style.

[1]Herbert Spencer, *Philosophy of Style,* ed. Fred N. Scott (1892), p. xix.

Spencers notion of attention as (limited) commodity produces ill sorts of problems in his argument: and the notion of attention is still one we rely on today in rhetorical theory

Selected Bibliography

Our excerpt of "The Philosophy of Style" is from the 1892 edition, bound as a book, with introduction and notes by Fred Newton Scott. The essay itself was first published in *Westminster Review*, October 1852. Spencer's major works (none of which concern rhetoric or language, except peripherally) include *Social Statics* (1851), which applies his ideas about evolution to the development of individualism and independence. *Principles of Psychology* (1855) develops further Spencer's analogy between biological, social, and psychological evolution. Spencer projected a systematic philosophy of evolution that extended to all branches of science. From this project came *First Principles* (1862), *Principles of Biology* (2 vols., 1864–67), *Principles of Sociology* (3 vols., 1876–96), and *Principles of Ethics* (2 vols., 1892–93). *Essays: Scientific, Political, and Speculative* (3 vols., 1891) provides a good sample of Spencer's views on evolutionary theory in science, politics, and philosophy. See also *An Autobiography* (1904).

A brief introduction to Spencer's work and its significance is the Twayne series' *Herbert Spencer* by James G. Kennedy (1978). Thoemmes Press has issued facsimile editions of Spencer's major works as well as *Herbert Spencer: Contemporary Assessments*, ed. M. W. Taylor (1996), with essays by John Dewey, William James, T. H. Huxley, and others. Marie Secor, in "The Legacy of Nineteenth Century Style Theory" (*Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 12 [1982]: 76–94), traces perspicuity from Campbell to Whately to Spencer and G. H. Lewes (who also attempted a scientific theory of style). Secor criticizes Spencer's mechanistic language theory and contrasts the scientific view with the more literary one of De Quincey, J. H. Newman, and Walter Pater. A dry but helpful essay contextualizing Spencer is James Zappen's "Scientific Rhetoric in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Herbert Spencer, Thomas H. Huxley, and John Dewey," in *Textual Dynamics of the Professions*, ed. Charles Bazerman and James Paradis (1991). E. D. Hirsch adopts and applies Spencer's theories almost uncritically to his own theory of readability in *The Philosophy of Composition* (1977).

you should give your attention talk in 4030 / 5020? it would pull somethings together: rhetoric, tech., Latour

From *The Philosophy of Style*

PART I
CAUSES OF FORCE IN LANGUAGE WHICH DEPEND UPON ECONOMY OF THE MENTAL ENERGIES

i. The Principle of Economy

1. Commenting on the seeming incongruity between his father's argumentative powers and his ignorance of formal logic, Tristram Shandy says:—"It was a matter of just wonder with my worthy tutor, and two or three fellows of that learned society, that a man who knew not so much as the names of his tools, should be able to work after that fashion with them." Sterne's intended implication that a knowledge of the principles of reasoning neither makes, nor is essential to, a good reasoner, is doubtless true. Thus, too, is it with grammar. As Dr. Latham, condemning the usual school-drill in Lindley Murray, rightly remarks:—"Gross vulgarity is a fault to be prevented; but the proper prevention is to be got from habit—not rules." Similarly, there can be little question that good composition is far less dependent upon acquaintance with its laws, than upon practice and natural aptitude. A clear head, a quick imagination, and a sensitive ear, will go far towards making all rhetorical precepts needless. He who daily hears and reads well-framed sentences, will naturally more or less tend to use similar ones. And where there exists any mental

Edited by Fred Newton Scott.

idiosyncrasy — where there is a deficient verbal memory, or an inadequate sense of logical dependence, or but little perception of order, or a lack of constructive ingenuity; no amount of instruction will remedy the defect. Nevertheless, *some* practical result may be expected from a familiarity with the principles of style. The endeavour to conform to laws may tell, though slowly. And if in no other way, yet, as facilitating revision, a knowledge of the thing to be achieved — a clear idea of what constitutes a beauty, and what a blemish — cannot fail to be of service.

2. No general theory of expression seems yet to have been enunciated.[1] The maxims contained in works on composition and rhetoric, are presented in an unorganized form. Standing as isolated dogmas — as empirical generalizations, they are neither so clearly apprehended, nor so much respected, as they would be were they deduced from some simple first principle. We are told that "brevity is the soul of wit." We hear styles condemned as verbose or involved. Blair says that every needless part of a sentence "interrupts the description and clogs the image;" and again, that "long sentences fatigue the reader's attention."[2] It is remarked by Lord Kaimes, that "to give the utmost force to a period, it ought, if possible, to be closed with that word which makes the greatest figure."[3] That parentheses should be avoided and that Saxon words should be used in preference to those of Latin origin, are established precepts. But, however influential the truths thus dogmatically embodied, they would be much more influential if reduced to something like scientific ordination. In this, as in other cases, conviction will be greatly strengthened when we understand the *why*. And we may be sure that a comprehension of the general principle from which the rules of composition result, will not only bring them home to us with greater force, but will discover to us other rules of like origin.

[1]That is, in works purporting to be rhetorics. General theories of literary expression had been put forth by Goethe, Schiller, Schlegel, Schopenhauer, Hegel, Vischer, and many other writers on æsthetics. [F.N.S.]

[2]"Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres," Lect. xi. [F.N.S.]

[3]"Elements of Criticism," Chap. 18, § 2. [F.N.S.]

3. On seeking for some clue to the law underlying these current maxims, we may see shadowed forth in many of them, the importance of economizing the reader's or hearer's attention. To so present ideas that they may be apprehended with the least possible mental effort, is the desideratum towards which most of the rules above quoted point. When we condemn writing that is wordy, or confused, or intricate — when we praise this style as easy, and blame that as fatiguing, we consciously or unconsciously assume this desideratum as our standard of judgment. Regarding language as an apparatus of symbols for the conveyance of thought,[4] we may say that, as in a mechanical apparatus, the more simple and the better arranged its parts, the greater will be the effect produced. In either case, whatever force is absorbed by the machine is deducted from the result. A reader or listener has at each moment but a limited amount of mental power available. To recognize and interpret the symbols presented to him, requires part of this power; to arrange and combine the images suggested requires a further part; and only that part which remains can be used for realizing the thought conveyed. Hence, the more time and attention it takes to receive and understand each sentence, the less time and attention can be given to the contained idea; and the less vividly will that idea be conceived.

