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ENGLISH ACADEMY

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH IN THE WORLD OF COMMERCE AND LITERATURE

A. RODGER MARTIN

FOR many years, as you have heard, I was Chairman of the Automobile Association of South Africa. During that time it was (as it still is) the good fortune of the A.A. to have as its Secretary-General, Mr. A. F. Trew — a man as much interested in "business" English as I have been all my life. It is your misfortune that Mr. Trew, who might otherwise have prepared this paper, is overseas, and so the lot has fallen to me — although I am not, and never have been, engaged in any branch of Commerce or Industry. All that justifies my being here today is that, during my chairmanship of the A.A. I constantly tried to promote in it the use of better English.

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English as a World Language

I need not, I think, spend much time arguing that English is, to quote the Encyclopedia Americana, "the predominant language of international commerce" — nor, indeed, is it part of my task to do so — but here, briefly, are some pertinent facts:

The population of the world today is about three thousand million — an American would say "three billion" — and they speak nearly three thousand languages. English is the first language of nearly one-tenth of all people — roughly two-hundred and seventy-five million — and is understood by about two-hundred and fifty million more.

It is by far the most widely used second language in the world today. It has been estimated that more than half the literate population of the world either speak English as a first or second language, or use it as an indispensable instrument for vocational purposes, or have studied it, or are studying it.

Does that sound rather vague? Here are some more precise figures:

Mr. A. Rodger Martin, a prominent Johannesburg professional man has for many years been associated with the A.A.

In its publication **Scientific and Technical Translating and Other Aspects of the Language Problem** (1958 edition) Unesco states that of "one thousand journals picked at random from the great **World List of Scientific Periodicals** which covers over fifty thousand titles altogether . . . the proportion in English is over one-half for engineering and manufacturing . . ."

English is taught as a school subject in most countries — including the U.S.S.R. where, it is said, about ten million children are learning it. In some countries English is the only foreign language taught in the schools.

The huge Philips organisation (of Holland) recently decreed that its staff throughout the world are to learn and use English. They state that English is the language used in more than 50 per cent of all newspapers throughout the world; 60 per cent of all broadcasts; 70 per cent of all periodicals; and 80 per cent of all correspondence.

The production of technical publications in English is not limited to English-speaking peoples. It also occurs in parts of Asia and in some smaller countries whose home languages are little known elsewhere — Sweden and the Netherlands are examples.

Mr. Nehru recently stressed the importance of English to commerce and industry when he said that English was important to India "because it is a major window to the modern world for us. If we close it," he added, "it is at the peril of our future."

It is said that Russia today has more first-class teachers of English than has Britain herself.

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Gobbledygook

This list of dull but telling facts could be many pages long, but I am sure we can agree without more ado that English is vitally important to the commerce and industry of the world. From this it follows that we whose mother-tongue it is have a special duty to speak it and write it as well as we possibly can.

I recall the experience of an acquaintance who was crossing from the United States to the United Kingdom in an American cargo ship — let us call her the **Warbler** — that carried a dozen or so passen-

gers. That Captain, a Brooklyn boy, bubbled with enthusiasm for his employers, his ship, his Echo-sounder, his Radar, and his job, and he was determined his passengers should enjoy, with gusto to equal his own, every thrill he could find for them.

A few days out he summoned them all to the bridge to share his delight in his newest darling, the radio telephone, on which he was about to call the Captain of the **Mocking Bird,** another ship of his line, which was just coming into range.

With his passengers suitably grouped about him he called — "Hallo, **Marking Boid,** hallo, **Marking Boid,** dis de **Woibler** — Cap. Elmer Q. Wheeler carling **Marking Boid.** Carm in please."

Mocking Bird answered at once.

"Halloi **Voibler,** halloi, **Voibler,** here is **Markink Boid** — Captain Hymie Goldboig — carlink **Voibler.** Vat you vant, Veeler, hmm?"

Before he went on with his call Captain Wheeler turned to his awe-struck passengers:

"Jeez," he said, "dat guy sure can moider de King's English!"

Before I go on to discuss briefly how we should avoid "moidering de King's English" (and, indeed, how we should foster it) I must emphasize that I shall be talking not of general usage but of the particular usage most appropriate in business. There is a great deal of difference between the way in which I use this knife to sharpen a pencil and that in which a sculptor would use it to create a beautiful wooden figure. Similarly there is much difference between what is sometimes called "business" English on the one hand and "creative" English on the other. But the tool is the same and it will do both jobs better if it is sharp and strong.

