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Lecture XVIII. Figurative Language - General Characters of Style--Diffuse, Concise--Feeble, Nervous--Dry, Plain, Neat, Elegant, Flowery

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LECTURE XVIII.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE ---- GENERAL
CHARACTERS OF STYLE---DIFFUSE,
CONCISE---FEEBLE, NERVOUS---DRY,
PLAIN, NEAT, ELEGANT, FLOWERY.

HAVING treated, at considerable length, of LECT.
XVIII.
the Figures of Speech, of their origin, of
their nature, and of the management of
such of them as are important enough to
require a particular discussion, before finally
dismissing this subject, I think it incumbent
on me, to make some observations concern-
ing the proper use of Figurative Language
in general. These, indeed, I have, in part,
already anticipated. But, as great errors are often
committed in this part of Style, especially by
young writers, it may be of use that I bring
together, under one view, the most material
directions on this head.

I BEGIN with repeating an observation formerly
made, that neither all the beauties, nor even
the chief beauties of composition, depend upon

LECT. Tropes and Figures. Some of the most sublime
XVIII. and most pathetic passages of the most admired authors, both in prose and poetry, are expressed in the most simple Style, without any figure at all; instances of which I have before given. On the other hand, a composition may abound with these studied ornaments; the language may be artful, splendid, and highly figured, and yet the composition be on the whole frigid and unaffecting. Not to speak of sentiment and thought, which constitute the real and lasting merit of any work, if the style be stiff and affected, if it be deficient in perspicuity or precision, or in ease and neatness, all the Figures that can be employed will never render it agreeable: they may dazzle a vulgar, but will never please a judicious, eye.

IN the second place, Figures, in order to be beautiful, must always rise naturally from the subject. I have shown that all of them are the language either of imagination, or of Passion; some of them suggested by Imagination, when it is awakened and sprightly, such as Metaphors and Comparisons; others by Passion or more heated emotion, such as Personifications and Apostrophes. Of course they are beautiful then only, when they are prompted by fancy, or by passion. They must rise of their own accord; they must flow from a mind warmed by the object which it seeks to describe; we should never interrupt the course of thought to cast about for Figures. If they be sought after coolly,

and fastened on as designed ornaments, they will have a miserable effect. It is a very erroneous idea, which many have of the ornaments of Style, as if they were things detached from the subject, and that could be stuck to it, like lace upon a coat: this is indeed,

LECT.
XVIII.

Purpureus late qui splendeat unus aut alter

*Affluitur pannus * —*

ARS POET.

And it is this false idea which has often brought attention to the beauties of writing into dispute. Whereas, the real and proper ornaments of Style are wrought into the substance of it. They flow in the same stream with the current of thought. A writer of genius conceives his subject strongly; his imagination is filled and impressed with it, and pours itself forth in that Figurative Language which imagination naturally speaks. He puts on no emotion which his subject does not raise in him; he speaks as he feels; but his style will be beautiful, because his feelings are lively. On occasions, when fancy is languid, or finds nothing to rouse it, we should never attempt to hunt for figures. We then work, as it is said, "*invitâ Minervâ*;" supposing figures invented, they will have the appearance of being forced; and in this case, they had much better be wanted.

* "*Shreds of purple with broad lustre shine,*

"Sew'd on your poem."

FRANCIS.

LECT. XVIII. In the third place, even when Imagination prompts, and the subject naturally gives rise to Figures, they must, however, not be employed too frequently. In all beauty, "*simplex munditiis*," is a capital quality. Nothing derogates more from the weight and dignity of any composition, than too great attention to ornament. When the ornaments cost labour, that labour always appears; though they should cost us none, still the reader or hearer may be surfeited with them; and when they come too thick, they give the impression of a light and frothy genius, that evaporates in show, rather than brings forth what is solid. The directions of the ancient critics, on this head, are full of good sense, and deserve careful attention. "*Voluptatibus maximis*," says Cicero, *de Orat. L. iii.* "*fastidium finitimum est in rebus omnibus; quo hoc minus in oratione miremur.*" "In quâ vel ex poëtis, vel oratoribus possumus judicare, concinnam, ornatam, festivam sine intermissione, quamvis claris sit coloribus picta, vel poësis, vel oratio, non posse in delectatione esse diuturnâ. Quare, bene et præclare, quamvis nobis sæpe dicatur, belle et festive nimium sæpe nolo*." To the same purpose,

