

THE ELEMENTS OF LEGAL STYLE (1991). By Bryan A. Garner. Oxford University Press, New York. Pp. xviii + 236. Price Rs. 350.

WORD IS a manifestation of God, as held by ancient *vedic* wisdom. It is believed that after creation of the world, God first created word; such is the significance of the word. Words create and make human history, words can bring peace and harmony and have also the potential of creating destruction if used irresponsibly and without proper application of mind. Hence, style matters. Great literature is recognised for its use of words; yes, the presentation, the clarity and, above all, the style. Style improves the substance of the matter in writing. What you say or write and how you say and write is the hallmark of style. When the style is sloppy, the content and substance of what you say or write too suffers. As good style is necessary for good literature, so good style is necessary for good legalese.

The reasons for bringing out the book under review<sup>1</sup> are set out in the blurb of the book. These are:

It is written for lawyers, law students, judges and their law clerks - for anyone who writes in and about the law.

Looking at the contents of the book that range from fundamental rules of usage to fundamental principles of legal writing and the treatment given to the subject, the reasons appear well justified.

The author in chapter I makes it abundantly clear as to what goaded him in writing this book and how it proves different from the classic book of Strunk and Whites' *Elements of Style*. The author brings out the distinction between legal and other writers, by observing:<sup>2</sup>

True, our goals are often similar to those of other writers, but we face special problem. For example, we struggle constantly to distinguish terms of art from high falutin jargon, and that from useful professional shorthand (Avoid foreign language, yes - but when and how) we use ordinary English words in senses ordinary to us. We use and cite authorities in peculiar ways....Good legal style consists mostly in figuring out the substance precisely and accurately, than stating it clearly.

Basically, the book deals with the legalese and gives hints and ideas as to make it more forceful, purposeful, meaningful and how to free it from clinches, repetitions, ponderosities and other barriers that tend to make it ambiguous. That legal writings never become a cant, one needs to read and consult this book over and over again.

Each and every chapter of this book has been meticulously presented. The

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1. Bryan A. Garner, *The Elements of Legal Style* (1991).

2. *Id.* at 4.

treatment is lucid and clear and examples are simple enough to bring home the point to the reader.

The printing of Oxford Press needs no comment; it is at its best and the book is a testimony to the fact.

The highlight of the book is that it shows to the legal writer the “trouble spots” in legal writing and how to come out of it effortlessly. But the point is one needs to read and re-read the book minutely and keep it handy while writing the legal material.

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