4. How truly language must be regarded as a hindrance to thought, though the necessary instrument of it, we shall clearly perceive on remembering the comparative force with which simple ideas are communicated by signs.[5] To

[4]See the comment made by Mr. Wright, *infra*, § 13: "The definite product language is more or less isolated from the agency using it, and viewed more in relation to the reader's than the writer's mind." A brief criticism of the general principle will be found in A. S. Hill's "Rhetoric," pp. 163, 164. [F.N.S.]

[5]This ingenious paradox rests upon an artificial distinction between language and other modes of expression. Language itself is but a system of verbal signs. What Spencer says is therefore virtually this: "Language is an inferior form of expression for ideas which are more easily expressed by other kinds of signs." Language in one sense is indeed a "hindrance to the expression of thought," and properly so; it forces vague and ill-defined thought back upon itself, compelling it to assume the organized form requisite to ordered verbal expression. [F.N.S.]

say, "Leave the room," is less expressive than to point to the door. Placing a finger on the lips is more forcible than whispering, "Do not speak." A beck of the hand is better than, "Come here." No phrase can convey the idea of surprise so vividly as opening the eyes and raising the eyebrows. A shrug of the shoulders would lose much by translation into words. Again, it may be remarked that when oral language is employed, the strongest effects[6] are produced by interjections, which condense entire sentences into syllables. And in other cases, where custom allows us to express thoughts by single words, as in *Beware, Heigho, Fudge,* much force would be lost by expanding them into specific propositions. Hence, carrying out the metaphor that language is the vehicle of thought, there seems reason to think that in all cases the friction and inertia of the vehicle deduct from its efficiency; and that in composition, the chief, if not the sole thing to be done, is, to reduce this friction and inertia to the smallest possible amount. Let us then inquire whether economy of the recipient's attention is not the secret of effect, alike in the right choice and collocation of words, in the best arrangement of clauses in a sentence, in the proper order of its principal and subordinate propositions, in the judicious use of simile, metaphor, and other figures of speech, and even in the rhythmical sequence of syllables.

ii. Economy in the Use of Words

5. The greater forcibleness of Saxon English, or rather non-Latin English, first claims our attention. The several special reasons assignable for this may all be reduced to the general reason—economy. The most important of them is early association. A child's vocabulary is almost wholly Saxon. He says, *I have,* not *I possess—I wish,* not *I desire;* he does not *reflect,* he *thinks;* he does not beg for *amusement,* but for *play;* he calls things *nice* or *nasty,* not *pleasant* or *disagreeable.* The synonyms which he learns in after years, never become so closely, so organically connected with the ideas signified, as do these original words used in childhood; and hence the association remains less strong. But in what does a strong association between a word and an idea differ from a weak one? Simply in the greater ease and rapidity of the suggestive action. It can be in nothing else. Both of two words, if they be strictly synonymous, eventually call up the same image. The expression—It is *acid,* must in the end give rise to the same thought as—It is *sour;* but because the term *acid* was learnt later in life, and has not been so often followed by the thought symbolized, it does not so readily arouse that thought as the term *sour.* If we remember how slowly and with what labour the appropriate ideas follow unfamiliar words in another language, and how increasing familiarity with such words brings greater rapidity and ease of comprehension; and if we consider that the same process must have gone on with the words of our mother tongue from childhood upwards, we shall clearly see that the earliest learnt and oftenest used words, will, other things equal, call up images with less loss of time and energy than their later learnt synonyms.

6. The further superiority possessed by Saxon English in its comparative brevity, obviously comes under the same generalization. If it be an advantage to express an idea in the smallest number of words, then will it be an advantage to express it in the smallest number of syllables. If circuitous phrases and needless expletives distract the attention and diminish the strength of the impression produced, then do surplus articulations do so. A certain effort, though commonly an inappreciable one, must be required to recognize every vowel and consonant. If, as all know, it is tiresome to listen to an indistinct speaker, or read a badly-written manuscript; and if, as we cannot doubt, the fatigue is a cumulative result of the attention needed to catch successive syllables; it follows that attention is in such cases absorbed by each syllable. And if this be true when the syllables are difficult of recognition, it will also be true, though in a less degree, when the recognition of them is easy. Hence, the shortness of Saxon words becomes a reason for their greater force. One qualification, however, must not be

[6] "Strongest effects" is vague to the last degree. There may be hundreds of strong effects of all shades of complexity; very obviously not all of them can be produced by interjections. [F.N.S.]

so some of this is pretty racist, right?

overlooked. A word which in itself embodies the most important part of the idea to be conveyed, especially when that idea is an emotional one, may often with advantage be a polysyllabic word. Thus it seems more forcible to say, "It is *magnificent,*" than "It is *grand.*" The word *vast* is not so powerful a one as *stupendous.* Calling a thing *nasty* is not so effective as calling it *disgusting.*

7. There seem to be several causes for this exceptional superiority of certain long words. We may ascribe it partly to the fact that a voluminous, mouth-filling epithet is, by its very size, suggestive of largeness or strength; witness the immense pomposity of sesquipedalian verbiage: and when great power or intensity has to be suggested, this association of ideas aids the effect. A further cause may be that a word of several syllables admits of more emphatic articulation; and as emphatic articulation is a sign of emotion, the unusual impressiveness of the thing named is implied by it. Yet another cause is that a long word (of which the latter syllables are generally inferred as soon as the first are spoken) allows the hearer's consciousness a longer time to dwell upon the quality predicated; and where, as in the above cases, it is to this predicated quality that the entire attention is called, an advantage results from keeping it before the mind for an appreciable time. The reasons which we have given for preferring short words evidently do not hold here. So that to make our generalization quite correct we must say, that while in certain sentences expressing strong feeling, the word which more especially implies that feeling may often with advantage be a many-syllabled or Latin one; in the immense majority of cases, each word serving but as a step to the idea embodied by the whole sentence, should, if possible, be a one-syllabled or Saxon one.

8. Once more, that frequent cause of strength in Saxon and other primitive words—their imitative character, may be similarly resolved into the more general cause. Both those directly imitative, as *splash, bang, whiz, roar,* &c., and those analogically imitative, as *rough, smooth, keen, blunt, thin, hard, crag,* &c., have a greater or less likeness to the things symbolized; and by making on the senses impressions allied to the ideas to be called up, they save part of the effort needed to call up such ideas, and leave more attention for the ideas themselves.