* "In all human things, disgust borders so nearly on the most lively pleasures, that we need not be surprized to find this hold in eloquence. From reading either poets or orators, we may easily satisfy ourselves, that neither a poem nor an oration, which, without intermission is showy and sparkling, can please us long. — Wherefore, though we may wish for the

are the excellent directions with which Quintilian concludes his discourse concerning Figures, L. ix. XVIII.
 C. 3. "Ego illud de iis figuris quæ vere fiunt,
 "adjiciam breviter, sicut ornant orationem oppor-
 "tunæ positæ, ita ineptissimas esse cum im-
 "modice petuntur. Sunt, qui neglecto rerum
 "pondere et viribus sententiarum, si vel inania
 "verba in hos modos depravarunt, summos se
 "judicant artifices; ideoque non desinunt eas
 "nectere; quas sine sententiâ sectare, tam est
 "ridiculum quam quærere habitum gestumque
 "sine corpore. Ne hæ quidem quæ rectæ fiunt,
 "densandæ sunt nimis. Sciendum imprimis quid
 "quisque postulet locus, quid persona, quid
 "tempus. Major enim pars harum figurarum
 "posita est in delectatione. Ubi verò, atrocitate,
 "invidiâ, miseratione pugnandum est; quis ferat
 "verbis contraposis, et consimilibus, et pariter
 "cadentibus, irascentem, flentem, rogantem?
 "Cum in his rebus, cura verborum deroget
 "affectibus fidem; et ubicunque ars ostentatur,
 "veritas abesse videatur*." After these judicious

"frequent praise of having expressed ourselves well and
 "properly, we should not cover repeated applause, for
 "being bright and splendid."

* "I must add, concerning those figures which are
 "proper in themselves, that as they beautify a composition
 "when they are seasonably introduced, so they deform it
 "greatly, if too frequently sought after. There are some,
 "who, neglecting strength of sentiment and weight of
 "matter, if they can only force their empty words into
 "a Figurative Style, imagine themselves great writers;

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LECT. XVIII, and useful observations, I have no more to add, on this subject, except this admonition.

IN the fourth place, that without a genius for Figurative Language, none should attempt it. Imagination is a power not to be acquired; it must be derived from nature. Its redundancies we may prune, its deviations we may correct, its sphere we may enlarge; but the faculty itself we cannot create: and all efforts towards a metaphorical ornamented style, if we are destitute of the proper genius for it, will prove awkward and disgusting. Let us satisfy ourselves, however, by considering, that without this talent, or at least with a very small measure of it, we may both write and speak to advantage. Good sense, clear ideas, perspicuity of language, and proper arrangement of words and thoughts, will always command attention. These are indeed the founda-

“ and therefore continually string together such ornaments;
 “ which is just as ridiculous, where there is no sentiment
 “ to support them, as to contrive gestures and dresses for
 “ what wants a body. Even those figures which a subject
 “ admits, must not come too thick. We must begin,
 “ with considering what the occasion, the time, and the
 “ person who speaks, render proper. For the object aimed
 “ at by the greater part of these figures, is entertainment.
 “ But when the subject becomes deeply serious and strong
 “ passions are to be moved, who can bear the orator,
 “ who, in affected language and balanced phrases, en-
 “ deavours to express wrath, commiseration, or earnest
 “ intreaty? On all such occasions, a solicitous attention to
 “ words weakens passion; and when so much art is
 “ shown, there is suspected to be little sincerity.”

GEN. CHARACTERS OF STYLE. 7

tions of all solid merit, both in speaking and writing. Many subjects require nothing more; and those which admit of ornament, admit it only as a secondary requisite. To study and to know our own genius well; to follow nature; to seek to improve, but not to force it, are directions which cannot be too often given to those who desire to excel in the liberal arts. LECT.
XVIII.