I suppose the biggest difference between good business English and good creative English is that the skilful creative writer enlists his reader as an ally and, by enticing him to use his own imagination, heightens both the reader's enjoyment, and his understanding of the writer's thoughts. In business English, on the other hand, it is usually unwise to leave anything important to the imagination of the reader. We must write as craftsmen, not as artists, and do all we can to ensure that even thick-witted readers should be able to understand us clearly, quickly, and fully.

It is seldom easy to be certain of doing that: it is often impossible unless we make a constant effort to be clear, accurate and concise. Gobbledygook (the English language is indebted to an American Congressman, Mr. Maury Maverick, of Texas, — of course — for this welcome word) — Gobbledygook is too much with us and we have to be ceaselessly alert if we are not to be corrupted willy-nilly by its flabby, gutless, inaccurate, verbiage, which in business engulfs us daily, and oozes from much of the Press. I spoke of English as being a tool. It is, and, like other tools, it deserves to be kept sharp and clean and worthy of the skill of the craftsman. But it seems nowadays that many of us, when we sit down to write, take as our motto:

Give us the job and we will finish the tool.

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Keeping our words sharp

Let us, then, agree that good business English is clear, accurate, concise, economical, and appropriate. Such English will be most effective in achieving our workaday business aims of giving information or instructions, eliciting information, or persuading. And if it is clear, accurate and concise, it can hardly fail to be simple — it may even find it has had a bonus added to it: charm.

On the need to be clear let me quote Prof. J. Y. T. Greig who, writing in a Johannesburg newspaper, **The Star,** said of business men and public servants :

> **I daresay most of us have heard them say that they have no time to waste when dictating. A pretty example of egoism! What about the men who have to read the letters and reports? Are they not short of time too? Must they struggle through verbiage in search of what the writer means? The waste of time each week in writing and reading prolix communications must be enormous . . .**

Professor Greig hits hard. No doubt he felt that to take a feather duster to the people he was writing about would do nothing to scale off their rust. Indeed an especial difficulty in trying to enlighten those who habitually debase English is that their very disregard of the value and meaning of words prevents our words — however forceful and well-chosen they may be — from leaving a clear imprint. You cannot carve a sharp image on a spoonful of mealie-meal.

Difficult to impress, too, are those who believe that if English is grammatically correct it cannot but be good English. Even those who know that that is nonsense, and who do recognise other faults, all too often excuse sloppy English in their business writing on the grounds that "I have no time to waste . . ." and "Oh, well, he'll know what I mean . . ." Yet these selfsame people would feel that they exposed themselves to ridicule if they allowed a grammatical mistake to escape them.

The "no-time-to-wasters" and "know-what-I-meaners" often have enough grace to excuse themselves shamefacedly. To attribute their manners to egoism may be too harsh. I doubt if their manners convict them of egoism any more than the pompo-

sity of **such is not the case** to mean **that is not so** convicts its perpetrators of pomposity. No. Faults such as these, when they are not caused by ignorance, must usually be put down, I believe, to laziness — not to egoism or pomposity.

I call it laziness because, if we take the trouble for a mere few weeks to be especially on our guard when dictating or writing, we shall find most of those circumlocutions and clichés and verbosities, which had become second nature to us, no longer even entering our heads. And virtue will beget virtue. In his preface to the A.A. Standard Letter Book, about which I shall have more to say, Mr. Trew notes this. He writes —

> **An acknowledged authority, Professor J. Y. T. Greig . . . edited the letters, which are fine examples of really good modern English. At first his style may seem strange — because he has broken clean away from the all-too-familiar and woolly jargon of commercial English — but readers of these letters will soon find that it is infectious.**

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, (although he was speaking of creative writing his words are equally apposite to business writing) said:

> **All reading demands an effort. The energy, the goodwill which a reader brings to the book** (or, may I say? letter) **is, and must be, partly expended in the labour of reading, marking, learning, inwardly digesting what the author means. The more difficulties, then, we authors obtrude on him by obscure or careless writing, the more we blunt the edge of his attention: so that if only in our own interests — though I had rather keep it on the ground of courtesy — we should study to anticipate his comfort.**

One more word on clarity: Last November Viscount Cobham, Governor-General of New Zealand, said —

> **Sloppiness in writing means sloppiness in thinking. Words are precision instruments to the same extent as figures. If you learn to use them well you will increase not only your enjoyment, but also your value. In business alone lack of clarity in speech and letters must cost the world many millions of pounds a year.**

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Woolly writing in the Press

On need for accuracy and precision I shall say little because these qualities are so interwoven with clarity that often they are inseparable. Here is a pleasing example (found in one of our daily papers last month) in which lack of accuracy produces, as it happens, little lack of clarity.)

