

of his novels, wrote in a whirlwind of inspiration, and never spent a moment with the file; but this, instead of justifying the neglect of revision, only explains the slovenliness of much of his composition. His writings abound in Scotticisms, errors in grammar, and other faults of style. When finishing the "Fair Maid of Perth," he was troubled how to pack the catastrophe into the space allotted for it. "There is no help for it," he said; "I must make a *tour de force*, and annihilate both time and space." He too often made these *tours de force*. Beginning his novels with no definite plan, he let his plots construct themselves, the result of which was that his conclusions were often hurried, abrupt and unsatisfactory.

But, it may be asked, is not the best writing, like the best painting, spontaneous, and does not the practised become the ready hand? Did not Cervantes say that the jests of Sancho fell from him like drops of rain when he least thought of it, and do not the works of Raphael and Rubens seem to have cost them, as Hazlitt says, no more labour than if they "had drawn in their breath, and puffed it forth again"? Are not many fine literary productions thrown off like the beautiful Dresden Madonna, which Raphael painted without any previous studies or drawings? We answer, yes; the best writing is spontaneous, but it is the spontaneous-ness of a second and disciplined nature. It is the experience of the veteran accomplishing with ease what seemed impossible to the raw recruit. It was because Gibbon wrote slowly "until he had got his one tune by heart," that he was able to send the last three volumes of the "Decline and Fall" in the first draft to press. It was after years of laborious self-training and experience that Raphael was able to throw his whole idea, in all its perfection and completeness, upon the

canvas, without the necessity of realizing it by piecemeal in intermediate attempts. In all such cases, where miracles of swiftness seem to have been performed, the miracle will melt, if we scrutinize it closely. We shall find that the picture has been painted, and the book written, with such ease, because years of study and practice have so lubricated the mental instruments, that, when the motive power is applied, they work, to a great extent, with the precision and regularity of a machine.

It is hardly necessary to add that one may dawdle too much over his compositions—that he may use the file till it weakens them. There is a medium between the carelessness of Lope de Vega, who wrote a hundred plays in as many days, and the fastidiousness of the poet Dana, of whom Lowell says that he is so well aware how things *should* be done, that "his own works displease him before they are begun;" between the excessive caution of the ancient orator who was three olympiads in writing a single oration, and the reckless haste of the poet whose funeral pile was composed of his own productions. Perhaps the best description of the natural manner in which a great work comes into existence, is that quoted by Hammer-ton from Michelet. The French writer says of one of his own books, that, "*it was produced by the heat of a gentle incubation.*" ("*Elle s'est fait à la chaleur d'une douce incubation.*")

That the moral character of a writer has much to do with the quality of his work, can hardly be doubted. No man who stands habitually on a low moral and spiritual plane can produce a great work of art, whether in literature, sculpture, or painting. Noble thoughts can come only from a noble soul. It is said that in India a muslin is manufactured which is so fine that it has received the poetic name of "Woven Wind." When laid