WHEN I entered on the consideration of Style, I observed that words being the copies of our ideas, there must always be a very intimate connection between the manner in which every writer employs words, and his manner of thinking; and that, from the peculiarity of thought and expression which belongs to him, there is a certain character imprinted on his Style, which may be denominated his manner; commonly expressed by such general terms, as strong, weak, dry, simple, affected, or the like. These distinctions carry, in general, some reference to an author's manner of thinking, but refer chiefly to his mode of expression. They arise from the whole tenour of his language; and comprehend the effect produced by all those parts of Style which we have already considered; the choice which he makes of single words; his arrangement of these in sentences; the degree of his precision; and his embellishment, by means of musical cadence, figures, or other arts of speech. Of such general Characters of Style, therefore, it remains now to speak, as the result of those underparts of which I have hitherto treated.

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LECT. XVIII. THAT different subjects require to be treated of in different sorts of Style, is a position so obvious, that I shall not stay to illustrate it. Every one sees that Treatises of Philosophy, for instance, ought not to be composed in the same style with orations. Every one sees also, that different parts of the same composition require a variation in the style and manner. In a sermon, for instance, or any harangue, the application or peroration admits more ornament, and requires more warmth, than the didactic part. But what I mean at present to remark is, that amidst this variety, we still expect to find, in the compositions of any one man, some degree of uniformity or consistency with himself in manner; we expect to find some predominant character of Style impressed on all his writings, which shall be suited to, and shall mark, his particular genius, and turn of mind. The orations in Livy differ much in Style, as they ought to do, from the rest of his history. The same is the case with those in Tacitus. Yet both in Livy's orations, and in those of Tacitus, we are able clearly to trace the distinguishing manner of each historian; the magnificent fulness of the one, and the sententious conciseness of the other. The "*Lettres Persanes*," and "*L'Esprit des Loix*," are the works of the same author. They required very different composition surely, and accordingly they differ widely; yet still we see the same hand. Wherever there is real and native genius, it gives a determination to one kind of Style rather than to

another. Where nothing of this appears ; where LECT,
XVIII. there is no marked nor peculiar character in the compositions of any author, we are apt to infer, not without reason, that he is a vulgar and trivial author , who writes from imitation , and not from the impulse of original genius. As the most celebrated painters are known by their hand, so the best and most original writers are known and distinguished, throughout all their works, by their Style and peculiar manner. This will be found to hold almost without exception.

THE ancient Critics attended to these general characters of Style which we are now to consider. Dionysius of Halicarnassus divides them into three kinds ; and calls them the Austere, the Florid , and the Middle. By the Austere , he means a Style distinguished for strength and firmness, with a neglect of smoothness and ornament ; for examples of which, he gives Pindar and Æschylus among the Poets, and Thucydides among the Prose writers. By the Florid , he means, as the name indicates, a Style ornamented, flowing, and sweet; resting more upon numbers and grace, than strength; he instances Hesiod, Sappho , Anacreon , Euripides , and principally Isocrates. The Middle kind is the just mean between these, and comprehends the beauties of both; in which class he places Homer and Sophocles among the Poets; in Prose, Herodotus, Demosthenes, Plato, and (what seems strange) Aristotle. This must be a very wide class indeed, which comprehends Plato and Aristotle under

LECT. one article as to Style*. Cicero and Quinctilian
 XVIII. make also a threefold division of Style, though with respect to different qualities of it; in which they are followed by most of the modern writers on Rhetoric; the *Simplex*, *Tenue*, or *Subtile*; the *Grave* or *Vehemens*; and the *Medium*, or, *Temperatum genus dicendi*. But these divisions, and the illustrations they give of them, are so loose and general, that they cannot advance us much in our ideas of Style. I shall endeavour to be a little more particular in what I have to say on this subject.

ONE of the first and most obvious distinctions of the different kinds of Style, is what arises from an author's spreading out his thoughts more or less. This distinction forms, what are called the Diffuse and the Concise Styles. A concise writer compresses his thought into the fewest possible words; he seeks to employ none but such as are most expressive; he lops off, as redundant, every expression which does not add something material to the sense. Ornament he does not reject; he may be lively and figured; but his ornament is intended for the sake of force, rather than grace. He never gives you the same thought twice. He places it in the light which appears to him the most striking; but if you do not apprehend it well in that light, you need not expect to find it in any other. His sentences are arranged with compactness and strength, rather

* De Compositione Verborum, Cap. 25.

than with cadence and harmony. The utmost precision is studied in them; and they are commonly designed to suggest more to the reader's imagination than they directly express. LECT. XVIII.