9. The economy of the recipient's mental energy, into which are thus resolvable the several causes of the strength of Saxon English, may equally be traced in the superiority of specific over generic words. That concrete terms produce more vivid impressions than abstract ones, and should, when possible, be used instead, is a thorough maxim of composition.[7] As Dr. Campbell says,[8] "The more general the terms are, the picture is the fainter; the more special they are, 'tis the brighter." We should avoid such a sentence as:—"In proportion as the manners, customs, and amusements of a nation are cruel and barbarous, the regulations of their penal code will be severe." And in place of it we should write:—"In proportion as men delight in battles, bull-fights, and combats of gladiators, will they punish by hanging, burning, and the rack."[9]

10. This superiority of specific expressions is clearly due to a saving of the effort required to

[7]The purpose of the writer and the needs of the reader must, however, always be taken into account. If the author's idea is such as to call for abstract terms, concrete expressions are obviously out of place. Of the two examples that follow in the text, it may be questioned whether to the legal or scientific mind the first will not convey by far the greater satisfaction. [F.N.S.]

[8]"Philosophy of Rhetoric," Bk. III., Chap. 1, § 1. [F.N.S.]

[9]Dr. Campbell's illustration is more to the point: "'Consider,' says our Lord, 'the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If, then, God so clothe the grass which to-day is in the field and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more will he clothe you?' Let us here adopt a little of the tasteless manner of modern paraphrasts, by the substitution of more general terms, one of their many expedients of infrigidating, and let us observe the effect produced by this change. 'Consider the flowers how they gradually increase in their size; they do no manner of work, and yet I declare to you that no king whatever, in his most splendid habit is dressed up like them. If, then, God in his providence doth so adorn the vegetable productions which continue but a little time on the land, and are afterwards put into the fire, how much more will he provide clothing for you?' How spiritless is the same sentiment rendered by these small variations! The very particularizing of to-day and to-morrow is infinitely more expressive of transitoriness than any description wherein the terms are general that can be substituted in its room."—"Philosophy of Rhetoric," Bk. III., Chap. 1, § 1. [F.N.S.]

translate words into thoughts. As we do not think in generals but in particulars—as, whenever any class of things is referred to, we represent it to ourselves by calling to mind individual members of it; it follows that when an abstract word is used, the hearer or reader has to choose from his stock of images, one or more, by which he may figure to himself the genus mentioned. In doing this, some delay must arise—some force be expended; and if, by employing a specific term, an appropriate image can be at once suggested, an economy is achieved, and a more vivid impression produced.[10]

iii. The Principle of Economy Applied to Sentences

11. Turning now from the choice of words to their sequence, we shall find the same general principle hold good.[11] We have a *priori* reasons for believing that in every sentence there is some one order of words more effective than any other; and that this order is the one which presents the elements of the proposition in the succession in which they may be most readily put together. As in a narrative, the events should be stated in such sequence that the mind may not have to go backwards and forwards in order to rightly connect them; as in a group of sentences, the arrangement should be such, that each of them may be understood as it comes, without waiting for subsequent ones; so in every sentence, the sequence of words should be that which suggests the constituents of the thought in the order most convenient for the building up that thought. Duly to enforce this truth, and to prepare the way for applications of it, we must briefly inquire into the mental act by which the meaning of a series of words is apprehended.[12]

12. We cannot more simply do this than by considering the proper collocation of the substantive and adjective. Is it better to place the adjective before the substantive, or the substantive before the adjective? Ought we to say with the French—*un cheval noir;* or to say as we do—a black horse? Probably, most persons of culture would decide that one order is as good as the other. Alive to the bias produced by habit, they would ascribe to that the preference they feel for our own form of expression. They would expect those educated in the use of the opposite form to have an equal preference for that. And thus they would conclude that neither of these instinctive judgments is of any worth. There is, however, a philosophical ground for deciding in favour of the English custom. If "a horse black" be the arrangement, immediately on the utterance of the word "horse," there arises, or tends to arise, in the mind, a picture answering to that word; and as there has been nothing to indicate what *kind* of horse, any image of a horse suggests itself. Very likely, however, the image will be that of a brown horse, brown horses being the most familiar. The result is that when the word "black" is

[10]The psychology of this passage is not above suspicion. The operation of the mind in thinking a class is different from its operation in thinking a particular of that class. In the latter case the mental procedure consists in bringing up a particular image of the thing; in the former the mind grasps the function of the image, leaving the particular features wholly out of account. The trained thinker in thinking the class "horse" does not "choose from his stock" of mental horses. He thinks the concept horse, and in so doing he may attain to a perfectly definite notion of the class without having in consciousness any particular horse whatsoever. The particular image is of course present, but such features as hight, color, etc., are simply disregarded. See, on this point, Dewey's "Psychology," pp. 204–13: James's "Psychology," I., Chap. 12; "How do Concepts arise from Percepts?" by J. Dewey, in *Public School Journal* for November, 1891; James's address in Psychol. Rev. [F.N.S.]

[11]On the general question of the order of words in sentences, see the admirable little treatise by H. Weil, "The Order of Words in the Ancient Languages compared with that of the Modern Languages" (Trans. by C. W. Super, Boston: 1887).

[12]"But there is another element we have to take into account, and that is the rhythmical effect of Style. Mr. Herbert Spencer in his essay very clearly states the law of Sequence, but I infer that he would include it entirely under the law of Economy; at any rate he treats of it solely in reference to intelligibility, and not at all in its scarcely less important relation to harmony. . . . But Style appeals to the emotions as well as to the intellect, and the arrangement of words and sentences which will be the most economical may not be the most musical, and the most musical may not be the most pleasurably effective. For Climax and Variety it may be necessary to sacrifice something of rapid intelligibility: hence involutions, antitheses, and suspensions, which disturb the most orderly arrangement, may yet, in virtue of their own subtle influences, be counted as improvements on that arrangement."—Lewes's "Principles of Success in Literature," p. 143. [F.N.S.]

added, a check is given to the process of thought. Either the picture of a brown horse already present to the imagination has to be suppressed, and the picture of a black one summoned in its place; or else, if the picture of a brown horse be yet unformed, the tendency to form it has to be stopped. Whichever is the case, a certain amount of hindrance results. But if, on the other hand, "a black horse" be the expression used, no such mistake can be made. The word "black," indicating an abstract quality, arouses no definite idea. It simply prepares the mind for conceiving some object of that colour; and the attention is kept suspended until that object is known. If, then, by the precedence of the adjective, the idea is conveyed without liability to error, whereas the precedence of the substantive is apt to produce a misconception, it follows that the one gives the mind less trouble than the other, and is therefore more forcible.[13]