Under the heading **Robot gives Doctors the Answer,** we read —

> **In the not too distant future, patients' symptoms will be fed into an electronic brain. The doctor will then push a button and receive a clear diagnosis . . .**

Next time I have a tummy-ache I shall have difficulty in restraining myself from taking it to the doctor to see him put it in an electronic brain. Which part of an electronic brain does one put a tummy-ache in? Has it an electronic stomach? If not, an ache put in the brain presumably becomes a headache. Will it really give a clear diagnosis when it has a headache?

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With conciseness one may couple economy.

When we decide to spend tens of thousands of rands on persuading our fellow men that we have something good for them we are usually wise enough to see that our message — our **slogan,** as we say, — is not only clear, but concise. We flash from the apartment-house tops —

> Every Picture Tells a Story . . .
> It beats, as it sweeps, as it cleans . . .
> Prevents that Sinking Feeling . . .

Those are concise and economical statements — and accurate too, I dare say, (although accuracy is the last quality that some other advertisers can afford.)

Most of such slogans are used with a picture because advertising men know how much a picture can help to persuade. But we are concerned not with pictures but with words, indeed with using words in circumstances where we cannot use paintings or drawings or sculptures or photographs. The eye can in a twinkling take in the whole of a picture; the mind can comprehend it. But with words that is not so. (Should I have said, "In the case of words such is by no means the state of the case?") The listener hears words one by one, the reader sees them in groups of at most five or six, and from this dribble of pieces of, as it were, a jig-saw puzzle, the listener or reader must build up quickly and accurately the clear picture you want him to see. The fewer the pieces of the puzzle, and the more accurately each is shaped, the faster will the picture be composed.

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Appropriate English

It is difficult — I suppose it is impossible — to say which of the virtues of business English is the most important (which is the most important leg of a three-legged stool?) so, though I come to appropriateness last, it is not that it is least.

In another of his articles in **The Star** Professor Greig told of the correspondence that passed between the Federal Bureau of Standards, of the United States, and a plumber. The plumber wrote to ask the Bureau if he was right to use hydrochloric acid to clear blocked drains. Even so ingenuous a question did not prompt the Bureau's officials to word their answer very simply. They replied —

> **The efficacy of hydrochloric acid is indisputable but the corrosive residue is incompatible with metallic permanence.**

The plumber wrote back to say how glad he was to find his practice approved — which brought from the Bureau the rejoinder —

> **We cannot assume responsibility for the production of toxic and noxious residue with hydrochloric acid and suggest you use an alternative procedure.**

The plumber wrote once more to thank the Bureau for their commendation, but this time, luckily, another official received the letter and dealt with it. He wrote to the plumber in accurate, clear, brief, forceful and — I venture to suggest — not inappropriate, English:

> **Don't use hydrochloric acid. It eats hell out of the pipes.**

When Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch was lecturing, the name gobbledygook had not been invented and he used the word jargon for that windy, periphrastic writing which abounds in compound prepositions and abstract nouns. Speaking of abstract nouns in his famous lecture, **On Jargon**, he warned his hearers: "If you would write masculine English never . . . forget the old tag of your Latin Grammar

> **Masculine will only be**
> **Things that you can touch and see."**

He added some "extremely rough rules" of which one was to take thought whenever your pen betrayed you into using one of these words: **case, instance, character, nature, condition, persuasion, degree, order, quality,** (today, I daresay, he would add **level, state,** and **bracket**). Another of his extremely rough rules was: "Train your suspicions to bristle up whenever you come upon **as regards, with regard to, in respect of, in connection with, according as to whether,** and the like." With Gobbledygook and Commercialese in mind, we might today add a **host of other periphrases — in the event of, on the assumption that, for the reason that, in as far as, in view of the fact that, in the neighbourhood** (or **vicinity**) **of.** Some of these phrases are useful occasionally, but most of them are used so often and so needlessly that they have become nauseating.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch used the word **Jargon** in a purely depreciatory way. Today we often use it with a good sense to mean the specialist language that may properly be used within a particular group of people. Let me illustrate correct jargon, business English, "creative" English and Gobbledygook. I will call my illustration **The Story of a Pretty Girl who Lost her Bloom.**

A doctor friend of mine was good enough to word it for me in medical jargon: the sort of language that one doctor might properly, if he wished, use in talking to another. Here it is:

> **The aetiology of her bilateral maxillary neurodermatitis lay in the depressive psychoneurosis induced by the compulsive obsession for suppression of her amatory emotions.**

I take my friend's word for it.

