

MANY people suppose that a novelist's system of work is quick and perceptive: no method of slow, laborious reasoning is required; all comes like a lightning flash to the end of the pen. The testimony of William Black, the English writer of Scotch stories, puts a different complexion on the matter. "I am building up a book months before I write the first chapter," he says; "before I can put pen to paper I have to realize all the chief incidents and characters. I have to live with my characters, so to speak; otherwise I am afraid they would never appear living people to my readers. This is my work during the summer, which is devoted to an exploration of different localities in the Highlands. Now and again I have had to read a great deal preparatory to writing. Before beginning "Sunrise," for instance, I went through the history of secret societies in Europe. The only time that I am really free from the burden of the novel that is to be is when I am grouse-shooting or salmon-fishing. At other times I am haunted by the characters and the scenes in which they take part, so that for the sake of his peace of mind my method is not to be recommended to any young novelist. When I come to the writing, I have to immure myself in perfect quietude; my study is at the top of the house, and on the two or three days a week that I am writing, Mrs. Black guards me from interruption."

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BUT even Mrs. Black could not control ulterior forces. During their residence in London they once found themselves next door to a family whose nursery on the top floor was filled with a number of thoroughly vitalized children. In the early morning hours, just when Mr. Black was in condition for his best work, sounds began to issue from beyond his study wall. The day's hostilities usually opened with a pillow fight, to quell which called forth the best energies of the eldest sister whose commands rang out in sharp *staccato* above the clamor of charging infantry. As the morning toilet progressed, the air resounded with shrill protests against the order of the bath, and promptly responsive slaps upon exposed surfaces. The call to

daily devotions was always issued in the same formula: "There, now, you're dressed, you nasty little things! now, kneel down and say your horrid little prayers." A momentary lull was followed by the vociferated chorus: "We've said our prayers! we've said our prayers!" and a wild stampede to breakfast in lower regions, which might have been very much farther down if the exasperated novelist had controlled the department of transportation and foreign travel. After a few heroic attempts at becoming accustomed to this daily riot next door, Mr. Black abandoned himself to complete mental rest, devoted some days to house-hunting, and succeeded in finding a more habitable locality.

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THE Mansion House Council on the Dwellings of the Poor of London, have photographed the famous Fagin's Kitchen, described by Dicken's in "Oliver Twist," prior to pulling down the old building known by the somewhat pompous name of "Viaduct Chambers." The spot does not seem to have been altered since the days of the Artful Dodger. The building, now a registered lodging-house, from the outside has that respectable, poverty-stricken look so common in more neglected corners of London. Fagin's Kitchen, however, does not belie the description given in "Oliver Twist." It is indescribably sordid and dirty, lighted only by a grating, and certainly unfit, from a modern point of view for human habitation.

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SOME time ago a young English girl, in quest of a copy of "Jonathan and His Continent," asked an old German bibliophile if he had in stock, "Max O'Rell in the United States." "Ach, Mees," expostulated the irate fossil, "Marcus Aurelius was *nevaire* in the United States." As a last touch to the tableau, we will state that not so very long ago we asked in a Yonge Street store for "The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius," in paper cover. The young person behind the counter gazed at us in blank astonishment, and, with no attempt at repressing an indulgent smile, sweetly suggested that we "must certainly want something by Max O'Rell."