

in the hands of bandits and of vessels which were being fired upon "almost daily" in the Upper Yangtze. Even granting, for argument's sake, that the situation is as bad as Mr. Woodhead would have his readers believe, we are still at a loss to see any connection between this and the abolition of extraterritoriality. Certainly Mr. Woodhead, the ablest of die-hard apologists, is better informed than to fancy, even for a moment, that extraterritoriality will ensure his compatriots in China against bandits and the irregular firing of the Communist bands. In this connection, we would like to recommend the following passage from Mr. Thomas F. Milliard's book entitled "China: Where It Is Today and Why" (P.95) to Mr. Woodhead and his co-workers. It reads:

One ought to comprehend what extraterritoriality includes. I have often been impressed with the vague understanding of that among foreigners who live in China. After listening for many years to comments of those foreigners on this topic, I think that most of them have little comprehension of what extraterritorial status is and what it actually does for them. They believe it protects them in ways it really does not, and consequently they have apprehensions regarding its abolition which are exaggerated or wholly unjustified.

In truth, extraterritoriality does little more than guard (in the sense of putting them under the law and administration of their home governments) the persons of foreigners. Presumably it assures them a fair trial if they get into court and humane punishment if they are convicted. Most foreigners feel safer under extraterritoriality because they know something of the laws of their home countries and therefore are less liable to infract them unwittingly or to make mistakes about the legality of business transaction. The foregoing applies to people who try and want to observe the law; the "shady" elements among foreigners in China sometimes would like to be exempt from home authority, and some go to China to escape it.

After having refuted all that is worth refuting, the writer cannot help wondering why our British friends should be so fussy and so embittered over a little, commonplace statement made by the Chinese Minister for Foreign Affairs. Was it really because that they had acquired, as has sometimes been suggested, the so-called "extrality inferiority" so that every mention of the word "extrality" would cause a flurry among them? If such were the case, there is clear indication that our die-hard friends have at last come to the realization that extraterritoriality must go sooner or later although they are fully determined to fight to the last man before they will give it up. Here is something certainly pathetic. But, as Dr. C. T. Wang has well said, "it will be a wiser course for the few remaining nations to agree to the abolition of extraterritoriality now than to await its natural death a couple of years later—for, then, it will mean nothing to China."

THE LITTLE CRITIC

EDITED BY LIN YUTANG

"HOW to write English" is no new topic. The subject has been rendered tiresome, as most subjects have been rendered tiresome, by that class of college professors who always think it their duty to teach grandmothers how to suck eggs. As I understand it, such courses generally include the following divisions: How to make an outline, the Choice of Words, Your Paragraph Must Be Clear, Your Paragraph Must Have Unity, Choose an Appropriate Theme, and other such sophomoric wisdom. As a matter of fact, these college professors invariably violate the very first principle of writing: they never express their thoughts clearly. Instead of writing a book, they should have written a letter to the publisher, and say plainly what they want, as follows:—

Dear Sir.—Will you help me out in a little financial difficulty? My wife has been in hospital for three months, and there are doctors' bills and washing bills and the milkman's bills to pay. You know what that means. A little loan will be greatly appreciated. I appeal to you as a father of children and as a husband. I thought of writing a book, but inspiration fails me just for the moment, and I thought it would be more decent to delay writing until the Spirit moves.

Yours in time of need, etc.

That would be what I call a clear and lucid style.

Now, the trouble with these fellows is that they either say what everybody already knows, or that they make the art of writing appear unnecessarily difficult and awe-inspiring. And that, again, violates another fundamental of good writing, which is, to have great respect for your readers, (see Principle 3 below). All these violations of the first principles of good writing explain why these authors are tiresome and why they remain sophomoric. I have been recently so moved by their tedium that I wish to say something on this subject, but, being an honest man, I can put it all into an article, instead of expanding it into a book, which will violate my Principle 6 below, which is, to stop when you are tired.