13. Possibly it will be objected that the adjective and substantive come so close together, that practically they may be considered as uttered at the same moment; and that on hearing the phrase, "a horse black," there is not time to imagine a wrongly-coloured horse before the word "black" follows to prevent it. It must be owned that it is not easy to decide by introspection whether this is so or not.[14] But there are facts collaterally implying that it is not. Our ability to anticipate the words yet unspoken is one of them. If the ideas of the hearer kept considerably behind the expressions of the speaker, as the objection assumes, he could hardly foresee the end of a sentence by the time it was half delivered: yet this constantly happens.[15] Were the supposition true, the mind, instead of anticipating, would be continually falling more and more in arrear. If the meanings of words are not realized as fast as the words are uttered, then the loss of time over each word must entail such an accumulation of delays as to leave a hearer entirely behind. But whether the force of these replies be or be not admitted, it will scarcely be denied that the right formation of a picture will be facilitated by presenting its elements in the order in which they are wanted;[16] even though the mind should do nothing until it has received them all.

14. What is here said respecting the succession of the adjective and substantive is obviously applicable, by change of terms, to the adverb and verb. And without further explanation, it will be manifest, that in the use of prepositions and other particles, most languages spontaneously conform with more or less completeness to this law.

15. On applying a like analysis to the larger divisions of a sentence, we find not only that the same principle holds good, but that the advantage of respecting it becomes marked. In the arrangement of predicate and subject, for example, we are at once shown that as the predicate determines the aspect under which the subject is to be conceived, it should be placed first; and the

[13]Two fallacies lurk in this argument: (1) That the "bias produced by habit" is a factor that may be disregarded, for obviously if the substantive-adjective order were the one habitually employed and exp ted, economy would dictate that the opposite order be avoided; (2) that the particulars of a concrete visual image necessarily arise in the mind upon hearing the term "horse." The "image" may be a sound or a moving line. "Take the following report from one of my students: 'I am unable to form in my mind's eye any visual likeness of the table whatever. After many trials I can only get a hazy surface, with nothing on or about it. I can see no variety in color, and no positive limitations in extent, while I cannot see what I see well enough to determine its position in respect to my eye, or to endow it with any quality of size. I am in the same position as to the word *dog*. I cannot see it in my mind's eye at all; and so cannot tell whether I should have to run my eye along it, if I did see it.'"—James's "Psychology," II., p. 57, note. The whole chapter should be read. [F.N.S.]

[14] See, for a discussion of this point, Victor Egger's "La Parole intérieure," Chaps. 6, 7; James's "Psychology," I., pp. 280, 281, note. [F.N.S.]

[15]Spencer fails to see how this fact tells against his theory. (1) The Frenchman, accustomed to the substantive-adjective order, will anticipate the coming *noir*, or some other adjective, as soon as he hears the word *cheval*. Hence in his case the nascent image of a wrongly-colored horse will not tend to arise. The peculiar intonation of the substantive will probably give him a hint as to whether the adjective is or is not to follow. (2) In the case of the Englishman, the word "black" may lead the hearer to anticipate some other substantive than "horse"; he may expect "sheep," or "man," or "eye," to follow, since all these things may possess the quality blackness [F.N.S.]

[16]In the original article as it appeared in the *Westminster Review*, the following words are inserted at this point: "and that, as in forming the image answering to a red flower, the notion of redness is one of the components that must be used in the construction of the image, the mind, if put in possession of this notion before the specific image to be formed out of it is suggested, will more easily form it than if the order be reversed." [F.N.S.]

striking effect produced by so placing it becomes comprehensible. Take the often-quoted contrast between "Great is Diana of the Ephesians," and "Diana of the Ephesians is great." When the first arrangement is used, the utterance of the word "great" arouses those vague associations of an impressive nature with which it has been habitually connected; the imagination is prepared to clothe with high attributes whatever follows; and when the words, "Diana of the Ephesians," are heard, all the appropriate imagery which can, on the instant, be summoned, is used in the formation of the picture: the mind being thus led directly, and without error, to the intended impression. When, on the contrary, the reverse order is followed, the idea, "Diana of the Ephesians," is conceived with no special reference to greatness; and when the words "is great" are added, the conception had to be remodelled: whence arises a loss of mental energy and a corresponding diminution of effect. The following verse from Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," though somewhat irregular in structure, well illustrates the same truth:

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide, wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

16. Of course the principle equally applies when the predicate is a verb or a participle. And as effect is gained by placing first all words indicating the quality, conduct or condition of the subject, it follows that the copula also should have precedence. It is true that the general habit of our language resists this arrangement of predicate, copula and subject; but we may readily find instances of the additional force gained by conforming to it. Thus, in the line from "Julius Cæsar"—

Then *burst* his mighty heart,

priority is given to a word embodying both predicate and copula. In a passage contained in "The Battle of Flodden Field," the like order is systematically employed with great effect:

The Border slogan rent the sky!
A Home! a Gordon! was the cry;
Loud were the clanging blows;
Advanced—forced back—now low, now high,
The pennon sunk and rose;
As *bends* the bark's mast in the gale
When *rent are* rigging, shrouds and sail,
It wavered 'mid the foes.

17. Pursuing the principle yet further, it is obvious that for producing the greatest effect, not only should the main divisions of a sentence observe this sequence, but the subdivisions of these should be similarly arranged. In nearly all cases, the predicate is accompanied by some limit or qualification, called its complement. Commonly, also, the circumstances of the subject, which form its complement, have to be specified. And as these qualifications and circumstances must determine the mode in which the acts and things they belong to are conceived, precedence should be given to them. Lord Kaimes[17] notices the fact that this order is preferable; though without giving the reason. He says:—"When a circumstance is placed at the beginning of the period, or near the beginning, the transition from it to the principal subject is agreeable: it is like ascending or going upward," A sentence arranged in illustration of this will be desirable. Here is one:—"Whatever it may be in theory, it is clear that in practice the French idea of liberty is—the right of every man to be master of the rest."