A DIFFUSE writer unfolds his thought fully. He places it in a variety of lights, and gives the reader every possible assistance for understanding it completely. He is not very careful to express it at first in its full strength; because he is to repeat the impression; and what he wants in strength, he proposes to supply by copiousness. Writers of this character generally love magnificence and amplification. Their periods naturally run out into some length, and having room for ornament of every kind, they admit it freely.

EACH of these manners has its peculiar advantages; and each becomes faulty when carried to the extreme. The extreme of conciseness becomes abrupt and obscure; it is apt also to lead into a Style too pointed, and bordering on the epigrammatic. The extreme diffuseness becomes weak and languid, and tires the reader. However, to one or other of these two manners, a writer may lean according as his genius prompts him: and under the general character of a concise, or of a more open and diffuse Style, may possess much beauty in his composition.

FOR illustrations of these general characters, I can only refer to the writers who are examples of them. It is not so much from detached passages, such as I was wont formerly to quote for instances, as from the current of an author's Style, that we

LECT. XVIII. are to collect the idea of a formed manner of writing. The two most remarkable examples that I know, of conciseness carried as far as propriety will allow, perhaps in some cases farther, are Tacitus the Historian, and the president Montesquieu in "*L'Esprit des Loix.*" Aristotle, too, holds an eminent rank among didactic writers for his brevity. Perhaps no writer in the world was ever so frugal of his words as Aristotle; but this frugality of expression frequently darkens his meaning. Of a beautiful and magnificent diffuseness, Cicero is, beyond doubt, the most illustrious instance that can be given. Addison also, and Sir William Temple, come in some degree under this class.

IN judging when it is proper to lean to the concise, and when to the diffuse manner; we must be directed by the nature of the Composition. Discourses that are to be spoken, require a more copious Style, than books that are to be read. When the whole meaning must be caught from the mouth of the speaker, without the advantage which books afford of pausing at pleasure, and reviewing what appears obscure, great conciseness is always to be avoided. We should never presume too much on the quickness of our hearer's understanding; but our Style ought to be such, that the bulk of men can go along with us easily, and without effort. A flowing copious Style, therefore, is required in all public speakers; guarding, at the same time, against such a degree of diffusion, as renders them languid and

tiresome ; which will always prove the case , when L E C T. they inculcate too much , and present the same XVIII. thought under too many different views.

IN written Compositions , a certain degree of conciseness possesses great advantages. It is more lively ; keeps up attention ; makes a brisker and stronger impression ; and gratifies the mind by supplying more exercise to a reader's own thought. A sentiment , which , expressed diffusely , will barely be admitted to be just , expressed concisely , will be admired as spirited. Description , when we want to have it vivid and animated , should be in a concise strain. This is different from the common opinion ; most persons being ready to suppose , that upon description a writer may dwell more safely than upon other things , and that by a full and extended Style , it is rendered more rich and expressive. I apprehend , on the contrary , that a diffuse manner generally weakens it. Any redundant words or circumstances encumber the fancy , and make the object we present to it , appear confused and indistinct. Accordingly , the most masterly describers , Homer , Tacitus , Milton , are almost always concise in their descriptions. They show us more of an object at one glance , than a feeble diffuse writer can show , by turning it round and round in a variety of lights. The strength and vivacity of description , whether in prose or poetry , depend much more upon the happy choice of one or two striking circumstances , than upon the multiplication of them.

LECT. ADDRESSES to the passions, likewise, ought
 XVIII. to be in the concise, rather than the diffuse manner. In these, it is dangerous to be diffuse, because it is very difficult to support proper warmth for any length of time. When we become prolix, we are always in hazard of cooling the reader. The heart, too, and the fancy run fast; and if once we can put them in motion, they supply many particulars to greater advantage than an author can display them. The case is different, when we address ourselves to the understanding; as in all matters of reasoning, explication, and instruction. There I would prefer a more free and diffuse manner. When you are to strike the fancy, or to move the heart, be concise; when you are to inform the understanding, which moves more slowly, and requires the assistance of a guide, it is better to be full. Historical narration may be beautiful, either in a concise or diffuse manner, according to the writer's genius. Livy and Herodotus are diffuse; Thucydides and Sallust are succinct; yet all of them agreeable.