The business man, telling the same tale in good business English, might write:

> **So firmly did she suppress any evidence of her emotions that she became ill and her complexion suffered.**

Have you recognised the story? It was told by the greatest English creative writer in **Twelfth Night.** Viola says:

> **She . . . let concealment, like a worm i' the bud, Feed on her damask cheek.**

I have suggested how the tale might be told in good business English. Alas! it is much more likely to be gobbledygooked into something like this —

> **In regard to the degree of deterioration evinced in the character of her complexion it transpires that its materialisation was the end product of the intensity of her concentration in connection with the suppression of visible evidence anent the condition of her emotional state.**

Oh God, Oh Montreal!

In **Power of Words** Stuart Chase quotes Sir Alan Herbert's "translation" of **England expects every man will do his duty.** It reads: **England anticipates that, as regards the current emergency, personnel will face up to the issues, and exercise appropriately the functions allocated to their respective occupational groups.**

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Modern Business English

Now let us turn to a few examples of the sort of English that is all too common in business today. They are taken from the obsolete standard letters of the A.A., which were later "de-verminised" by

Professor Greig and other recognised authorities on the English language. Here is a paragraph from the once-standard letter sent to a member from whom a payment had gone astray —

> **A thorough investigation has been carried out but I regret to advise that there is no record of the receipt of your remittance at this Office.**

That reads, in the current, washed-and-polished, standard letter —

> **We regret that we cannot trace having received this remittance.**

The reviser expunged the abstract nouns, the flabby passive verb, and that commercialese piglet **advise** for **tell** or **inform**; he replaced twenty-six words with ten, clarified the meaning of the whole sentence, and — perhaps most important — scrapped the phrase that, even if it were true, would tinkle of the base metal composing it: **a thorough investigation has been carried out.** He left the sentence sincere and forthright.

Here is another paragraph from an Old-Style letter—

> **It is indeed unfortunate that the representations made on your behalf did not meet with success but I feel sure you appreciate the fact that the Association has endeavoured to assist you in this matter.**

That becomes, New Style —

> **I am sorry to report that our efforts to obtain compensation for the damage to your car have failed.**

Does not the current nineteen-word version ring true and manly? Did not the original, with its thirty-five words, somehow seem to imply that the author felt he might have tried harder? Yet I know the author and I know how he battles for the A.A. member. I know too, that if he were reporting by word of mouth he would say something like this—

> **We've done everything we can, Sir. I'm sorry we've failed.**

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Ways of improving our use of English

I now want to refer, in rather more detail, to some of the chief signposts we might follow in order to improve our writing.

First let me suggest that he makes himself out timorous indeed who habitually uses passive verbs; who seemingly lacks the fibre to say "I agree . . ." and appears to shelter behind "it is agreed that . . ."; who avoids "please do this now" by saying "this should be done by you at this juncture, please." The use of the passive can become a habit leading to such gratuitous flabbiness as "Thanks are expressed for your letter" instead of the natural, "Thank you for your letter."

In business English we might take this as an infallible rule: **Writing that abounds in abstract nouns, compound prepositions and other circumlocutions, and passive verbs is evidence of the laziness, muddled thinking, ignorance, or insincerity, of the writer.**

In **The King's English,** H. W. and F. G. Fowler urge us to prefer, as a rule, the familiar word to the far-fetched; the concrete word or expression to the abstract; the single word to the circumlocution; and the short word to the long. They are dealing primarily with creative writing and some authorities question whether their advice is wholly sound. But few will doubt, I believe, the value of their sign-posts (**rules** would be too positive a word) to the writer of business English.

