

ANTI-CLIMAX

Everybody knows what a climax is. The word expresses only a single idea, and there is no other word in the language to express that idea.

"Klimaxis" is Greek for a short ladder or staircase; though there is evidence that "among Queens of Asia," 2,000 years ago, the lady who prostrated herself for a queen to step upon, getting into a carriage, was called a "klimaxis."

Our purely literary climax is still of a similar kind. "It is a rhetorical figure in which the sentence or series of sentences rises, as it were, step by step; the successive members gaining in force, importance, or dignity until the close. It is a method of composition which passes from the common to the rare, from the ordinary to the wonderful, from the simple to the complex, from the known to the previously unimagined."

A beautiful example is the passage in Shakespeare's "Tempest":

"The cloud-tapped towers, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which inherit, shall dissolve. And, like this unsubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a wrack behind."

The oratory of all nations abounds with examples of climax. A specimen occurs in Burke's criticism of Sheridan's speech at the trial of Warren Hastings. He said of that wonderful effort of eloquence that "it reflected the highest honor upon the speaker, renowned upon Parliament, glory upon the country, and lustre upon letters."

Grammarians invite us to note how carefully this sentence is composed. The terms, "honor," "renown," "glory," "lustre," are practically synonymous; but the things to which these qualities are attributed are disposed in gradually ascending order. Reference is first made to the orator himself; then to the Parliament, of which he is a member; then, to the country; and, finally, to the world of letters, which comprehends all countries.

One of the noblest pieces of eloquence in the English language, the speech of John Philip Curran in defence of Hamilton Rowan, owes much of its force to climax. Dealing with the rights of Irish Catholics to be freed from the civil and religious disabilities to which they were subjected towards the end of the eighteenth century, he said:

"I speak in the spirit of the British law, which makes liberty commensurate with, and inseparable from, British soil; which proclaims even to the stranger and the sojourner, the moment he sets his foot upon British earth, that the ground on which he treads is holy, and consecrated by the genius of universal emancipation. No matter in what language his doom may have been pronounced; no matter what complexion incompatible with freedom an Indian or African sun may have burnt upon him; no matter in what disastrous battle his liberty may have been closed down; no matter with what solemnities he may have been devoted upon the altar of slavery; the first moment he touches the sacred soil of Britain, the altar and the god sink together in the dust; his soul walks abroad in her own majesty; his body swells beyond the measure of his chains, that burst from around him; and he stands redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled by the irresistible genius of universal emancipation."

The force of this magnificent peroration is largely due to climax. Another remarkable example of its oratorical use is the speech of Mark Antony over the body of Julius Caesar, in Shakespeare's well-known play.

Anti-climax is the converse of climax. The one is a gradual ascent; the others, generally, a sudden fall. The literary essence of anti-climax is inconsistency, incongruity. It is a kind of exaggerated antithesis. When two things are contrasted we have an antithesis; when the contrast is a little sharper, we get an epigram; push it farther still, and the result is anti-climax. The boundary line between these figures of speech is almost imperceptible; and it sometimes happens that writers aim at one mark and hit another.

Serious anti-climax is nothing but a rather lengthy epigram, or a keen and extended antithesis. A portion of one of Hamlet's speeches is frequently quoted as an example of this class. He says:

"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty; in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel; in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?"

The anti-climax in this speech lies in the discord between the nominal value of these splendid attributes of a man, and the worth at which the speaker appraises them in relation to himself.

A second kind of anti-climax is unintentional burlesque, or false climax. "There is only a step from the sublime to the ridiculous." (Step step, in serious writing, must be made with the greatest care. When we take it too hastily—anti-climax!)

An excellent illustration is found in the little story about the suffragette. This suffragette was evidently one of the sternest and most aggressive of her sex. She had been holding forth to an audience largely composed of ladies with angular forms, high cheek-bones, and excessively Roman noses. The peroration of her address was extremely fine:

"I have proved that man is a gigantic sham. Too long has he tyrannized over the

nobler half of creation. But woman has at last awoke to a knowledge of her rights and a consciousness of her strength. And when we rise up in wrath to enforce our claims; when in serried array we march forward with our blood up and our back hair down; when we demand—yes, demand—that the tyrant man shall abdicate the throne he has too long occupied, and kneel in subjection at the foot of woman, his rightful queen; when our mighty army sweeps on under the protection of Providence and the shadow of ten hundred thousand banners; when we do this, what will stop us?"

