Book Reviews

Recurrent Maladies in Scholarly Writing. Eugene S. McCartney, Univ. Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1953. 141 pp. Illus. $2.50.

Despite the somewhat forbidding title, there is not a dull page in these lively essays on the faults of the academic author. McCartney, a classicist turned editor, can quote telling passages from Quintilian to Anita Loos to prove his points. A deft and cheerful surgeon, he accompanies each twist of the scalpel with a jest.

These essays should be required reading for all candidates for the Ph.D. degree and for their preceptors as well; for they cover the whole range and gamut (see p. 36 for the misuse of these overworked nouns) of the boners committed by academic writers.

In his nine chapters, the author considers pedantry, lack of euphony, illogicality, overelaboration, dangling participles, oddities in measuring and counting, misspelling, tautological phrase of specification, and a summary of the general pathology of manuscripts.

The temptation to quote is too strong to be denied, especially since extracts will give the reader a better idea of the book than anything this reviewer could tell him.

In the chapter entitled The Avoidance of Simplicity we read:

> One of our youthful scholars said of a certain place: "Only a small part of all the inhabitants is visually encountered." Would our nation have been more deeply stirred if Perry's laconic dispatch after his victory on Lake Erie had been touched up in similar scholarly form: "We have visually encountered our adversaries, and they are in our possession"?

Discussing infelicities of repetition, he quotes this gem:

> After reaching Greenland the authors reached different conclusions.

McCartney takes a deserved crack at the frequent use of *literally* when *figuratively,* the exact reverse, is meant; and at the misuse of the word *fact.*

> He bought and literally devoured the works of Michael Faraday.
>
> The facts he tells us are few, and subsequent research has shown that they are inaccurate.

In the chapter on overelaboration—appropriately entitled Saying It with Flowers—we meet such specimens as:

> Here unnamed and unanalyzed forces and conditions are interwoven to form a morass which needs exploration and excavation.
>
> Life paid him off with the cruel coin of sour dead sea fruit.

Fine writing, what crimes are committed in thy name!

The useful chapter devoted to the participle contains:

> Being a clergyman and more or less sedentary in my habits, obesity crept on me unawares.
>
> Consumed in excess of 10 per cent of the ration, specialists said poults die of some unknown cause.

In Oddities in Measuring, the disinclination of writers to make straightforward statements is abundantly illustrated. Egregious examples are:

> Thousands of copies of the letter were mailed to every minister and prominent layman in the valley.
>
> The epidermal cells are almost twice or more broader than long.

An alternate title for the volume might be that employed by Harry Leon Wilson a generation ago: *Professor, How Could You?*

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The Language of Science. Theodore H. Savory. Andre Deutsch, London, 1953. (U.S. distr.: British Book Centre, New York 22.) 184 pp. 10s 6d.

One of the prime responsibilities of the scientist is to communicate his discoveries and opinions. Despite this, as Savory points out in this fascinating book, ". . . it is strange that no one seems to have undertaken a broad study of the language of science." The author thus undertook to begin to fill in the gap that existed between the literature of philology and science. Although written for the layman, this book should be informative and interesting to both philologists and scientists.

Savory notes that scientific writing is essentially cold and informative. As such, it cannot run in double harness with emotive language. Thus, the appeal in the language of science is derived from its authoritative nature.

In addition to assaying the importance of the scientific language, the associated philology is considered. The adoption of Greek and Latin words into English scientific writing is contrasted with the German use of combined forms. The rapid growth of science in the past two or three centuries is shown to be responsible for the simultaneous expansion of the scientific vocabulary. The author suggests that "the man who supplies or suggests a useful name for a new phenomenon, fact or anything else is doing his fellows as real a service as the man who discovers, applies or explains it."

After examining the growth of the language of science, the character of that language is considered. Here, Savory claims, ". . . the writer of the language of science must from the outset abandon all thoughts or hopes of achieving eloquence. . . ." Because of the precision of scientific writing, however, he runs smaller risk of using the wrong word.

Reading this book is a delightful excursion into one of those alluring side roads along the main avenue of science. The main facts are presented with authori-