I OBSERVED that a diffuse style inclines most to long periods; and a concise writer, it is certain, will often employ short sentences. It is not, however, to be inferred from this, that long or short sentences are fully characteristic of the one or the other manner. It is very possible for one to compose always in short sentences, and to be withal extremely diffuse, if a small measure of sentiment be spread through many of these sen-

tences. Seneca is a remarkable example. By the shortness and quaintness of his sentences, he may appear at first view very concise; yet he is far from being so. He transfigures the same thought into many different forms. He makes it pass for a new one, only by giving it a new turn. So also, most of the French writers compose in short sentences; though their style, in general, is not concise; commonly less so than the bulk of English writers, whose sentences are much longer. A French author breaks down into two or three sentences, that portion of thought which an English author crowds into one. The direct effect of short sentences, is to render the Style brisk and lively, but not always concise. By the quick successive impulses which they make on the mind, they keep it awake; and give to Composition more of a spirited character. Long periods, like Lord Clarendon's, are grave and stately, but, like all grave things, they are in hazard of becoming dull. An intermixture of both long and short ones is requisite, when we would support solemnity, together with vivacity; leaning more to the one or the other, according as propriety requires, that the solemn or the sprightly should be predominant in our composition. But of long and short sentences, I had occasion, formerly, to treat under the head of the construction of periods.

THE Nervous and the Feeble, are generally held to be characters of Style, of the same import with the Concise and the diffuse. They do indeed

L E C T.
XVIII.

LECT. very often coincide. Diffuse writers have for the
 XVIII. most part some degree of feebleness; and nervous
 writers will generally be inclined to a concise
 expression. This, however, does not always
 hold; and there are instances of writers, who,
 in the midst of a full and ample Style, have
 maintained a great degree of strength. Livy is an
 example; and in the English language, Dr.
 Barrow. Barrow's Style has many faults. It is
 unequal, incorrect and redundant; but withal,
 for force and expressiveness uncommonly dis-
 tinguished. On every subject, he multiplies words
 with an overflowing copiousness; but it is always
 a torrent of strong ideas and significant expres-
 sions which he pours forth. Indeed, the founda-
 tions of a nervous or a weak Style are laid in
 an author's manner of thinking. If he conceives
 an object strongly, he will express it with energy:
 but, if he has only an indistinct view of his
 subject; if his ideas be loose and wavering; if his
 genius be such, or, at the time of his writing,
 so carelessly exerted, that he has no firm hold
 of the conception which he would communicate
 to us; the marks of this will clearly appear in
 his Style. Several unmeaning words and loose
 epithets will be found; his expressions will be
 vague and general; his arrangement indistinct
 and feeble; we shall conceive somewhat of his
 meaning, but our conception will be faint.
 Whereas a nervous writer, whether he employs
 an extended or a concise Style, gives us always
 a strong impression of his meaning; his mind is
 full

full of his subject, and his words are all expressive; every phrase and every figure which he uses, tends to render the picture, which he would set before us, more lively and complete.

I OBSERVED, under the head of Diffuse and Concise Style, that an author might lean either to the one or to the other, and yet be beautiful. This is not the case with respect to the nervous and the feeble. Every author, in every composition, ought to study to express himself with some strength, and, in proportion, as he approaches to the feeble, he becomes a bad writer. In all kinds of writing, however, the same degree of strength is not demanded. But the more grave and weighty any composition is, the more should a character of strength predominate in the Style. Hence in history, philosophy, and solemn discourses, it is expected most. One of the most complete models of a nervous Style, is Demosthenes in his orations.

As every good quality in Style has an extreme, when pursued to which it becomes faulty, this holds of the Nervous Style as well as others. Too great a study of strength, to the neglect of the other qualities of Style, is found to betray writers into a harsh manner. Harshness arises from unusual words, from forced inversions in the construction of a Sentence, and too much neglect of smoothness and ease. This is reckoned the fault of some of our earliest classics in the English language; such as Sir Walter Raleigh, Sir Francis Bacon, Hooker, Chillingworth, Milton in his