There was for a moment a silence deep enough to dive into; then, amid the deadly hush a man at the back of the hall ejaculated in a still, small voice—

"A mouse!"

That was enough. There was a unanimous roar from the audience; the orator hastily descended from the platform, and the meeting broke up in disorder.

Now, this estimable lady was discomfited by anti-climax, as was the pompous gentleman who heard two persons disputing, and wished to make peace—

"Gentlemen," he said, "listen to me. All I want is common sense." "That is precisely what you do want," said one of the disputants. The pompous individual retired.

Another orator was discoursing upon the iniquity of reform—to anything—anywhere. "Gentlemen," he said, "let us not go too fast. Let us be careful, very careful, what we do. The popular will is against this measure, and let those beware who would trifle with the popular will. For, in the inspired language of the poet, 'Facilis descensus Avernus,' which means, 'The voice of the people is the voice of God.'"

But, sometimes, the laugh is with the speaker and against the audience. A celebrated American stump orator was addressing a meeting where it was a great point to obtain the Irish vote. After alluding to the native American party in flattering terms, he inquired: "Who dig our canals? Irishmen. (Applause.) Who build our railroads? Irishmen. (Still greater applause.) Who build our jails? Irishmen. (Enthusiastic cheers.) And who fill our jails? Irishmen!"

The anti-climax did not exactly bring down the house, but it brought the Irish in a rush to the platform, and the speaker took to flight. But the components of an anti-climax need not be either sublime or ridiculous. It is only necessary that they be incongruously disposed. And this incongruity occurs so frequently and so naturally that an unintentional anti-climax is a pitfall of which even good writers must be wary; while ordinary folk are frequently victims to its insidious snare. Sometimes, as in the cases quoted, an anti-climax may be a joint production, needing two or more persons for its manufacture. Such was the character of the specimen which is reported to have surprised a worthy Irish parish priest—

He met a little girl, the daughter of one of his parishioners, at play on Sunday, and shocked at her breach of decorum, accosted her severely: "Good morning, daughter of the Evil One." The girl timidly raised her head and replied: "Good morning, father."

But one can generally manage an anti-climax unaided; and it is surprisingly easy indeed, whether or not you know how it is done. I was shown recently a lady's letter to a friend, which, as is sometimes the case, was composed without any stops or paragraphs. One passage ran in this fashion—

"Poor Mrs. Jones died on Sunday she was only thirty-eight but she looked at least forty-five she passed peacefully away such is life in the midst of it we are in death I have got a new pink silk for evenings I shall have it made up by Miss Harrison she did my last one so well."

And so on. But you must not imagine that the ladies are solely at fault. By no means. A writer in Australia, the other day, conjoined these two statements in the same paragraph—

"The circulation of the Daily Mail is over 750,000 daily. Mr. Marks is now sole proprietor of the Burrageorang Reporter."

Some years ago a Melbourne shirebroker committed suicide. He left a brief letter couched as follows—

"Too much pain and too much mental worry caused me to do this. I leave my wife and children to the protection of God and the care of Mrs. M. H. Davies."

It is very easy to make an anti-climax in a language with which one is not familiar. Take the Frenchman's exclamation at the sight of Niagara: "Dis is sublime. Dis is magnificent. By gar, dis is pretty good."

When illiterate persons attempt to compose poetry, they generally rush into the jaws of the monster waiting to devour them. Some rich specimens of unintentional anti-climax occasionally occur in the poets' corner of Australian country papers. Take the following ingenious verse:

"The ark when prepared foretold a great sea; The angels at Sodom told Lot for to flee; The sea and the tempest, that dangerous gale, Commanded old Jonah, and so did the whale."

And this from a poem in praise of a virtuous and charitable young lady:

"To the house of the sick and the feeble she went; Undaunted and firm on her purpose was bent; The dogs were all glad, they left their old bones To give a reception to our heroine, Miss Jones."