18. In this case, were the first two clauses, up to the word "practice" inclusive, which qualify the subject, to be placed at the end instead of the beginning, much of the force would be lost; as thus:—"The French idea of liberty is—the right of every man to be master of the rest; in practice at least, if not in theory."

19. Similarly with respect to the conditions under which any fact is predicated. Observe in the following example the effect of putting them last:—"How immense would be the stimulus to progress, were the honour now given to wealth and title given exclusively to high achievements and intrinsic worth!"

20. And then observe the superior effect of putting them first:—"Were the honour now given to wealth and title given exclusively to high achievements and intrinsic worth, how immense would be the stimulus to progress!"

[17] "Elements of Criticism," Chap. 18, § 2. [F. N.S.]

21. The effect of giving priority to the complement of the predicate, as well as the predicate itself, is finely displayed in the opening of "Hyperion":

> *Deep in the shady sadness of a vale*
> *Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,*
> *Far from the fiery noon and eve's one star*
> *Sat* gray-haired Saturn, quiet as a stone.

Here it will be observed, not only that the predicate "sat" precedes the subject "Saturn," and that the three lines in italics, constituting the complement of the predicate, come before it; but that in the structure of that complement also, the same order is followed: each line being so arranged that the qualifying words are placed before the words suggesting concrete images.

22. The right succession of the principal and subordinate propositions in a sentence manifestly depends on the same law. Regard for economy of the recipient's attention, which, as we find, determines the best order for the subject, copula, predicate and their complements, dictates that the subordinate proposition shall precede the principle one when the sentence includes two. Containing, as the subordinate proposition does, some qualifying or explanatory idea, its priority prevents misconception of the principal one; and therefore saves the mental effort needed to correct such misconception. This will be seen in the annexed example:[18] "The secrecy once maintained in respect to the parliamentary debates, is still thought needful in diplomacy; and in virtue of this secret diplomacy, England may any day be unawares betrayed by its ministers into a war costing a hundred thousand lives, and hundreds of millions of treasure: yet the English pique themselves on being a self-governed people." The two subordinate propositions, ending with the semicolon and colon respectively, almost wholly determine the meaning of the principal proposition with which it concludes; and the effect would be lost were they placed last instead of first.

[18]The following is the example given in the *Westminster Review*: "Those who weekly go to church, and there have doled out to them a quantum of belief which they have not energy to work out for themselves, are simply spiritual paupers." [F.N S.]

23. The general principle of right arrangement in sentences, which we have traced in its application to the leading divisions of them, equally determines the proper order of their minor divisions. In every sentence of any complexity the complement to the subject contains several clauses, and that to the predicates several others; and these may be arranged in greater or less conformity to the law of easy apprehension. Of course with these, as with the larger members, the succession should be from the less specific to the more specific — from the abstract to the concrete.

24. Now, however, we must notice a further condition to be fulfilled in the proper construction of a sentence; but still a condition dictated by the same general principle with the other: the condition, namely, that the words and expressions most nearly related in thought shall be brought the closest together. Evidently the single words, the minor clauses, and the leading divisions of every proposition, severally qualify each other. The longer the time that elapses between the mention of any qualifying member and the member qualified; the longer must the mind be exerted in carrying forward the qualifying member ready for use. And the more numerous the qualifications to be simultaneously remembered and rightly applied, the greater will be the mental power expended, and the smaller the effect produced. Hence, other things equal, force will be gained by so arranging the members of a sentence that these suspensions shall at any moment be the fewest in number; and shall also be of the shortest duration. The following is an instance of defective combination: — "A modern newspaper-statement, though probably true, would be laughed at if quoted in a book as testimony; but the letter of a court gossip is thought good historical evidence, if written some centuries ago," A rearrangement of this, in accordance with the principle indicated above, will be found to increase the effect. Thus: — "Though probably true, a modern newspaper-statement quoted in a book as testimony, would be laughed at; but the letter of a court gossip, if written some centuries ago, is thought good historical evidence."

25. By making this change, some of the suspensions are avoided and others shortened; while

there is less liability to produce premature conceptions. The passage quoted below from "Paradise Lost" affords a fine instance of a sentence well arranged; alike in the priority of the subordinate members, in the avoidance of long and numerous suspensions, and in the correspondence between the order of the clauses and the sequence of the phenomena described, which, by the way, is a further prerequisite to easy comprehension, and therefore to effect.

> As when a prowling wolf,
> Whom hunger drives to seek new haunt for prey,
> Watching where shepherds pen their flocks at eve,
> In hurdled cotes amid the field secure,
> Leaps o'er the fence with ease into the fold;
> Or as a thief, bent to unhoard the cash
> Of some rich burgher, whose substantial doors,
> Cross-barr'd, and bolted fast, fear no assault,
> In at the window climbs, or o'er the tiles;
> So clomb this first grand thief into God's fold;
> So since into his church lewd hirelings climb.[19]

26. The habitual use of sentences in which all or most of the descriptive and limiting elements precede those described and limited, gives rise to what is called the inverted style: a title which is, however, by no means confined to this structure, but is often used where the order of the words is simply unusual. A more appropriate title would be the *direct style,* as contrasted with the other, or *indirect style:* the peculiarity of the one being, that it conveys each thought into the mind step by step with little liability to error; and of the other, that it gets the right thought conceived by a series of approximations.

27. The superiority of the direct over the indirect form of sentence, implied by the several conclusions that have been drawn, must not, however, be affirmed without reservation. Though, up to a certain point, it is well for the qualifying clauses of a period to precede those qualified; yet, as carrying forward each qualifying clause costs some mental effort, it follows that when the number of them and the time they are carried become great, we reach a limit beyond which more is lost than is gained. Other things equal, the arrangement should be such that no concrete image shall be suggested until the materials out of which it is to be made have been presented. And yet, as lately pointed out, other things equal, the fewer the materials to be held at once, and the shorter the distance they have to be borne, the better. Hence in some cases it becomes a question whether most mental effort will be entailed by the many and long suspensions, or by the correction of successive misconceptions.