LECT. XVIII. prose works, Harrington, Cudworth, and other writers of considerable note in the days of Queen Elizabeth, James I. and Charles I. These writers had nerves and strength in a high degree, and are to this day eminent for that quality in Style. But the language in their hands was exceedingly different from what it is now, and was, indeed, entirely formed upon the idiom and construction of the Latin, in the arrangement of Sentences. Hooker, for instance, begins the Preface to his celebrated work of Ecclesiastical Polity, with the following Sentence : “ Though for no other
 “ cause, yet for this, that posterity may know
 “ we have not loosely, through silence, permitted
 “ things to pass away as in dream, there shall
 “ be, for men’s information, extant this much,
 “ concerning the present state of the church of
 “ God established amongst us, and their careful
 “ endeavours which would have upheld the
 “ fame.” Such a sentence now sounds harsh in our ears. Yet some advantages certainly attended this sort of Style; and whether we have gained, or lost, upon the whole, by departing from it, may bear a question. By the freedom of arrangement, which it permitted, it rendered the Language susceptible of more strength, of more variety of collocation, and more harmony of period. But however this be, such a style is now obsolete; and no modern writer could adopt it without the censure of harshness and affectation. The present form which the Language has assumed, has, in some measure, sacrificed the

study of strength to that of perspicuity and ease. LECT. XVIII.
 Our arrangement of words has become less forcible, perhaps, but more plain and natural: and this is now understood to be the genius of our Language.

THE restoration of King Charles II. seems to be the æra of the formation of our present style. Lord Clarendon was one of the first who laid aside those frequent inversions which prevailed among writers of the former age. After him, Sir William Temple, polished the Language still more. But the author, who, by the number and reputation of his works, formed it more than any one, into its present state, is Dryden. Dryden began to write at the Restoration, and continued long an author both in poetry and prose. He had made the language his study; and though he wrote hastily, and often incorrectly, and his style is not free from faults, yet there is a richness in his diction, a copiousness, ease, and variety in his expression, which has not been surpassed by any who have come after him*. Since his time, considerable attention has been paid to

* Dr. Johnson, in his life of Dryden, gives the following character of his prose style: " His prefaces have not
 " the formality of a settled style; in which the first half
 " of the sentence betrays the other. The clauses are never
 " balanced, nor the periods modelled; every word seems
 " to drop by chance, though it falls into its proper place.
 " Nothing is cold or languid; the whole is airy, animated,
 " and vigorous; what is little, is gay; what is great
 " is splendid. Though all is easy, nothing is feeble;

LECT. Purity and Elegance of Style: But it is Elegance, XVIII. rather than Strength, that forms the distinguishing quality of most of the good English writers. Some of them compose in a more manly and nervous manner than others; but, whether it be from the genius of our Language, or from whatever other cause, it appears to me, that we are far from the strength of several of the Greek and Roman authors.

HITHERTO we have considered Style under those characters that respect its expressiveness of an author's meaning. Let us now proceed to consider it in another view, with respect to the degree of ornament employed to beautify it. Here, the Style of different authors seems to rise, in the following gradation: a Dry, a Plain, a Neat, an Elegant, a Flowery manner. Of each of these in their order.

FIRST, a Dry manner. This excludes all ornament of every kind. Content with being understood, it has not the least aim to please, either the fancy or the ear. This is tolerable only in pure didactic writing; and even there, to make us bear it, great weight and solidity of matter is requisite; and entire perspicuity of Language. Aristotle is the thorough example of a Dry Style. Never, perhaps, was there any author who adhered so rigidly to the strictness

“ though all seems careless, there is nothing harsh; and
 “ though since his earlier works, more than a century has
 “ passed, they have nothing yet uncouth or obsolete.”

of a didactic manner, throughout all his writings, and conveyed so much instruction without the least approach to ornament. With the most profound genius, and extensive views, he writes like a pure intelligence, who addresses himself solely to the understanding, without making any use of the channel of the imagination. But this is a manner which deserves not to be imitated. For, although the goodness of the matter may compensate the dryness or harshness of the Style, yet is that dryness a considerable defect; as it fatigues attention, and conveys our sentiments, with disadvantage, to the reader or hearer. LECT. XVIII.