A churchyard supplies many an example of unintentional anti-climax. The space on a

tombstone is so small that, in the attempt to recite the numerous virtues with which every individual is credited, when we know he cannot come back to contradict us, it is easy to make a mistake. I quote a few examples:

"This stone is erected to the memory of Robert Kelly, who was accidentally shot by his brother as a mark of respect."

"Sacred to the memory of Robert Boyle, the father of Chemistry and the brother of the Earl of Cork."

"Here lies interred, in hopes of Zion, The landlord of the British Lion; Obedient to the heavenly will, His son conducts the business still."

The third kind of anti-climax is intentional burlesque. This form is the basis of almost all humorous American literature and of much of the humorous literature of England. Pope's satires are full of it, e.g.:

"Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes, And screams of horror rent the affrighted skies, Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast, When husbands or when lap-dogs breathe their last."

Hood frequently uses this form of anti-climax, and the "Ingoldby Legends" are full of examples. But America is the true home of the intentional anti-climax. The writings of many American authors are nothing but a continuous series of instances of the use of the figure. Take this:

A speculator once telegraphed to Ward, when he was lecturing: "What will you take for twenty-eight nights in San Francisco?" Artemus telegraphed back at once, "Brandy and water."

The well-known example, "He bared his arm to Heaven and stole the sugar," is also credited to Artemus Ward.

The posters which announced his lectures had this line in very large letters:

"ARTEMUS WARD HAS DELIVERED LECTURES BEFORE ALL THE CROWNED HEADS OF EUROPE"

Under this, in very small type, was printed: "Ever thought of delivering lectures?"

Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, Max Adler—the works of these writers are full of similar anti-climax. Artemus Ward even made a visible anti-climax.

"As winged lightning bolts from the heavens when the Eternal has unbared their bolts, so does a fat nigger run like the deuce when a big dog is after him."

COUNTING THE CHINESE

According to an estimate made by the Imperial Board of the Interior in China, the population of the empire is 336,042,000, against 429,214,000, the estimate of the Chinese Imperial Customs in 1909, and 433,553,030, the figures attributed to the latest native computation by the Statesman's Year Book for 1911. Mr. Rockhill, until recently American Minister at Peking, put the population of China proper in 1904 at probably less than 270,000,000, but this, it should be understood, does not include Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet or Chinese Turkestan. The present estimate of the Board of the Interior goes far toward confirming Mr. Rockhill's conservative total, for it attributes to China proper a population of only 309,674,000, or an excess of less than forty millions over his figures. Manchuria is credited with a population of 14,917,000, Mongolia with 2,491,000, Tibet with 6,500,000, Chinese Turkestan with 760,000, and the Manchu military clans at 1,700,000.

The figures gathered by the Board of the Interior are regarded as trustworthy above earlier computations because they are based on an actual count of households in all parts of the empire, Tibet excepted, and on a count of individuals in two entire provinces, parts of other provinces and the urban district of the capital. By means of these partial enumerations ratios of individuals to families was established, and what seems a fairly accurate aggregate was obtained. The result is interesting for more than one reason. It shows in the first place a growing disposition on the part of the Chinese government to substitute modern statistical methods for the haphazard conclusions of the past. Eventually there must be an authoritative census of the empire, and the present combined count and estimate will make that more comprehensive task, whenever it is undertaken, easier than it would otherwise be. Isolated and ignorant peoples habitually object to a census. They think it implies some new tax impost or military draft. But, having perceived that the count of households has produced no harmful effects, they will be reader to assist the enumerators hereafter.

The estimate by the Board of the Interior is chiefly interesting, however, because of the reduction of more than a hundred millions that it makes in the total Chinese population. Never before was there so bloodless and painless an elimination of an enormous mass of humanity. We have been led to suppose from various sources that the Chinese empire contained from four to five hundred million inhabitants, and now at one fell swoop the number is reduced to 336,042,000, a total considerably greater than the population of India, which was 294,361,056 in 1901, and is at present, according to advance figures of the census of 1911, 315,000,000. It may be that when actual rather than approximate figures are eventually obtained from the Chinese empire, say a decade hence, it will be found that there are fewer people under the rule of the Emperor at Peking than are included in King George's Indian dominions.—Providence Journal

Arthur Bonar Law, M.P.