You may object — "Worthwhile literary work cannot be produced by studying and obeying a set of sign-posts." That is so. But these sign-posts are not for the man of business who is blessed with the ability to produce good literature — he needs no elementary aids. They are for him whose aim is simply to use his language well for a mundane purpose. He at least should almost always prefer the familiar word to the far-fetched — **leader** to **protagonist** (nor should this long and cacophonous brute be used to mean **champion** or **advocate**); **neighbourhood** to **vicinity; happen** to **transpire** (or **eventuate**); **beginning** to **inception; uncertainty** to **incertitude.** "Familiarity Breeds Clarity" might be a good watchword for the business man.

Again the writer of good business English prefers the concrete word or expression to the abstract. All too often we have to swallow some such choking mass of cotton wool as —

> **The combination of adverse atmospheric conditions, the defective state of the road, the sharp character of the bend, and the obscured nature of the level-crossing were the causative features of the collision.**

Since most of our thinking is in the form of words one cannot but wonder what sort of mind thinks in such language as that: as crisp as a wet biscuit. Or does that writer feel his thoughts must be bedecked in special finery when they are to be written down? Perhaps he regards as uncultured and barren such simple, explicit, wording as —

> **Several factors led to the collision: the thick mist, the corrugated surface of the road, the sharp bend, and the hidden level-crossing.**

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To use circumlocutions for single words is probably the commonest bad fault in English today. I have already listed several compound prepositions such as those commonly substituted for **about — as regards, with regard to, in regard to, in respect of, in connection with, plus or minus,** (this last is an illiteracy, too, and becomes even more offensive when shortened to **plus-minus**). Similarly **because** becomes **as a result of, for the reason that, in view of the fact that,** or **in consequence of. If** has a particularly maleficent circumlocution: **in the event of.** Not only are five syllables used to do the work of one but the five then usually demand a dubious construction to follow. **If members want extra copies . . .** degenerates into **In the event of members' wanting extra copies . . .** (I call the construction "dubious" because some people will condemn you if you fail to put an apostrophe after members; others if you put one.)

There is no end to circumlocutions. Here are a few more very common ones —

> **An enormous majority of members** and **a very high percentage of members** meaning **most members; A large majority** and **a high proportion** meaning **many; a minority** meaning **a few; only a fraction** meaning **a few** (although logically it could certainly mean **nearly all); a limited number** meaning **a few; in many cases** meaning **many; in such cases** meaning **that is so; such is by no means the case** meaning **that is not so.** (This word **case** is the special darling of the mealy-mouthed. **In many cases the buildings need painting** means **many of the buildings need painting; in the case of illustrated books higher prices are unavoidable** does not refer to a book-case. All it means is, **illustrated books cost more**). **In short supply** means **scarce; in free supply** means **plentiful; at the present juncture** means **now; in a high income bracket** means **well-to-do** or, perhaps, **wealthy.**

At this point let me interpose a word on another favourite device of gobblers: using a verb and an abstract noun to do, doughily and in several words, what a verb will do accurately by itself. This sort of thing —

> **It is our intention to render assistance to such tooth-pick growers as have suffered heavy losses.**

For **it is our intention** why not: **we intend?** For **render assistance** why not: **assist,** or **help?** For **suffered losses** why not: **lost?**

We then have a brief, clear-cut, statement —

> **We intend to help such tooth-pick growers as have lost heavily.**

One wonders if the people who write so wordily remember Jonathan Swift's — "Whoever could make two ears of corn, or two blades of grass, to grow upon a spot of ground, where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind, and do more essential service to his country, than the whole race of politicians put together." Do Gobblers think that what is true of grass is also true of words?

Such, by the way, is another darling of gobbledygook. No gobbler who aspires to eminence will miss a chance of dragging in a **such.** I deliberately said "**such** tooth-pick growers as . . ." where "**those** tooth-pick growers who . . ." would have been better. **Such** is a most useful little word: we should cease from cheapening it with such sentences as —

> **Such persons, and such of their associates as are eligible, should forward such details as tend to establish such claims . . .** and so on. I submit that, in English, that would read —

> **Those persons, and such of their associates as are eligible, should forward the details that tend to establish their claims . . .**

On preferring the short word to the long I will say only this: If the earlier sign-posts still leave a choice between a long word and a short, think sympathetically of Winnie-the-Pooh who said, "I am a Bear of Very Little Brain, and Long words Bother me."

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Good English saves money

Yet, after all that can be said has been said, there will remain those apathetic thousands who are content to debase their mother-tongue especially as they believe it costs nothing. But does it cost nothing? Let us descend to their level and examine the point.

