I kept wondering what to say to you in this last talk, and then I had a bright idea. At least I *hope* it's a bright idea. I said to myself. "Suppose you give a talk about giving a talk."—"A talk about giving a talk! How d'you mean?"—"Why, how you set about it, and the tricks of the trade, and so on."—"Yes, that *is* rather an idea," I said to myself. So here goes. . . .

There've been bits in the paper sometimes about my broadcasts. The bits I've always liked best are those that refer to John Hilton "who just comes to the microphone and *talks*. So different from listening to something being *read*." Oh yes, I like that. For, of course, I read every word of every talk. If only I could pull it off every time—but you have to be at the top of your form. Yes, of course, every word's on paper even now—this—what I'm saying to you now—it's all here. Talking! Just as it comes to

him! Right out of his head! I hope it sounds so; it's meant to. If it does—well—this is one of my good days.

"Tricks of the trade." Must I really tell you those? All right. The first trick of the trade is that there aren't any tricks. I mean tricks don't come off. That's my experience, anyway. I've tried, in my time, this way and that. I like experiments. I'll try anything once. But the little stunts and try-ons—no good! For me, I mean, of course. I think what listeners can spot more surely than anything else is any trace of falseness. I think you've got to find yourself—the radio rendering of yourself, and then be true to it. Truth, not tricks. For my sort of stuff, I mean, of course.

"But to read as if you were talking! Isn't that a trick?" Oh no, that's an art—or a craft, whichever you like. And in every art or craft there's a technique, a method, a way. What is it here? Well, I suppose each has to find his own; but my notion is that to read as if you were talking you must first write as if you were talking. What you have on the paper in front of you must be talk stuff, not book stuff.

It's, in part, a mere matter of how you put the words down on the paper. That very sentence now, the one you've just heard. It began with "It's in part. . . ." If I'd said to you, "It is, in part," you'd have thought, "He's reading." In speech we say, "It's," not "It is." So I write "I T apostrophe S," and not "It is" on the paper. I know if I wrote, "It is," I should say "It is." . . .

I don't know anything about others, as I say, but my way is to speak my sentences aloud as I write them. In fact, here's my second rule, all pat: "To write as you would talk you must talk while you write." If you were outside my room while I'm writing a talk you'd hear muttering and mumbling and outright declaration from beginning to end. You'd say, "There's somebody in there with a slate loose; he never stops talking to himself." No, I wouldn't be talking to *myself* but to you. . . .

You can scrap, in writing a talk, most of what you've been told all your life was literary good form. You have to; if you want your talk to ring the bell and walk in and sit down by the hearth. You've been told, for instance, that it's bad form to end a sentence with a preposition. It may be, in print. But not in talk. Not in talk. I'm coming to the view that what I call the "prepositional verb" (I'm no grammarian—I invent my own names for those things)—that what I call the prepositional verb is one of the glories of the English language. You start with a simple verb like "to stand"; and with the help of a pocketful of prepositions you get all those lovely changes: to stand up, to stand down, to stand off, to stand in, to stand by, to stand over—and twenty others. We score over the French there. The Germans have it; but they stick their prepositions in front of

the verbs. I think our way has much more punch to it. And what bull's-eyes you can score with the prepositional verb if only you'll search for it and, having found it, let the preposition come at the end of the sentence.

You know how odd moments stick in the memory. One stays in mine. I was dealing with retirement pensions. I was tired. Tired to the point of writing that awful jargon that passes for English. I'd written something like "I don't want what I've said to discourage you from pursuing this question further; rather I would wish that my arguments should prove an added stimulus. . . ." At that point I said to myself, "Now, come on, John, pull yourself together. That won't do: what is it you're trying to say?" And I pulled myself together (tired as I was)—I pulled myself together and searched and found it. "I don't want to put you off. I want rather to set you on." That was all. (What torment we have to go through to find what it is we're trying to say and how to say it in simple words.) That was all. Two simple sentences: put you *off*—set you *on*. Each ending with a preposition.

At that point, as I wrote this script, I went for a walk round the houses. Two lads were talking as I passed. One had three dogs on a leash. The other asked, as I went by, "What d'you keep dogs for?" I pricked up my ears at that (for more reasons than one, you know). But I'm always interested in the way people say things. Quite as much as in what they say. "What d'you keep dogs for?" That was his way of asking, "Why do you keep dogs?" It's most people's way. I fancy it's my way, as often as not. In my everyday speech, I mean. But suppose I'm writing a talk, and want to ask a question like that in it. Which form shall I use? Shall I say, "Why," or shall I say, "What for"? The first saves a word, and over the air a word saved in expressing a thought is a kingdom gained. The second not only wastes a word, but the sentence ends in the wrong sort of preposition, the one on which you drop your voice: "What d'you keep *dogs* for?" So you'd say, "Use the first." Yes, but I like what I say to get home; and to get at that lad, mustn't I use *his* form, not the best form? The times I've had to face that question: popular English or good English!

I think I've mostly dodged it. There's an idiom, I believe, lies behind both. Behind both stiff speech and loose talk. I think if you can get back to *that*, the boy on the bike and the girl at the counter and the man at the works and the woman in the home will all feel the speech you're using to be, perhaps not "true to life"—but something better: truer than life. It's a choice of word and a turn of speech that, if only you can get it, reflects the very soul and spirit of our language. It comes down, of course, through Shakespeare and the Authorized Version. But there's nothing old-fashioned, nothing dead and done with about it. It's all alive and

kicking. But it keeps to the homely words that belong to the oldest English and to homely turns of speech. That's the way out I've tried to find. Sometimes I've felt I've really found it, and then what a thrill! How often I've tried for it and failed. . . .

I do believe that's all I want to say about the technique of *composing* talk. All I want to say here and now, I mean. It's all I *can* say, anyhow. But about delivering over the air what's composed? Ah, there I think I'd better keep quiet. Each has a way that best suits himself (or herself, of course). Each must find that way: his or her own way. To find it one has to experiment, as I've said. You may even, I think, copy or mimic someone else's style now and again just to see if there's anything in it that fits you. But in the end, you've got to find your own self. Or rather, you've got to find or create a radio version of your real self (all that about being natural's no good, you know. Fine art's never natural, it only looks it. Or sounds it.) You've got to find or create a radio version of yourself, the radio quintessence of yourself, and then write for it, and go to the microphone and act it—with truth and sincerity.

Just two odd things from my own experience on the matter of delivery. My belief is that listeners hear speech, not in a sequence of words—one after the other—but in chunks; and what I try to do, though I may seldom succeed in my good intentions, is to throw out my words in bunches . . . like that . . . and then pause long enough for the listener to take that bunch in. I don't know if that's right for everyone; I don't even know if others would think it right for me; but it's been my theory, and it's what I've aimed at in practice, however often I may have missed the mark.

The other oddment is this. The matter of speed. All over, average speed. Many of you have written to me from time to time: "What you were saying was so exciting. But oh I wish you'd gone slower. I missed some words." Yes, but if I'd gone slower you wouldn't have been excited. You'd have written then and said, "Why were you so solemn? You nearly sent me to sleep!" Oh, I know. . . . You can't have it both ways. When I *have* gone slow it's not been for that. It's been because of my many friends in Wales who have trouble in following too rapid English, however clearly it may be spoken.

Well, there you are. That's my last talk—a talk about giving a talk. It's a sort of—well, I won't say "last will and testament," but at any rate a testament. So now, I leave you for a year or two. I'm going to take things easy for a while—or try to. Then I must buckle to on all sorts of other explorations and enterprises. I know I shall have your good wishes. You have mine. Look after yourselves. Blessings on you. ■