It was characteristic of that pillar of conservatism in the House of Commons, Arthur Bonar Law, to set about the undoing of American reciprocity with Canada the moment the news of President Taft's now famous pact had reached London. If, as so many of his admirers insist, Mr. Law is a coming Prime Minister of England, the cornerstone of his policy, as we read in the London Standard, will be the destruction of reciprocity between the Dominion and the States through the purely commercial process of a preferential rate. Canada is to be given the British market when she has given up the American one, and the bribe will be, in the opinion of those who uphold the economic theories of Bonar Law, quite too tempting. Nor does Bonar Law talk merely of tariff in his campaign. He is the spokesman and leader of those Britons who see in Canada's pact with the States the entering wedge that may split the Empire upon which the sun never sets. As he is the most conspicuous figure next to Arthur James Balfour in the whole opposition, as he commands the ear of his countrymen in all that relates to tariffs, and as he represents to his native land the sum of all the forces opposed to free trade with the foreigner, the Canadian reciprocity pact arranged by President Taft conferred among its other blessings a special importance upon Arthur Bonar Law. There is not the slightest fear that Canada will linger long beneath her new American spell if we can accept the judgment of British Conservative dailies. Mr. Bonar Law will open her eyes.

The greatness of Bonar Law at Home has still to be realized in the United States. A leader of the Unionists, in the Commons, he clamors in and out of the House that Britain is for the Britons. He has expended much energy in the past seven years in vociferations that Canada would yet be induced by representations from Washington to let down her tariff barriers. He does not proclaim his ideas eloquently or with brilliance, for Nature denied him the hining gifts which render Lloyd George so emotionally effective when he refers to the blessings of free trade. To the London News, indeed, Bonar Law is the Gradgrind of English politics, a dealer in hard facts. He is a man who, we read in the London Mail, springs no swift verbal surprises, who has little or no appeal in the tones of his voice. He is that incarnation of British heroism the average man, not witty, not clever, not magnetic, but so much to the fore that he may succeed Arthur James Balfour as the leader of his party.

The very absence of those brilliant qualities which have raised contemporary British statesmen to international renown has made the solid and serious Mr. Bonar Law illustrious, according to the character sketch in the London Mail by its Parliamentary correspondent, Mr. Frank Dilonot. An entire absence of ornament in speech, we read, but the conspicuous presence of common sense, "a terse and forceful exposition of practical matters," are Mr. Law's distinguishing characteristics in debate. He never tries to convey the impression that he is brilliant. But it was not until he found himself out of office, in company with his leader, Arthur James Balfour, that the strong qualities of Bonar Law became evident to Britons. "From the time he took his place on the front Opposition bench with Mr. Balfour he has been steadily building a name for himself as a big fighter, a stalwart, with a business equipment such as few statesmen have, who is prepared to battle always, under any circumstances, with the nimble wits on the other side." He can state a case as convincingly as can Prime Minister Asquith himself.

In no sense is Bonar Law a phrase-maker, like Lloyd George, his great antagonist in the House of Commons. Mr. Law meets the corners of epigram with forceful facts, forcefully arranged, asserts our London authority. "Verbal subtleties are not for him, and it is testimony to his worth that he has succeeded by his simple directness." His political aptitude as well as his business training led him early to see that tariff reform was to be one of the great political motives of the age, and he soon acquired a place of prestige among the champions of that preferential tariff idea which the name of Joseph Chamberlain is so conspicuously associated. Time and again did Bonar Law assure the House of Commons that the United States and Canada would enter into just such a reciprocity agreement as has been already effected—and a bad day would that be for the British Empire. Bonar Law seems to the London Mail to be endowed with just such a mind for the Cassandra-like functions of dire prophecy. He has the facts of commerce at his finger's end. From boyhood he has been in the habit of coming to close quarters with facts.

In Bonar Law the House of Commons has no fervid prophet running to words. Here is rather the man who, having convinced himself that a certain course is necessary, will work without any personal ostentation, but with a certain grim ruthlessness until his object is attained. "That is how Mr. Bonar Law reveals himself. He stands at the table of the House of Commons, a tall, spare figure, with a suggestion of Scottish gauntness about him. He is generally in a long frock coat or cutaway. He stands very erect, one hand by his side, the finger of the other hand resting lightly on the box in front of him. He has no gestures, and he consults no notes." Thus seeming to an onlooker he pours out a steady stream of facts and arguments, effective against his cleverest opponents yet to be understood, seemingly, by the merest novice in

politics. That would appear to be one of Bonar Law's secrets of effect—his lucidity, his complete grasp of his topic and the directness with which he seizes, and controverts an argument, be it the most incisive, advanced by the other side.