When the A.A. lent me their Standard Letter Book they also gave me what copies they could find of their Old-Style letters, and permission to be as blunt as I liked. Thinking about cost I counted the syllables in the first three letters. (Number of syllables illustrates the extent of the improvement more clearly than does number of words because one of the inevitable gains in the New-Style letters is the clarity of crisp, short words used to replace long, woolly, and often ambiguous, ones.) The three new letters have 460 syllables where the corresponding old ones had 720, thus the reduction is more than one-third. The A.A. yearly posts about 75,000 letters based on the 300 models in the Standard Letter Book. If we assume that the average Old-Style letter took ten minutes to type, then the new will take about seven and the time saved in a year will be about 225,000 minutes, or 3,750 hours. That is roughly the time

of two typists. If they were paid R100 a month each, and if we add the employer's contribution to their pension and medical benefit funds, and add, too, the rental value of the space they occupy, and interest, maintenance costs and depreciation on their machines and furniture — if we reckon all these we find that the saving to the A.A. members is not far short of R3,000 a year. So it seems that good business English is also "good business".

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A suggestion to businessmen

I imagine that what is needed to arrest Falling Standards in English (proclaimed the theme of this series of meetings) is education. That is far from my province, but let me suggest some positive actions that could be taken, by big firms at least, over the language they use. They might, for example, have some of their present standard letters criticized by an acknowledged authority. If his verdict is unfavourable, and if there is on their staff someone who can, they believe, write well, they might give him a chance to decarbonise a few of their letters. The authority could criticize the results and, if his verdict were again unfavourable, the firm might follow the A.A.'s lead and commission an outsider to do their overhaul. Another device, which some firms might find worth while, is to issue notes designed to guide their staff about the firm's specific needs. The A.A. did that and, though I disagree with many of their notes, I believe that, in recognising the need for and in producing them, they showed a rare and praiseworthy sense of responsibility.

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Some useful references

So far what I have said has been addressed chiefly to business men and I now want to say a few words more directly to students of English — I use the word **students** in its widest sense. There are many ways in which they can and do foster better English in our daily life; but there are ways, too, in which they can do harm where most they seek to do good.

Because English is a living — and, indeed, a vigorously growing — language, books about it are necessarily out of date the day they are published. This leads to a temptation, when we recommend this book or that on English, to give some such warning as "of course, it is rather out of date." Sometimes we make other pejorative comments. If our hearers are sufficiently knowledgeable about English to be able to discriminate no harm will have been done; but often they are not. So our comments can lead the very man who most needs guidance to believe that he may lightheartedly reject the advice of a Fowler if it appears to him to be wrong.

"In the case of my golf," your tiro will then say, "between you and I, I am equally as good or better than him." Perhaps you will be cruel enough to take so simple a soul to task about this shabby chain of everyday illiteracies and to suggest that ten minutes with the book you lent him will do no harm. He will retort that all the so-called faults you have decried are clearly points on which, as you warned him when you made the loan, the book is out of date. In next to no time, what is more, he will have culled from the daily press, and from less fugitive sources too, a dozen cuttings embodying these very illiteracies. Thus — he will contend — he has proved his claim to have been using correct modern English.

That is a danger in recommending the right book in the wrong way. Another danger lies in recommending a first-rate book to a reader not yet ready for it. Some years ago I heard the remark "I used to be pretty keen on trying to write better English until I read . . ." (the speaker named an admirable but advanced book). "It made me feel," he said, "that it was hopeless for me to bother when I saw how experts can tear the best of writers to pieces."

We can reduce the risk of producing such despair as that by trying to fit the book to the would-be reader.

Finally, at whatever risk to the peace of mind or inertia of the staff, there are some books that ought to be found in the bookcase of almost every office. At the very least, I suggest, there should be—

A good dictionary — **the Concise Oxford,** for example.

Modern English Usage H. W. Fowler)
The Complete Plain Words (Sir Ernest Gowers)
Roget's Thesaurus.

To these might well be added Eric Partridge's **Usage and Abusage** and (for the tenderfoot) a simpler book such as M. Alberton Pink's **A Dictionary of Correct English.**

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In writing this paper I tried to keep my feet firmly on the ground and to deal with only the commonest and least abstruse of faults. In that way I hope that more people may be prompted to embark on a study, however casual, of the English language — the greatest instrument the world has ever had for conveying from one mind to another ideas, beliefs, knowledge — anything, in fact, that can be put in words.