28. This question may sometimes be decided by considering the capacity of the persons addressed. A greater grasp of mind is required for the ready comprehension of thoughts expressed in the direct manner, where the sentences are anywise intricate. To recollect a number of preliminaries stated in elucidation of a coming idea, and to apply them all to the formation of it when suggested, demands a good memory and considerable power of concentration. To one possessing these, the direct method will mostly seem the best; while to one deficient in them it will seem the worst. Just as it may cost a strong man less effort to carry a hundred-weight from place to place at once, than by a stone at a time; so, to an active mind it may be easier to bear along all the qualifications of an idea and at once rightly form it when named, than to first imperfectly conceive such idea and then carry back to it, one by one, the details and limitations afterwards mentioned. While conversely, as for a boy, the only possible mode of transferring a hundred-weight, is that of taking it in portions; so, for a weak mind, the only possible mode of forming a compound conception may be that of building it up by carrying separately its several parts.

29. That the indirect method — the method of conveying the meaning by a series of approximations — is best fitted for the uncultivated, may indeed be inferred from their habitual use of it. The form of expression adopted by the savage, as in — "Water, give me," is the simplest type of the approximate arrangement. In pleonasms, which are comparatively prevalent among the uneducated, the same essential structure is seen; as, for instance, in — "The men, they were there." Again, the old possessive case — "The king, his crown," conforms to the like order of thought. Moreover, the fact that the indirect mode is called the natural one, implies that it is the one spontaneously employed by the common

[19] Bk. IV., lines 183–93. [F.N.S.]

people: that is—the one easiest for undisciplined minds. . . .

iv. The Principle of Economy Applied to Figures

33. Turning now to consider figures of speech, we may equally discern the same general law of effect.[20] Underlying all the rules given for the choice and right use of them, we shall find the same fundamental requirement—economy of attention. It is indeed chiefly because they so well sub-serve this requirement, that figures of speech are employed. To bring the mind more easily to the desired conception, is in many cases solely, and in all cases mainly, their object.

34. Let us begin with the figures called Synecdoche. The advantage sometimes gained by putting a part for the whole, is due to the more convenient, or more accurate, presentation of the idea. If, instead of saying "a fleet of ten ships," we say "a fleet of ten *sail*," the picture of a group of vessels at sea is more readily suggested; and is so because the sails constitute the most conspicuous parts of vessels so circumstanced: whereas the word *ships* would very likely remind us of vessels in dock. Again, to say, "All *hands* to the pumps," is better than to say, "All *men* to the pumps," as it suggests the men in the special attitude intended, and so saves effort. Bringing "*gray hairs* with sorrow to the grave," is another expression, the effect of which has the same cause.

35. The occasional increase of force produced by Metonymy may be similarly accounted for. "The low morality of *the bar*," is a phrase both more brief and significant than the literal one it stands for. A belief in the ultimate supremacy of intelligence over brute force, is conveyed in a more concrete, and therefore more realizable form, if we substitute *the pen* and *the sword* for the two abstract terms. To say, "Beware of drinking!" is less effective than to say, "Beware of *the bottle!*" and is so, clearly because it calls up a less specific image.

36. The Simile is in many cases used chiefly with a view to ornament, but whenever it increases the *force* of a passage, it does so by being an economy. Here in an instance: "The illusion that great men and great events came oftener in early times than now, is partly due to historical perspective. As in a range of equidistant columns, the furthest off look the closest; so, the conspicuous objects of the past seem more thickly clustered the more remote they are."

37. To construct by a process of literal explanation, the thought thus conveyed would take many sentences, and the first elements of the picture would become faint while the imagination was busy in adding the others. But by the help of a comparison all effort is saved; the picture is instantly realized, and its full effect produced.

38. Of the position of the Simile,[21] it needs only to remark, that what has been said respecting the order of the adjective and substantive, predicate and subject, principal and subordinate propositions, &c., is applicable here. As whatever qualifies should precede whatever is qualified, force will generally be gained by placing the simile before the object to which it is applied. That this arrangement is the best, may be seen in the following passage from the "Lady of the Lake":

> As wreath of snow, on mountain breast,
> Slides from the rock that gave it rest,
> Poor Ellen glided from her stay,
> And at the monarch's feet she lay.[22]

Inverting these couplets will be found to diminish the effect considerably. There are cases, however,

[20] On the general subject of figures, see Max Müller's essay in *Fortnightly*, Vol. 46, p. 617, on "Metaphor as a Mode of Abstraction"; Earle's "English Prose," pp. 234–53; Gummere's "Poetics," pp. 83–132; *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 1, p. 140, "The Classification of Rhetorical Figures," by C. B. Bradley. [F.N.S.]

[21] Properly the term "simile" is applicable only to the entire figure, inclusive of the two things compared and the comparison drawn between them. But as there exists no name for the illustrative member of the figure, there seems no alternative but to employ "simile" to express this also. This context will in each case show in which sense the word is used.—H. S.

[22] But compare the arrangement in the following from "Othello":

> Of one whose subdued eyes,
> Albeit unused to the melting mood
> Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
> Their medicinal gum.

even where the simile is a simple one, in which it may with advantage be placed last, as in these lines from Alexander Smith's "Life Drama":

> I see the future stretch
> All dark and barren as a rainy sea.

The reason for this seems to be, that so abstract an idea as that attaching to the word "future," does not present itself to the mind in any definite form, and hence the subsequent arrival at the simile entails no reconstruction of the thought.

39. Such, however, are not the only cases in which this order is the most forcible. As the advantage of putting the simile before the object depends on its being carried forward in the mind to assist in forming an image of the object, it must happen that if, from length or complexity, it cannot be so carried forward, the advantage is not gained. The annexed sonnet, by Coleridge, is defective from this cause:

> As when a child, on some long winter's night,
> Affrighted, clinging to its grandam's knees,
> With eager wond'ring and perturb'd delight
> Listens strange tales of fearful dark decrees,
> Mutter'd to wretch by necromantic spell;
> Or of those hags who at the witching time
> Of murky midnight, ride the air sublime,
> And mingle foul embrace with fiends of hell:
> Cold horror drinks its blood! Anon the tear
> More gentle starts, to hear the beldame tell
> Of pretty babes, that lov'd each other dear,
> Murder'd by cruel uncle's mandate fell:
> Ev'n such the shiv'ring joys thy tones impart,
> Ev'n so, thou, Siddons, meltest my sad heart.

40. Here, from the lapse of time and accumulation of circumstances, the first part of the comparison is forgotten before its application is reached, and requires re-reading. Had the main idea been first mentioned, less effort would have been required to retain it, and to modify the conception of it into harmony with the comparison, than to remember the comparison, and refer back to its successive features for help in forming the final image.