The speeches for which Bonar Law is so celebrated in and out of the Commons are described by our contemporary as "amazingly factful." His efforts are the more impressive because he never makes use of a note. Once in a long while, we read, he will thrust his right hand into the left breast pocket of his coat and draw out a small sheet of paper containing some reference or some quotation. But he restores it to his bosom or lays it on the table in front of him with a quickness suggesting his eagerness not to spoil an argument by depriving it of the extempore quality. "He is not a great orator in the sense that he can move by any appeal to the emotions, but for that very reason he is the more trenchant debater." Mr. Bonar Law thus seems to the friendly London Post one of the great assets of the Opposition. His grasp of practical facts, his lucid exposition of them and a certain firmness are his outstanding characteristics. "He first lifted himself in the world as an ironmaster, and even now, as he stands beside the table of the House of Commons, there is iron in the hard directness of the man, and in that air of quiet resolution which marks him from head to foot."

The monotonous and dry details of his biography go well with the character that seems to have resulted from them. Arthur Bonar Law was born nearly fifty-three years ago, and he is the son of a Presbyterian minister. He went to the High School at Glasgow, and while a mere youth was put to business. He forged ahead at a rate that made him as powerful in the steel trade of Britain as any president of the Carnegie board in the United States. Not until he was forty-two and famed as chairman of the Glasgow Iron Trade Association did Bonar Law find a seat in the House of Commons. Once there, he made up for lost time, filling a responsible secretaryship in the Board of Trade during Mr. Balfour's stormy period of power. Mr. Law proved himself a peculiar master of the dry, cold and irresistible facts which, stated without passion, demolish the most brilliant propositions. He could not be brilliant, as the London Times says, but he could be crushing. His assertions relate invariably to trade returns, to tariffs, to reciprocity, to preference. It is difficult to realize that one mind can bring an artillery of statistics to bear upon so numerous an array of themes. He is said never to err.

THE POOR VEGETARIAN

Dr. Archibald Henderson, author of the new life of Bernard Shaw, was talking about vegetarianism at a dinner at Hillsboro.

"Mr. Shaw," he said, "has been a vegetarian more than twenty years. He sticks to vegetables very strictly. At the same time he doesn't like their taste overmuch."

"Shaw," said his house at Ayot, St. Lawrence, once said to me:

"You should have come in time for luncheon. We had a fine luncheon today."

"Good," said I.

"Yes," said Shaw, "a fine luncheon. Salad, lentils, cress, greens, a luncheon fit for a cow—excuse me, I mean for a king!"

HAD

"Pat," said the Englishman who wanted some fun, "I will give you eighteen (eight in) pence for a shilling." Pat thought for a moment, then, diving his hand in his trousers pocket, produced the required shilling. At the same time the Englishman slipped eight pence into Pat's hand, saying, "Not bad, is it?" "No," replied Pat, "but the shilling is."

SWEET CHILD

"Yes," said little Elsie, "mamma says she is always glad to let me come to parties at your house."

"It is very nice of your mamma to say that." "Cause she says you're so savin' that there's never any danger you'll give me anything that will be rich enough to hurt me."

ENOUGH FOR THE PRESENT

A traveling salesman was handed a message which read as follows: "Twins arrived tonight. More by mail!" The drummer rushed to the telegraph office and hurriedly replied:

"If any more arrive by mail send them to the dead letter office."

NOT EXACTLY

Conductor—Did you get out and stretch your legs when we stopped at the junction?

Passenger—Well, not exactly; I went into the dining car and had them pulled.—Brooklyn Life.

Client—Before we decide on the house, my husband asked me to enquire if the district is at all unhealthy?

House Agent—Er—what is your husband's profession, madam?

Client—He is a physician.

House Agent—Hum—er—well, I'm afraid truth compels me to admit that the district is not too healthy!

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