Of course, I should make it clear that I am speaking of true writing, as distinguished from editing or making a scientific or business report. I am speaking of writing as an author's art, and not writing as a commercial clerk's job. These principles hold good from the dashing off of an occasional article to the writing of a long novel, but they apply especially to the former. Now both are very simple, although both suppose the writers' gift, which cannot be taught in any case. William Lyon Phelps shows his wisdom by brushing all sophomoric discussions on the novel technique aside, and defining a good novel as simply "a good story well told." I don't see how any one can

improve upon that dictum. Another professor of literature defines literature simply as "genuine feelings and thoughts beautifully expressed." Members of the literary profession may feel offended, but, the art of authorship is really as simple as that. There are no great mysteries about literature.

Granted that the man has the writer's gift, which, as I say, cannot be taught (though it can be cultivated), and which therefore need not be brought into the discussion, there are certain points of good manners in writing, which can often save a writer from becoming a bore. They are six in number, as far as I can think of now.

1. *The writer must be expressed.*—An experienced diplomat always coughs and lies: that is his profession. A writer shouldn't do so. The modest cough may be very appropriate for the politician's speech, but the modest cough can be disastrous to a writer, who must, in the first place, be an honest man. If he must lie, let him lie honestly, and without any false cough. He must not be afraid of his own opinions. A great American politician, when asked recently about his opinion on a big political issue, replied, "My opinion is that of the average American." That was all very well for a politician who wanted to keep his job, but it would be a damning admission for a writer, if true, and extremely bad manners, if false. When a writer's opinion is that of the average American, he should stop writing. For the writer must express himself. Says the diplomat, "The moon is round, if I may quote my honourable colleague, the Minister from Portugal, Don Ferdinando Venezuela." If Don Ferdinando Venezuela protests that he has been mis-quoted and takes a slight offence at it, the diplomat should hasten to extend his apologies and correct himself with a modest cough, "I beg His Excellency's pardon. Of course I meant to say the moon is square. It was just a slip of my memory. And I fully concur in His Excellency's opinion." A writer cannot allow himself such large liberties with the shape of the moon; he must say, "The moon is round, and looks scarlet to me, too. Take it or leave it: this is honestly what I think."

It is astonishing how much political blunder and human suffering could be avoided if this first principle of writing could be brought into the sphere of politics also, and there were less coughing and lying on this earth. The last civil war with its casualties of nearly twenty million in wounded and killed, and pure waste of two hundred million dollars could be avoided, or at least its issues made clearer, if Generals Yen and Feng and Mr. Chiang would say honestly what they meant, instead of holding a public debate on the duties of a revolutionist and the importance of unity for China as the alarums and flourishes preparatory to the roaring of machine-guns and heavy artillery. Yen Hsi-shan should have sent the following telegram to Chiang:—

"Dear Fellow.—I am tired of staying in Shansi for eighteen years, and should welcome a change. Now,

you have been sitting in Nanking for too long. Would you mind changing with me? Feed. Sincerely, Yen."

To which Mr. Chiang should have replied.—

"Dear Big Brother Yen. Don't be silly. I honestly think you are mistaken. I can't exchange these positions of public trust like private gifts. But if you want a change of air, or wish to add more titles to your funeral notice, why, I am sure I can arrange it to your satisfaction, with the public's consent. You know the people hate war like the dickens, and would willingly pay you a million a month just to stop it, if you will just say so. It would be more economical. Let me know what you think of this proposition. White. Sincerely, Chiang."

And Feng You-shan't should have addressed the following to Chiang.—

"Dear Comrade.—I have no rice for my soldiers in this famine-stricken Northwest. You don't expect me to feed them out of air, do you? If you don't give it to me, I shall have to fight for it. I believe some such arrangement can be made for my soldiers without coming to arms. You know I don't like fighting against you. River. Sincerely, Feng."

And Mr. Chiang would reply.—

"Many thanks for your taking me into your confidence. I hate civil wars more than you, and have as much respect for you as a fighter as you have for me. I will give you rice. Come over to Nanking one of these days, and let us have a talk. Or shall I send my personal aeroplane for your purpose? Fish. Sincerely, Chiang."

Then Marshal Chang of Manchuria, seeing the "river telegram" and "fish telegram," should issue some such public statement.—

"Look here! He don't like fighting against he, and he don't like fighting against he. Well, nobody fight against nobody. That's much better. Clever. Chang." By this time, the political atmosphere would have been so clarified through the plain speaking and through discussions in the newspapers that no war would have been precipitated. Street quarrels are often patched up in this manner; it is a pity that political quarrels and international bickerings can't be.