41. The superiority of the Metaphor to the Simile is ascribed by Dr. Whately[23] to the fact that "all men are more gratified at catching the resemblance for themselves, than in having it pointed out to them." But after what has been said, the great economy it achieves will seem the more probable cause. Lear's exclamation—

> Ingratitude! thou marble-hearted fiend,

would lose part of its effect were it changed into—

> Ingratitude! thou fiend with heart like marble;

and the loss would result partly from the position of the simile and partly from the extra number of words required. When the comparison is an involved one, the greater force of the metaphor, consequent on its greater brevity, becomes much more conspicuous. If, drawing an analogy between mental and physical phenomena, we say, "As, in passing through the crystal, beams of white light are decomposed into the colours of the rainbow; so, in traversing the soul of the poet, the colourless rays of truth are transformed into brightly tinted poetry"; it is clear that in receiving the double set of words expressing the two halves of the comparison, and in carrying the one half to the other, considerable attention is absorbed. Most of this is saved, however, by putting the comparison in a metaphorical form, thus: "The white light of truth, in traversing the many sided transparent soul of the poet, is refracted into iris-hued poetry."

42. How much is conveyed in a few words by the help of the Metaphor, and how vivid the effect consequently produced, may be abundantly exemplified. From "A Life Drama" may be quoted the phrase,—

> I spear'd him with a jest,

as a fine instance among the many which that poem contains. A passage in the "Prometheus Unbound," of Shelley, displays the power of the metaphor to great advantage:

> Methought among the lawns together
> We wandered, underneath the young gray dawn,
> And multitudes of dense white fleecy clouds
> Were wandering, in thick flocks along the mountains
> *Shepherded* by the slow unwilling wind.

This last expression is remarkable for the distinctness with which it realizes the features of the

[23] "Rhetoric," Pt. III., Chap. 2, § 3. [F.N.S.]

scene: bringing the mind, as it were, by a bound to the desired conception.

43. But a limit is put to the advantageous use of the Metaphor, by the condition that it must be sufficiently simple to be understood from a hint. Evidently, if there be any obscurity in the meaning or application of it, no economy of attention will be gained; but rather the reverse. Hence, when the comparison is complex, it is usual to have recourse to the Simile. There is, however, a species of figure, sometimes classed under Allegory, but which might, perhaps, be better called Compound Metaphor, that enables us to retain the brevity of the metaphorical form even where the analogy is intricate. This is done by indicating the application of the figure at the outset, and then leaving the mind to continue the parallel.[24] Emerson has employed it with great effect in the first of his "Lectures on the Times":—"The main interest which any aspects of the Times can have for us, is the great spirit which gazes through them, the light which they can shed on the wonderful questions, What are we, and Whither we tend? We do not wish to be deceived. Here we drift, like white sail across the wild ocean, now bright on the wave, now darkling in the trough of the sea; but from what port did we sail? Who knows? Or to what port are we bound? Who knows? There is no one to tell us but such poor weather-tossed mariners as ourselves, whom we speak as we pass, or who have hoisted some signal, or floated to us some letter in a bottle from far. But what know they more than we? They also found themselves on this wondrous sea. No; from the older sailors nothing. Over all their speaking trumpets the gray sea and the loud winds answer, Not in us; not in Time." . . .

vi. The Effect of Poetry Explained

52. . . . Poetry, we shall find, habitually adopts those symbols of thought, and those methods of using them, which instinct and analysis agree in choosing as most effective, and becomes poetry by virtue of doing this. On turning back to the various specimens that have been quoted, it will be seen that the direct or inverted form of sentence predominates in them; and that to a degree quite inadmissible in prose. And not only in the frequency, but in what is termed the violence of the inversions, will this distinction be remarked. In the abundant use of figures, again, we may recognize the same truth. Metaphors, similes, hyperboles, and personifications, are the poet's colours, which he has liberty to employ almost without limit. We characterize as "poetical" the prose which uses these appliances of language with any frequency, and condemn it as "over florid" or "affected" long before they occur with the profusion allowed in verse. Further, let it be remarked that in brevity—the other requisite of forcible expression which theory points out, and emotion spontaneously fulfils—poetical phraseology similarly differs from ordinary phraseology. Imperfect periods are frequent; elisions are perpetual; and many of the minor words, which would be deemed essential in prose, are dispensed with.

53. Thus poetry, regarded as a vehicle of thought, is especially impressive partly because it obeys all the laws of effective speech, and partly because in so doing it imitates the natural utterances of excitement. While the matter embodied is idealized emotion, the vehicle is the idealized language of emotion. As the musical composer catches the cadences in which our feelings of joy and sympathy, grief and despair, vent themselves, and out of these germs evolves melodies suggesting higher phases of these feelings;[25] so, the poet develops from the typical expressions in which men utter passion and sentiment, those choice forms of verbal combination in which concentrated passion and sentiment may be fitly presented.

54. There is one peculiarity of poetry conducing much to its effect—the peculiarity which is

[24]Not uncommon in Shakespeare, as, for example, the following from "Hamlet," IV., 2:—"But such officers do the king best service in the end: he keeps them, as an ape doth nuts, in the corner of his jaw; first mouth'd to be last swallowed." [F.N.S.]

[25]For Spencer's views on the relation of music to speech-tunes, see his essay on the "Origin and Function of Music" in "Essays, Scientific, Political, and Speculative"; his recent paper on the "Origin of Music" in *Mind* for October, 1890; the discussion by R. Wallaschek and J. McK. Cattell in *Mind* for July, 1891; and Chap. 21 of Gurney's "Power of Sound." [F.N.S.]

indeed usually thought its characteristic one—still remaining to be considered: we mean its rhythmical structure. This, improbable though it seems, will be found to come under the same generalization with the others. Like each of them, it is an idealization of the natural language of strong emotion, which is known to be more or less metrical if the emotion be not too violent; and like each of them it is an economy of the reader's or hearer's attention. In the peculiar tone and manner we adopt in uttering versified language, may be discerned its relationship to the feelings; and the pleasure which its measured movement gives us, is ascribable to the comparative ease with which words metrically arranged can be recognized.

