

CORRESPONDENCE

From: Mr S.C. Crowther-Smith, Banbury Road, Oxford, England.

I am most grateful that you continue to send me copies of your publication and consequently disappointed that it will appear only annually in future.

However, I should be failing in my duty to the Cause if I did not protest at the manner of your announcement of the reduced frequency. I refer to the first sentence at the foot of the page facing p. 1. Please see your own Dictionary, p. 62.

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?

Alles van die beste (Afk, x).

The slip is indeed unpardonable. But it seems that the infallible guardian, complete with frock-coat and watch-chain, went out, sadly, with Victoria. His contemporary imitator is, in a way, as vulnerable and, perhaps, as flexible as his ward. And, who knows, in time to come general usage may render the dangling phrase completely acceptable.

Thank you for pointing out this glaring error. St Luke's admonition is undoubtedly applicable: 'Physician, heal thyself!'

(The reference is to the sentence starting: 'Due to ...', in Vol. 12, 1981.)

Editors

From: Mrs L. Piek, Bethulie

Thank you for still sending me copies of your interesting journal – when it appears!

From: D.L. Armstrong, Durban

PHYSICIAN HEAL YOURSELF OR LEAVE IT TO THE MEDICOS TO GET THE GRAMMAR RIGHT

In the generally delightful little book *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk and E.B. White, Strunk is quoted thus:

A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts.

In this context the reason should be a self-evident fact or common knowledge. Is it? Ask the students, 'What is the reason?' This is the first question.

If, in the quotation, everything but the full stop is deleted after the word, 'sentences', nothing is lost and the cumbersome use of the word, unnecessary, is halved.

Strunk apparently did not read this before he wrote it else he would not have been guilty of the very practice he was trying to stop.

Of course many drawings do have functionally unnecessary lines and many machines have functionally unnecessary parts. They are the ones that often are the most costly.

On page 5 of *English Usage in Southern Africa* (7(i)) Kay Abbott has:

Nevertheless sentences *are* the functional units in any normal communication and as a machine with too many parts is unworkable, so a sentence should have only as many parts as are necessary to fulfil its function.

Bravo, Kay. Apply the Abbott law and we get: 'Nevertheless sentences are the functional units in any normal communication. A sentence should have only as many parts as are necessary to fulfil its function'.

We see here what 'it' does and the unworkable machine with the redundant parts can be dumped on the scrap heap where it belongs. Poor Kay.

On page 207 of *Pears Medical Encyclopaedia* (1951 edition) you will find:

Just as one cannot run a car on petrol alone and ignore lubricating oil and water for the cooling system, so the body cannot be run by simply taking in calories.

There is no doubt about that. Ask your students, 'Can you run a car on petrol alone?' The answer would be immediate, and correct, unless their minds were still bogging at the first question.

P.S. I think that the two 'n's' in 'unnecessary' is unnecessary, or would you prefer 'are unnecessary'?