2. *The reader must be impressed.*—He likes it. Talk of something he doesn't know. If you are talking about a fishing trip, bring in a good many words beyond his comprehension, like flounder, flat-fish, carabou (land animal, please), the Newfoundland mussels, the gunwale, the patchway, leaway, alongside, etc. It creates confidence in you. If you are giving a jaw on dwarfs and giants, be sure to mention the thyroid and the pituitary glands. (In general, words, beginning with a thy- or a



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ps- are very impressive). After the reader is properly awed and subdued you can do what you like, for he is willing to put up with a lot of nonsense. Of course, a corollary is that you must know what you are talking about, but that is understood. So much also depends on the kind of readers you have. If you are debating with a Seventh-Day Adventist or a Baptist, be sure to quote prolifically from the Bible, and more from the Old Testament than from the New, and more from Zachariah than from Exodus. After all, no Seventh-Day Adventist can repeat Zachariah the way he can repeat Exodus, and it is good for an Atheist to humiliate him in his field. As a matter of fact, it generally happens that an Atheist knows the articles of the Roman Catholic Church better than a criminal lawyer knows the articles of his criminal code, and he can repeat the Creed of Athanasius backwards which the Protestant Baptist can't.

The point is, you must talk about something the reader has respect for, and at the same time, beat him on his own ground. If you are talking with your uncle who is the owner of a native money-shop, don't talk to him about Kant and Goethe, but mention your friend the brother-in-law of the Tobacco Tax Bureau chief. He will respect you. And talking to your Tobacco Tax Bureau chief, tell him when you met H. H. Kung or T. V. Soong in a public dinner, and how they dressed. To convince him, say that Dr. H. H. Kung has a moustache, but T. V. Soong hasn't. By the way, your wife is the class-mate of the wife of the class-mate of the minister, isn't she? You could already hear the Tobacco Tax Bureau chief order the boy to open a bottle of champagne for you. The same psychology holds with regard to writing. Writing for the average bourgeoisie, and wishing to convince them about the benefits of the romanization of the Chinese language, do not argue about consonants and vowels, but say Ministerial Order this and Ministerial Order that. You will always impress, and you will never bore.

3. *Think a great deal of your reader.*—Neglect of this rule is the commonest offence of the great class of tiresome authors. Don't say what is obvious, what is a commonplace, what every reader already knows or what everybody agrees on. I once read a volume of collected essays of one of my friends who is a college professor. The fellow is an educationalist and a sociologist, very unhappy lines, scholastically, in my opinion. His tedium was so impressive that I made a collection of the first sentences of his paragraphs, which read as follows:—

"Education is that process by which human beings acquire knowledge."

"Marriage, in my opinion, is the union of two sexes."
"China is the biggest country in Asia. She has 400,000,000 people."

"Young men ought to study and not bother with politics."

"Europe has Christianity as China has Confucianism."

"Drinking and smoking are bad habits."

And I could add.—

"Oatmeal must be taken with milk and sugar."

Now the trouble with these writers is that they have too little respect for their readers. After all, nobody likes to be treated as small children. As is said by one of Bernard Shaw's characters (was it the flower-girl of *Pygmalion*?), "The difference between an ordinary woman and a lady is not how she behaves, but how she is treated." Every reader likes to be thought to know a great deal, as every woman likes to be treated as a lady. When you talk of the chemical composition of the tear gas, preface it by the remark, "Of course you know," and make the reader feel elevated. You make him feel like a chemist, and very soon he feels he is something of a chemist. These things make for culture. It is one of the important points in the good manners of writing. Stop short of the obvious and very soon he will like you. Tell a joke, but don't explain the point. Use some Latin phrases like *ad hoc* without any explanation, and he feels as happy as an aristocrat. Pretend that your reader knows, while you know that he doesn't, and leave a great deal to his imagination, while very likely he hasn't any. Nothing is so soul-uplifting as to be assumed to understand a subject of which one has only hazy notions. One becomes a scholar pretty soon, if steeped in such an atmosphere.