55. This last position will scarcely be at once admitted; but a little explanation will show its reasonableness. For if, as we have seen, there is an expenditure of mental energy in the mere act of listening to verbal articulations, or in that silent repetition of them which goes on in reading[26]—if the perceptive faculties must be in active exercise to identify every syllable—then, any mode of so combining words as to present a regular recurrence of certain traits which the mind can anticipate, will diminish that strain upon the attention required by the total irregularity of prose.[27] Just as the body, in receiving a series of varying concussions, must keep the muscles ready to meet the most violent of them, as not knowing when such may come; so, the mind in receiving unarranged articulations, must keep its perceptives active enough to recognize the least easily caught sounds. And as, if the concussions recur in a definite order, the body may husband its forces by adjusting the resistance needful for each concussion; so, if the syllables be rhythmically arranged, the mind may economize its energies by anticipating the attention required for each syllable.

56. Far-fetched though this idea will perhaps be thought, a little introspection will countenance it. That we *do* take advantage of metrical language to adjust our perceptive faculties to the force of the expected articulations, is clear from the fact that we are balked by halting versification. Much as at the bottom of a flight of stairs, a step more or less than we counted upon gives us a shock; so, too, does a misplaced accent or a supernumerary syllable. In the one case, we *know* that there is an erroneous preadjustment; and we can scarcely doubt that there is one in the other. But if we habitually preadjust our perceptions to the measured movement of verse, the physical analogy above given renders it probable that by so doing we economize attention; and hence that metrical language is more effective than prose, because it enables us to do this.[28]

57. Were there space, it might be worth while to inquire whether the pleasure we take in rhyme, and also that which we take in euphony, are not partly ascribable to the same general cause.

[26]There has been much discussion over this point. See Bain, "Senses and Intellect," pp. 345, 353; Stricker, "Studien über die Sprachvorstellungen"; *Revue Philosophique*, Vol. 16, p. 405; Vol. 18, p. 685; and Vol. 19, p. 118. [F.N.S.]

[27]Good prose is far from being totally irregular. It has a large rhythm peculiar to itself which is difficult to define, but even with an untrained ear, easy to perceive. The day-laborer making his way through a newspaper article will often complain that "the writing doesn't run smooth." He means that the prose-rhythm is defective. Consult on this point, Saintsbury's "Specimens of English Prose Style," Introduction; Stevenson's essay on "Style in Literature," *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 47, p. 548; Ellis's "On the Physical Constituents of Accent and Emphasis" in Transactions of the English Philological Society for 1873–4, pp. 113–64. [F.N.S.]

[28]"What the rhythm of the dance is to our muscular energies, the rhythm of poetry and music is to the ear. Its main constituent as a pleasure is the regularity of its occurrence and the consequent possibility of relaxing our attention to the accentuation or the arrangement of chords. While syllables irregularly thrown together require a certain amount of jumping from point to point in the auditory perception, syllables placed in a regular order of short and long allow us to withdraw the attention from their accent and to expect a continuance of the same harmonious and easily followed succession. Many familiar facts concur to justify this explanation. In attempting for the first time to read a perfectly new metre, it is sometimes a few minutes before *we fall into the swing of it*, as we phrase it; that is, before our auditory apparatus accommodates itself to the new mode of recurrence,"—Grant Allen, "Physiological Æsthetics," p. 115.

"The members or clauses and the periods themselves should be neither truncated nor too long. If they are too short, they often make a hearer stumble; for if, while he is hurrying on to the completion of the measure or rhythm, of which he has a definite notion in his mind, he is suddenly pulled up by a pause on the part of the speaker, there will necessarily follow a sort of stumble in consequence of the sudden check."—Aristotle, "Rhetoric," III. 9, Welldon's Trans. [F.N.S.]

PART II
CAUSES OF FORCE IN LANGUAGE WHICH DEPEND UPON ECONOMY OF THE MENTAL SENSIBILITIES

iv. The Ideal Writer

67. This species of composition which the law of effect points out as the perfect one, is the one which high genius tends naturally to produce. As we found that the kinds of sentences which are theoretically best, are those generally employed by superior minds, and by inferior minds when excitement has raised them; so, we shall find that the ideal form for a poem, essay, or fiction, is that which the ideal writer would evolve spontaneously. One in whom the powers of expression fully responded to the state of feeling, would unconsciously use that variety in the mode of presenting his thoughts, which Art demands. This constant employment of one species of phraseology, which all have now to strive against, implies an undeveloped faculty of language. To have a specific style is to be poor in speech. If we remember that, in the far past, men had only nouns and verbs to convey their ideas with, and that from then to now the growth has been towards a greater number of implements of thought, and consequently towards a greater complexity and variety in their combinations; we may infer that we are now, in our use of sentences, much what the primitive man was in his use of words; and that a continuance of the process that has hitherto gone on, must produce increasing heterogeneity in our modes of expression. As now, in a fine nature, the play of the features, the tones of the voice and its cadences, vary in harmony with every thought uttered; so, in one possessed of a fully-developed power of speech, the mould in which each combination of words is cast will similarly vary with, and be appropriate to the sentiment.

68. That a perfectly-endowed man must unconsciously write in all styles, we may infer from considering how styles originate. Why is Johnson pompous, Goldsmith simple? Why is one author abrupt, another rhythmical, another concise? Evidently in each case the habitual mode of utterance must depend upon the habitual balance of the nature. The predominant feelings have by use trained the intellect to represent them. But while long, though unconscious, discipline has made it do this efficiently, it remains from lack of practice, incapable of doing the same for the less active feelings; and when these are excited, the usual verbal forms undergo but slight modifications. Let the powers of speech be fully developed, however — let the ability of the intellect to utter the emotions be complete; and this fixity of style will disappear. The perfect writer will express himself as Junius, when in the Junius frame of mind; when he feels as Lamb felt, will use a like familiar speech; and will fall into the ruggedness of Carlyle when in a Carlylean mood. Now he will be rhythmical and now irregular; here his language will be plain and there ornate; sometimes his sentences will be balanced and at other times unsymmetrical; for a while there will be considerable sameness, and then again great variety. His mode of expression naturally responding to his state of feeling, there will flow from his pen a composition changing to the same degree that the aspects of his subject change. He will thus without effort conform to what we have seen to be the laws of effect. And while his work presents to the reader that variety needful to prevent continuous exertion of the same faculties, it will also answer to the description of all highly-organized products, both of man and of nature: it will be not a series of like parts simply placed in juxtaposition, but one whole made up of unlike parts that are mutually dependent.[29]

[29]This is the fundamental principle with which, in the opinion of the editor, Mr. Spencer would have done well to open his essay. He would thus have brought his various exceptions, opposing rules, supplementary principles, and so forth, under one universal all-pervading law. [F.N.S.]