A PLAIN Style rises one degree above a Dry one. A writer of this character, employs very little ornament of any kind, and rests, almost, entirely upon his sense. But, if he is at no pains to engage us by the employment of figures, musical arrangement, or any other art of writing, he studies, however, to avoid disgusting us like a dry and a harsh writer. Besides Perspicuity, he pursues Propriety, Purity, and Precision, in his Language; which form one degree, and no inconsiderable one, of beauty. Liveliness too, and force, may be consistent with a very Plain Style: and, therefore, such an author, if his sentiments be good, may be abundantly agreeable. The difference between a dry and plain writer, is, that the former is incapable of ornament, and seems not to know what it is; the latter seeks not after it. He gives us his meaning, in good language, distinct and pure; any further orna-

LECT. ment he gives himself no trouble about; either,
XVIII. because he thinks it unnecessary to his subject;
or, because his genius does not lead him to
delight in it; or, because it leads him to
despise it *.

THIS last was the case with Dean Swift, who
may be placed at the head of those that have
employed the Plain Style. Few writers have
discovered more capacity. He treats every subject
which he handles, whether serious or ludicrous,
in a masterly manner. He knew, almost, beyond
any man, the Purity, the Extent, the Precision
of the English Language; and, therefore, to such
as wish to attain a pure and correct Style, he is
one of the most useful models. But we must
not look for much ornament and grace in his
Language. His haughty and morose genius, made
him despise any embellishment of this kind as
beneath his dignity. He delivers his sentiments
in a plain, downright, positive manner, like
one who is sure he is in the right; and is very
indifferent whether you be pleased or not. His
sentences are commonly negligently arranged;
distinctly enough as to the sense; but, without

* On this head, of the General Characters of Style,
particularly, the Plain and the Simple, and the characters
of those English authors who are classed under them, in
this, and the following Lecture, several ideas have been
taken from a manuscript treatise on rhetoric, part of which
was shown to me, many years ago, by the learned and
ingenious author, Dr. Adam Smith; and which, it is
hoped, will be given by him to the Public.

any regard to smoothness of sound; often without much regard to compactness, or elegance. If a metaphor, or any other figure, chanced to render his satire more poignant, he would, perhaps, vouchsafe to adopt it, when it came in his way; but if it tended only to embellish and illustrate, he would rather throw it aside. Hence, in his serious pieces, his style often borders upon the dry and unpleasing, in his humorous ones, the plainness of his manner gives his wit a singular edge, and sets it off to the highest advantage. There is no froth, nor affectation in it; it flows without any studied preparation; and while he hardly appears to smile himself, he makes his reader laugh heartily. To a writer of such a genius as Dean Swift, the Plain Style was most admirably fitted. Among our philosophical writers, Mr. Locke comes under this class; perspicuous and pure, but almost without any ornament whatever. In works which admit, or require, ever so much ornament, there are parts where the plain manner ought to predominate. But we must remember, that when this is the character which a writer affects throughout his whole composition, great weight of matter, and great force of sentiment, are required, in order to keep up the reader's attention, and prevent him from tiring of the author.

WHAT is called a Neat Style comes next in order; and here we are got into the region of ornament; but that ornament not of the highest or most sparkling kind. A writer of this character

LECT. shows, that he does not despise the beauty of
XVIII. Language. It is an object of his attention. But his attention is shown in the choice of his words, and in a graceful collocation of them; rather than in any high efforts of imagination, or eloquence. His sentences are always clean, and free from the incumbrance of superfluous words; of a moderate length; rather inclining to brevity, than a swelling structure; closing with propriety; without any tails, or adjections dragging after the proper close. His cadence is varied; but not of the studied musical kind. His figures, if he uses any, are short and correct; rather than bold and glowing. Such a Style as this, may be attained by a writer who has no great powers of fancy or genius; by industry merely, and careful attention to the rules of writing; and it is a Style always agreeable. It imprints a character of moderate elevation on our composition, and carries a decent degree of ornament, which is not unsuitable to any subject whatever. A familiar letter, or a law paper, on the driest subject, may be written with neatness; and a sermon, or a philosophical treatise, in a Neat Style, will be read with pleasure.

