

At the Sign of the Wooden Leg

By "Silas Wegg."

Keep Your Pencil Pointed.

The pointing of a pencil is an art in itself. Pencils have been sharpened in all sorts of ways with all sorts of instruments. Mrs. Wegg sharpens her pencils with the scissors. Silas Wegg, Jr., uses his teeth for the purpose. They are of the utilitarian school, to whom a pencil is a mere convenience. Their aim, like that of the rapid-fire story-teller, is to get to the point as soon as possible. With me—I say it in all modesty—it is different. I do not pose as an artist, and my finished work would not entitle me to the rank, but I am an artist in feeling, and so I love to linger over the pointing of my pencil as a deacon lingers over his grace at the table. In fact no good work is accomplished with a pencil unless the work has been prefaced with a sacrament of calm and reflective pointing. The knife and the pencil should be held firmly, yet not fiercely, the pencil should be revolved slowly by the thumb, and there should be no gouging. Hack work in the sharpening of a pencil is a fitting prelude to hack work in the use of it.

Whether the work to be undertaken is of a literary or business nature, or even if the pencil is to be used as a pastime, great good comes from the moments spent in carefully preparing the point. The poet offers his delicate whittles as a sacrifice to the muses. The mathematician knows that the time is not wasted while he slowly removes the splinters from his pencil. He is sharpening his wits at the same time.

It is not of the artists alone that I would speak however. I summon all to court, artists, utilitarians and any others that are loafing in the market-place. I urge them, admonish them, exhort them to keep their pencils sharpened, for I am in a practical mood, as the saying goes, today. I intend talking about habits of observation and might use as a sub-text to the one I have chosen the words of Captain Cuttle—"And when found take a note of."

To begin with, it is necessary, before one takes notes, to take notice. There are a good many blind people in the world who do not have little dogs to lead them. They are not totally blind however. They can see the streets but they cannot see the people in them, or, if they see the people, they cannot distinguish one from another. The people they do see are just people as a primrose by the river's brim was just a primrose to Peter Bell and nothing more. I sometimes think that the blind man of the Gospels who, when his sight was restored, saw men as trees walking came into a state of vision that is denied to most of us. It requires good eyes to see what he saw, but a man who learns to take notice will observe men as trees and trees as men, and he need not try to find rhymes to fit his visions either.

"Alas," I hear some critic say, "he said he was going to be practical, and is this practical, this talking of the foolish ways of children who find faces in the clouds and the wall-paper?" Quite right, my dear Critic, quite right. I was only clearing the ground for the real practical