4. *Feel happy while you write, with the help of a cigarette, if necessary.*—No one can be convincing when he is unhappy himself. Nobody likes a sour writer and no one likes a writer who wants to "talk down to" people. The words must bubble and overflow from the fullness of your heart. Unless the words flow naturally, you feel miserable, and will as surely make your reader feel miserable with you. A cigarette or a brisk morning walk will often help to tap the flow of words. And nothing more quickly cures a sour mood than sticking a pipe between your teeth, for no one has ever seen a man with a pipe in his mouth wearing a sour face. Housewives seeing their husbands about to fly into a fit of temper should stick the pipe in their mouths, and watch the sulky expression on their faces disappear as the mist dissolves before the morning sun.

5. *Do as the Spirit moves you.*—This makes all the difference between good writing and a Ph.D. dissertation. If the doctorate dissertations are so uniformly badly written, the reasons must be that the Spirit never moves the candidates and somebody must have been responsible for the atrocious tradition of making a spiritless, beggar's outline. The outlines of the Ph. D. dissertations and the Foochow Road handbooks are alarmingly similar. A Ph. D. dissertation generally progresses like this:—

- I. X in Its Relation to the Individual.
- II. X in Its Relation to the Social Community.
- III. X in Its Relation to the State.
- IV. X. in Its Relation to the Universe.

"X" may stand for "Extraterritoriality" or for the "Chinese Rotten Egg." It makes no difference. Follow the scheme, and the Ph. D. is yours already.

A Foochow Road dissertation goes like this:—

- I. Chinese Boxing Historically Considered.
- II. Chinese Boxing Geographically Considered.
- III. Chinese Boxing Nationally Considered.
- IV. Chinese Boxing Internationally Considered.
- V. Chinese Boxing Physically Considered.
- VI. Chinese Boxing Morally Considered.
- VII. Chinese Boxing Intellectually Considered.
- VIII. Chinese Boxing Spiritually Considered.
- IX. Chinese Boxing Financially Considered.
- X. Chinese Boxing Socially Considered.

When you look at these outlines, it is clear that the Spirit never moves their authors; they belong to the order of made-to-order stuff. At least, I can't believe that the Spirit moves them equally in speaking of "Chinese Boxing Internationally Considered" as in "Chinese Boxing Spiritually Considered." For this reason, the same hack writer can compile a large number of World Self-Study Manuals, all of them equally good, as follows:—

- The World Self-Study Manual of Boxing.
- The World Self-Study Manual of Sanmin Doctrine.
- The World Self-Study Manual of Hygiene.
- The World Self-Study Manual of First Aid.
- The World Self-Study Manual of Fishing.
- The World Self-Study Manual of Gardening.
- The World Self-Study Manual of Dentistry.
- The World Self-Study Manual of Courtship.
- The World Self-Study Manual of Motherhood, etc., etc.

All these PHoochow-road dissertations always remind me of the Y.M.C.A. red triangle. It would be well, indeed if life could be cut up into those three convenient and water-tight departments; physical, moral and intellectual.

6. *Stop when you are tired.*—This is really a corollary that follows naturally from the preceding rule. It is better to leave off without a conclusion at all than to have a bad conclusion. Should your writing turn out to be a masterpiece, future literary critics will marvel at your consummate art in making such an abrupt ending, and compare it to an abrupt precipice that stands magnificently overlooking a ten-thousand-foot ravine. It is, in literary critical phraseology, a magnificent torso, like the Venus with the broken arm, all the more precious because of its incomplete state. It was left to Chang Shih-tsai, (章實齋) the brilliant literary critic of the Tsing Dynasty, to expose the fallacies of the Chinese conventional essay, and arrive at a true appreciation of the "creative moment" in literature. All true creative writing has an inner form of its own; the form is inherently determined by the intricacies of our thoughts, as the brook's meanderings are determined by the natural topography of the country. Any effort to adhere to conventional form can only transform the brook into a canal, the canal which carries the butcher, the baker and the candle-stick maker all swiftly and safely into the Ph. D. haven.

L. Y.