An Elegant Style is a character, expressing a higher degree of ornament than a neat one; and, indeed, is the term usually applied to Style, when possessing all the virtues of ornament, without any of its excesses or defects. From what has been formerly delivered, it will easily be understood, that complete Elegance implies great perspicuity

and propriety; purity in the choice of words, and care and dexterity in their harmonious and happy arrangement. It implies, farther, the grace and beauty of Imagination spread over Style, as far as the subject admits it; and all the illustration which Figurative Language adds, when properly employed. In a word, an elegant writer is one who pleases the fancy and the ear, while he informs the understanding, and who gives us his ideas clothed with all the beauty of expression, but not over-charged with any of its misplaced finery. In this class, therefore, we place only the first rate writers in the Language; such as, Addison, Dryden, Pope, Temple, Bolingbroke, Atterbury, and a few more: writers who differ widely from one another in many of the attributes of Style, but whom we now class together, under the denomination of Elegant, as in the scale of Ornament, possessing nearly the same place.

WHEN the ornaments applied to Style, are too rich and gaudy in proportion to the subject; when they return upon us too fast, and strike us either with a dazzling lustre, or a false brilliancy, this forms what is called a Florid Style; a term commonly used to signify the excess of ornament. In a young composer this is very pardonable. Perhaps, it is even a promising symptom in young people, that their Style should incline to the Florid and Luxuriant: "*Volo se efferat in adoleſcente fecunditas,*" says Quinctilian, "*multum inde decoquent anni, multum ratio limabit, aliquid velut usu ipſo deteretur;*

LECT. "fit modo unde excidi possit quid et exculpi. —
 XVIII. "Audeat hæc ætas plura et inveniat et inventis
 "gaudeat; sint licet illa non satis interim sicca et
 "severa. Facile remedium est ubertatis: sterilia
 "nullo labore vincuntur*." But although the
 Florid Style may be allowed to youth, in their
 first essays, it must not receive the same indul-
 gence from writers of maturer years. It is to
 be expected, that judgment, as it ripens, should
 chasten imagination, and reject, as juvenile, all
 such ornaments as are redundant, unsuitable to
 the subject, or not conducive to illustrate it.
 Nothing can be more contemptible than that tin-
 sel splendour of Language, which some writers
 perpetually affect. It were well, if this could be
 ascribed to the real overflowing of a rich imagin-
 ation. We should then have something to amuse
 us, at least, if we found little to instruct us.
 But the worst is, that with those frothy writers,
 it is a luxuriancy of words, not of fancy. We
 see a laboured attempt to rise to a splendour of
 composition, of which they have formed to them-

* "In youth, I wish to see luxuriancy of fancy appear.
 "Much of it will be diminished by years; much will be
 "corrected by ripening judgment; some of it, by the
 "mere practice of composition, will be worn away. Let
 "there be only sufficient matter, at first, that can bear
 "some pruning and lopping off. At this time of life, let
 "genius be bold and inventive, and pride itself in its
 "efforts, though these should not, as yet be correct.
 "Luxuriancy can easily be cured; but for barrenness
 "there is no remedy."

felves some loose idea; but having no strength of genius for attaining it, they endeavour to supply the defect by poetical words, by cold exclamations by, common-place figures, and every thing that has the appearance of pomp and magnificence. It has escaped these writers, that sobriety in ornament, is one great secret for rendering it pleasing; and that, without a foundation of good sense and solid thought, the most Florid Style is but a childish imposition on the Public. The Public, however, are but too apt to be so imposed on; at least, the mob of Readers, who are very ready to be caught, at first, with whatever is dazzling and gaudy.

I CANNOT help thinking, that it reflects more honour on the religious turn, and good dispositions of the present age, than on the public taste, that Mr. Hervey's Meditations have had so great a currency. The pious and benevolent heart, which is always displayed in them, and the lively fancy which, on some occasions, appears, justly merited applause: but the perpetual glitter of expression, the swollen imagery, and strained description which abound in them, are ornaments of a false kind. I would, therefore, advise students of oratory to imitate Mr. Hervey's piety, rather than his Style; and, in all compositions of a serious kind, to turn their attention, as Mr. Pope says, "from sounds to things, from fancy to the heart." Admonitions of this kind, I have already had occasion to give, and may hereafter repeat them; as I conceive nothing more incum-

LECT. bent on me in this course of lectures, than to
XVIII. take every opportunity of cautioning my Readers against the affected and frivolous use of ornament; and, instead of that slight and superficial taste in writing, which I apprehend to be at present too fashionable, to introduce, as far as my endeavours can avail, a taste for more solid thought, and more manly simplicity in Style.