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?*

PHELPS SOULE

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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-

tative scholarship but with occasional pauses to enlarge upon the features of the language of science that are of interest to the nonspecialist.

The essence of the book is summed up in its final paragraph: "This book has tried to demonstrate the existence of a real language of science and to detect something of its strength and its weakness. Its strength will be enhanced, its weakness will be concealed, and its power for good will become greater as scientists turn their abilities to using it more effectively."

DONALD J. LOVELL

Pasadena, Maryland

The Hand-Produced Book. David Diringer. Philosophical Library, New York, 1953. 603 pp. Illus. $15.

David Diringer, author of a previous book entitled *The Alphabet: A Key to the History of Mankind,* has produced a sequel to that work in which he traces the evolution of the written document from the earliest beginnings down to the invention of printing. His title may need further explanation. He is not concerned with the making of books as we know them. Although he himself (p. 24) asks the question, "What is a book?" he does not provide a definition but confines himself to a discussion of the various etymologies. What *The Hand-Produced Book* is really concerned with is the history of written communication.

Dr. Diringer starts with primitive modes of communication, beginning with the first crude drawing that man made in the sand. He then discusses the gradual improvement in communication from the cave drawings and stone carvings to the relatively sophisticated clay tablet books and finally to papyrus books.

It was the discovery of the utility of papyrus that made written communication easy and convenient and made possible the writing of books roughly as we know them. It also gave to European languages their words for paper. Papyrus was a technologic development of the ancient Egyptians who first discovered that the stems of the reedy plants growing in their Nile marshes could be flattened out, glued together in sheets, and used for writing. Papyrus remained an Egyptian monopoly, "but for a thousand years," says the author, "it was the chief writing material for the Graeco-Roman world . . . and was used both for literary and for ordinary purposes such as legal documents, receipts, petitions, notices of birth, and official and private letters (p. 125)."

Parchment and vellum developed naturally from the use of tanned leather as writing materials—how early, no one knows with certainty. But by the second century B.C., parchment, prepared by scraping skins on both the hair and flesh sides and rubbing with pumice stone, had come into fairly common use in Egypt and Asia Minor. The finest grade of parchment vellum, made from calfskin, was used for valued documents. The early craftsmen learned to prepare a particularly fine-grained white vellum from the skin of aborted calves, a type known technically today as uterine vellum. With papyrus, parchment, and vellum as satisfactory writing materials, the ancient world could produce written documents in quantity. During the Middle Ages in western Europe, parchment was widely used for the multiplication of books and other documents.

Diringer's volume provides encyclopedic information about an infinite variety of matters that impinge on writing: the kinds of writing materials used in different countries and regions, the instruments used for writing, including a discussion of inks, pigments, and pencils, and methods of multiplying manuscripts. He ranges over the pre-Columbian Mayas and Aztecs in America, a mysterious riddle that, like the ancient Etruscan writing, remains unsolved.

Many points in the book are controversial, and scholars will not of course agree with all of the author's conclusions, but he provides a stimulating body of information and bibliographical clues for further investigation. Although one of his theses, that the book follows religion, has much to commend it, this is an oversimplification of the complex problem of the reasons for the development of the book. The dust jacket announces that the volume was written primarily "for the cultured layman" and not for specialists. It is not a work however, that one can read easily, for even within chapters it is a succession of sometimes disjointed paragraphs on a wide variety of loosely connected topics. A tendency to repetition and many parenthetical cross references and allusions further retard the reader. But with all of its faults, *The Hand-Produced Book* is both an interesting and useful encyclopedia of information on the written document before the beginning of printing in Europe. The profuse illustrations also add to its value.

LOUIS B. WRIGHT

The Folger Shakespeare Library
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Ideologie und Forschung in der Sowjetischen Naturwissenschaft. Schriftenreihe Osteuropa, No. 1. Arnold Buchholz. Deutsche Verlags, Stuttgart, 1953. 126 pp.

Propaganda and counterpropaganda have aroused passions to the point where calm and rational consideration of anything pertaining to the USSR has become a rarity. The book under review belongs to this rare class. The author describes the present situation of science in the USSR and, to some extent, its historical background, with calm and detachment as well as with knowledge and understanding. The book is obviously too short for a thorough coverage of fields as diverse as mathematics, physics, astronomy, chemistry, biology, and agriculture. It is, however, hard to imagine how one could pack more information in every paragraph than the author succeeds in doing. The documentation and references are extensive and, in every instance where the reviewer is competent to judge, accurate.

The evaluations made by the author will assuredly be attacked from the left as well as from the right, since they will appear too severe to some and too lenient to others. In any case, the author did not succumb to the facile generalizations that are so tempting to amateur and to professional propagandists.