

Such protests as these apply only to the more frothy businesses, but they serve to illustrate why a business style of correspondence is not exactly the proper one for professional men to imitate. What then should be the style of a professional man's letters? Sweeping aside temporarily all political prejudices, it can be said that the most extreme example of a professional-letter writer (some sarcastic people might say professional letter-writer, a significant shift of the hyphen) well known to the public is Woodrow Wilson.

"Making due allowance for Mr. Wilson's diplomatic vagueness and political oratory (what one senator called "soufflé of soap-bubbles"), his letters have the dignity, moderation and flowing smoothness that should characterize—though perhaps in a less degree—the letters of the typical professional man. The following note of the president, consisting of only two sentences, is in the best professional style:—

A Letter from President Wilson

"My dear Senator:

"Matters of so grave a consequence are now under consideration that I would very much appreciate an opportunity to have a talk with you about the treaty and all that it involves. I wonder if it would be possible for you to see me at the White House at 2.15 o'clock to-morrow, Thursday afternoon.

"Cordially and sincerely yours,

"Woodrow Wilson."

Or it is pertinent to take as illustration the president's 200-word message on prohibition:—

"I am convinced that the attorney-general is right in advising me that I have no legal power at this time in the matter of the ban on liquor. Under the act of November, 1918, my power to take action is restricted. The act provides that after June 30th, 1919, 'until the conclusion of the present war and thereafter until the termination of demobilization, the date of which shall be determined and proclaimed by the president, it shall be unlawful,' etc. This law does not specify that the ban shall be lifted with the signing of peace, but with the termination of the demobilization of the troops, and I cannot say that this has been accomplished. My information from the War Department is that there are still a million men in the army, under the emergency call. It is clear, therefore, that the failure of congress to act upon the suggestion contained in my message of the twentieth of May, 1919, asking for a repeal of the act of November 21st, 1918, so far as it applies to wines and beer, makes it impossible to act in this matter at this time. When demobilization is terminated, my power to act without congressional action will be exercised.

Leisureness of Thought

Like these letters of President Wilson, the correspondence of an engineer should convey a certain leisureness of thought, such as the design of a machine should receive. The style ought to suggest long views, a careful judgment, a thoughtful manner, while still containing underlying strength and forcefulness. No one need use such long sentences as President Wilson favors, unless he wishes to, of course. Such excellent writers as Abraham Lincoln and Georges Clemenceau prefer short, logical and pithy sentences. The French incline to mathematically short and precise sentences, based on their prevalent philosophy of rationalism. The British naturally adopt long sentences, and are not averse to wandering from the main thought if the side-paths seem interesting. Many British writers cultivate a certain sonorousness of phrase, and it must be admitted that their journalists, for instance, construct more impressive sentences than the somewhat careless prose common to American newspapers.

In striving for a dignified, thoughtful style suggestive of an educated man not entirely preoccupied with dollar-chasing, the professional man by all means should avoid the pompous manner of the many verbose writers who evidently have never heard of that sterling rule, "Eliminate the superfluous word." As a case in point, the following sentence from an engineer's letter, can be reduced to the better form shown:—

The reason why I desire a change of position is due to the fact that in a larger concern my chances for advancement undoubtedly would be better."

Reducing this 27-word sentence to 16 words gives the simpler and better sentence:—

"I wish a change because with a larger company my chance for advancement would be better."

Reduction in Verbiage

This is a 40% reduction and saves that much effort for the reader. It gives point to the remark of Charles A. Dana that he had time to write a long letter but not time to write a short one. While it is not true that a 40% reduction in words can be made often, it is probably true that a 20% reduction would improve most letters, making them simpler, more moderate, and truer. The wording, however, should not be so reduced as to give an aspect of telegraphic abruptness. Equally as important as the omission of superfluous words is the desirability of making a letter smooth and flowing in diction, as illustrated in President Wilson's style.

The engineer should be even more careful than the business-man in the matter of using words in their exact meanings and in not using certain over-worked words too much. He should choose such words as "quite," "line," "concern," "desire," "due," etc., only for their proper and limited meaning. He should avoid the undue use of such words as "so," "as," "advise," and the participles and superlatives.

Everything considered, the engineer has reason to be particularly careful in his employment of language. As an intellectual leader, and a man of judgment and taste, he has high traditions to maintain. His choice of words and literary style are often taken as criterion of his professional skill and character.

The city of Calgary has decided to sell the old steel bridge over the Bow River at Hillhurst, which was originally built by the Alberta government, but which is now owned by the city. This bridge is popularly known as the Louise Bridge. It has been replaced by a reinforced concrete structure.

The Automobile Club of Canada, Montreal, is in receipt of an official letter from Hon. J. A. Tessier, Minister of Roads in the Quebec cabinet, stating that in view of the recent arguments put forth by the club showing the pressing need for improving the Laprairie dyke, instructions have been given to proceed with the work of placing a smooth surface along the dyke for a length of 8,000 ft..

Prof. J. W. Dorsey, of the University of Manitoba, who recently announced that he had discovered a new and inexpensive method of transmitting electrical power, states that as a result of this invention it will be possible to serve farms for a distance of 50 miles on both sides of a main power line with electricity at very low cost for transmission. He advocates that crops be energized electrically at night when other power demands are negligible and when power can be secured at low cost. He declares that two crops can thus be grown where only one would otherwise be possible.

That the 8-hour day is not only more efficient than the 10-hour day in industrial plants, but also more economical, is the conclusion reached by the United States Public Health Service after three years' study of conditions and production in factories. Following is a summary of the Service's report: "The outstanding feature of the 8-hour day is steady maintenance of output; the outstanding feature of the 10-hour system is the decline of output. Under the 8-hour system work with almost full power begins and ends approximately on schedule, and lost time is reduced to a minimum; under the 10-hour system, work ceases regularly before the end of the spell and lost time is frequent. Under the 10-hour system the laborers seem to artificially restrict their efforts and to keep pace with the less efficient workers; under the 8-hour day the output varies more nearly according to the individual capacity of the laborer. The full report is contained in Public Health Bulletin No. 106, which is the first of a series to be published by the U.S. Public Health Service on the problems of industrial working capacity."