

not be said to receive an "ovation," this being an award of praise distinctively reserved for meritorious subjects of the empire. Over and over again, after his Italian battles, Napoleon III. was said, in print, to have received "ovations;" and the solecism was repeated, years after, when the Emperor William entered Berlin, in such triumph as surely precluded the idea of any minor sacrifice. Had pagan rites been revived at that time, no simple, silly sheep, but Jove's own chosen shape and symbol, the majestic bull, would have bled on the laurel-wreathed altar. It was a triumph with a capital T. We have seen how the dabbler in what he is pleased to call, very loosely, "Anglo-Saxon," boggles with "fain" and "greet." One of his kind, not long ago, gravely condemned, as a vulgar phrase, "I would as lief;" and, in pronouncing his mighty fiat, disclosed the sum and substance of his knowledge concerning "lief," by spelling it "leave." Not only is "lief" (Saxon *leof*, German *lieb*) a most comely and warrantable word, and the especial favourite of English poets, not only is it good and sound in itself, but its comparative, "liever," for "rather," as "I would liever have had," is, though unfamiliar, yet by no means vulgar; vulgar, that is to say, in the evil sense, which applies as much to the slang of the drawing-room as to the slang of the slums. "Very," is a word that has fallen upon evil days. Blind leaders of the blind have denounced the practice, as old as Chaucer, of placing this word before an adjective in the superlative degree, sapiently remarking that to do this is to qualify a superlative with a superlative. This astounding nonsense, manifest in the condemnation of phrases like "the very wisest man," calls for few words of exposure. "Very" is indicative of the man who is wisest; and it is here equivalent to the Latin *idem*. Is *idem sapientissimus*

a qualifying of the superlative? Of all stupid men, we might say, this very man is stupidest—*idem stultissimus*, that same stupidest man, or truly the stupidest of all. For "very" and "truly" are the same word, and the "very perfect, gentle knight," was he who truly was perfect. You do not "qualify" perfection by thus emphasizing the superlative attribute of embodied chivalry.

Is it yet too late in the decline of our language to appeal against such tricks as the substitution of "numerous" for "many;" of "witness" for "behold" or "see;" of "the whole of" for "all," when numbers are implied, of "starvation" for "hunger," "want," "famine," "privation," or "inanition;" and of "commence" for "begin"? It should be remembered that "numerous" is an adjective properly qualifying such nouns as "crowd," "family," "class," "crew," "assembly," "troop," "herd," "flock," etc. If we speak of our numerous friends we may suggest to a precision the awkward idea that each friend is numerous.* "To witness" does not

* Four or five years ago, in protesting against the use of the word "numerous" in lieu of "many," I wrote certain comments which I may now be allowed to repeat. "It has been a favourite custom with the poets to apply the adjective 'numerous' to objects of magnitude, vastness, grandeur, or depth, even though the terms of such object were not nouns of multitude; and this very connection of the word with nouns, such in the singular number, sufficiently demonstrates the impropriety of substituting it for 'many,' which always belongs to the plural. Waller supplies an illustration, which I take at second hand from Latham's Dictionary.

Thy heart no ruder than the rugged stone,
I might, like Orpheus, with my numerous moans,
Melt to compassion."

"The many-voiced, or multitudinously murmuring quality, which a much older poet than Waller ascribes to the sea, is here very elegantly suggested, is a line through which we seem to hear the breathings of an Arabian harp. Is the 'numerous moans' especially one feels the pulsating sweep over the strings. But to my purpose, which is very practical, being simply to establish the grammatical distinction of 'numerous' and 'many.' Perhaps I have done this, and I hope I have; but if enforcement be yet needed, let us just suppose that Waller had spoken of many moans instead of only one moan, and had chosen to qualify them all in the same manner. His phrase would then have been 'many numerous moans.'" To this I must now add that Waller's contemporary, Milton, employs "numerous" in its modern application; but he does so only once or twice, giving the preference to "many."