

Before replying to my question he added a few concluding lines to his article; then leaned back in his chair and lighted his pipe.

"I derive my wisdom from the same source from which other men derive theirs—from books. I have a very valuable library."

"Library; you haven't got any. Where is it?" I asked, incredulously.

He silently pointed to a swing-shelf hanging against the wall, upon which were ranged about a score of shabby, well-worn volumes of various dimensions. I could have tied a string round them, and carried them all on my back, without the slightest inconvenience.

"You don't mean to dignify those few tattered old books by the name of a library, do you?" I asked.

"Listen," he replied, "and I will let you into the whole secret of writing for the periodical press. I wouldn't do as much for everybody, but I owe you some reparation for having dashed your own literary hopes. You can't write a readable novel, but if you will favour me with your close attention I may put you up to the trick of earning bread and butter as I do. That swing-shelf to which I just now directed your attention, of the contents whereof you speak so contemptuously, supports an amount of inspiration which, judiciously used, will last an ordinary literary hack like myself for a lifetime. In order that you may be able to fully realize this truth, I will take down the works in their order, and expound their respective merits to you.

"These ten volumes," continued he, "are CHAMBERS'S ENCYCLOPEDIA—the substratum of all my learning—the field from which I glean straws for nearly all my marketable sheaves. It is absolutely necessary for every man who lives by literature, no matter how generally well-informed he may be, to have constant recourse to an encyclopædia. Every well-furnished newspaper office contains one for the use of the staff, and scarcely a day passes in which it is not consulted. In future, when you pick up one of the leading dailies, and read therein an exhaustive account of the whole process of paper-manufacture, or a brief epitome of all that is known on the subject of Prester John, don't for a moment suppose that the article has been written by a man who has had any practical experience of the manufacture of paper, or who has enjoyed any special facilities for treating of His Most Christian Majesty of the East, who most probably never existed. Just make up your mind that the writer knew no more about the matter than yourself, until he sat down to get up the materials for his article. Such materials as he may need he supplies himself with from time to time, as occasion may require; and as a rule he finds those materials in an encyclopædia. Of course there are much more comprehensive works of this nature than Chambers's. At the head of the list stands the Encyclopædia Britannica—the most valuable work in the English language—but it is too costly a luxury for a poor author to indulge himself with. There is also Knight's Cabinet Cyclopædia, the American Cyclopædia published by the Appletons, and various others; but even those are expensive, and for ordinary purposes this one answers quite as well. I bought it second-hand for half-price—about twelve dollars—and the investment has paid for itself fifty times over. Formerly I had only the first two volumes, which, as you will perceive, only go as far as CHI; so that I was grievously restricted in my choice of a subject. I wrote learned discourses on Ærolites, Acoustics, Alcohol, Architecture, the Barometer, Buddhism, Calico-printing, and the Chinese Empire; but when our editor requested me to furnish him with an article on Hydrostatics, I was compelled to avail myself of the Parliamentary Library. Since I have had the complete work, however, I don't find it necessary to go there once a month. There are very few subjects that present themselves for treatment respecting which I cannot find sufficient information for my purposes in these volumes. You will understand that I have to cut and hack and transpose, and dress the matter up in an original shape in words of my own, occasionally adding a few incidental circumstances obtained from other sources. This identical paper on the Michigan Murder does not contain a single original idea of my own. I have cribbed it all out of the "Memoirs of Vidocq" and Edgar Poe's detective stories, which I specially consulted for the

purpose. That scheme for the detection of the murderer, which you think so brilliant, is at least as old as Fouché, and probably much older.

"Next in order comes this huge quarto, which is WEBSTER'S UNABRIDGED DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. Of course it is not often that a literary man has occasion to consult a dictionary for the purpose of knowing how to spell a word correctly, or even to ascertain its ordinary meaning; but it is a matter of almost daily necessity to know the *derivation* of a word. I prefer Webster to any other work of the same kind. This, as you will observe, is the last edition; and I have never yet had occasion to trace the history of any word which I have not found here. Then, the definitions are concise and clearly expressed. It accurately exhibits all the various shades and degrees of meaning which are authorized either by prescriptive usage or by actual derivation. It likewise contains a comprehensive list of the phrases in every day use. Here, you see, is an explanatory and pronouncing vocabulary of the noted names of fiction and tradition. To a literary man, this department alone is worth much more than the price of the entire work. "Dark and Bloody Ground," "Seven Wonders of the World," "Sick Man of the East," and a thousand other terms occasionally met with are defined for us clearly and succinctly. Then, there are comprehensive lists shewing the correct pronunciation of Modern Geographical, Biographical, and Greek and Latin names: a collection of contractions and abbreviations, and of arbitrary signs used in writing and printing; and even a proof-sheet, shewing how corrections for the press are made. All things considered, this quarto contains such a mine of useful information as is to be found in no other single volume which has ever come under my notice. I might as well attempt to get along without pens, ink, or paper; and if it could not be replaced I would not part with it for its weight in gold.

"This thick volume is MEN OF THE TIME, a work which I also find very useful for purposes of reference; though it is much to be regretted that greater care was not taken in its compilation. Here, for instance, we have four full pages devoted to an individual about whom no one can possibly wish to know anything, while many persons whose lives are of infinitely more importance to the public are dismissed in a few lines. It is, however, the best work of its kind extant, and as such is a necessary addition to a literary man's library.

"I next invite your particular attention to these four large folios, which are SCRAP BOOKS. Ever since I began to write for the press I have made a practice of cutting out from any newspapers or periodicals which came in my way such paragraphs or items as might possibly be turned to account. In making these selections I have had an eye exclusively to utility; and as a necessary consequence of the numerous sources whence I have drawn, the contents of these volumes are quite as heterogeneous as the contents of the dictionary itself. Few periodicals are so utterly trashy or worthless that some scraps of useful information cannot be derived from them, and I have not disdained to extract from all classes of journals. Here, for instance, side by side with half a column from the *Saturday Review*, is a paragraph from the *New York Clipper*. At the end of each extract I have, as you see, noted the name and date of the paper from which the slip was cut; and at the end of each volume is a full index. As a matter of course, all this entails a considerable amount of labour, but I find that it *pays*. I have been rather more than three years filling these four volumes, and I believe that if I live to see my fiftieth birthday I shall have a collection quite as valuable as the encyclopædia. The novel called "A Terrible Temptation" furnished me with a judicious hint of which I shall probably avail myself a few years hence; and that is, to compile an *Index ad Indices*.

"This is my COMMON-PLACE BOOK. You see I am unfolding to your gaze all the secrets of my professional workshop. Every literary man keeps a book of this description, but it is not every one who cares to acknowledge the fact. Just look at the extent to which Hawthorne availed himself of the idea. I, however, don't practice the trick on nearly so extensive a scale. The greater part of the contents of my common-place book are merely vague