

greater mistake than when you conceived yourself to be a born novelist. For know that, notwithstanding all I have told you, there is no royal road to authorship; at least to such authorship as is worthy of the name. Did you ever read Edgar Poe's essay on "The Philosophy of Composition?" You didn't. Well, in that essay the author gives an elaborate account of the genesis of that wonderful poem of his, *The Raven*. He professes that its composition was a mere mechanical operation from beginning to end; that he went to work by rule and compass, just as calmly and deliberately as though he had been about to manufacture a common deal table; and finally produced the most remarkable poem of its kind in any language. Now, he, poor fellow, was, unfortunately, so abandoned a liar that I should be vehemently disposed to doubt the fact of the earth's revolution on its axis if insisted upon very strongly by him. But even admitting, for the sake of argument, that he went to work precisely in the manner he describes, and worked out his problem like the *pons asinorum*: admitting all this, I repeat, do you for one moment suppose that any amount of attention to his directions would enable you or me, or indeed anyone but himself, to bring about such a result. I have tried my hand, and can speak from bitter experience. I produced a poem of the orthodox length; in fact strictly according to his scheme, in every respect. I am thankful to say that I had the good sense to stick it in the fire as soon as it was finished. I can only remember one stanza, which you shall hear. The poem opened with a namby-pamby description of myself and my surroundings, as I sat alone in my desolate chamber at the witching hour of twilight. If I remember aright, I represented myself as "gazing through the skylight," in order to rhyme with "twilight," when I was disturbed in my reflections by hearing "a footfall on the floor of my chamber, near the door," which I opened, and encountered a base-born burglar, whose physical exterior I described as follows:—

"He was dirty, grim, and grimy; and his locks were lank and slimy;  
And his nose was tipped with crimson, with a wart upon the end;  
And his lips they had the snigger of a base and vulgar nigger,  
And his aspect and his figure were not those of any friend;  
And he didn't look like one whom it would answer to offend—  
Upon that you may depend."

"Stay a moment—I remember another stanza, in which I addressed the intruder in this wise:—

"O, thou most repulsive party, with proboscis red and warty,  
And demeanour most unhearty, say what errand make you here?  
Thou art neither shorn nor shaven, and thy looks bespeak thee craven;  
Tell thy business then instant; let it sans delay appear:  
Then, proceed about thy business, and no longer linger here!  
Thus I spoke, with frown severe."

"Enough. You see that, notwithstanding I implicitly followed the instructions of Mr. Poe, the results in the cases of his experiment and mine were widely different. Do you ask me why? I answer, because in my case the keystones were wanting. I had neither Poe's general literary ability, nor his "fine frenzy;" both of which were needed to produce so marvellous a piece of *diablerie* as *The Raven*. The canons of composition which he lays down, even if he made use of them at all—which I don't for a moment believe he ever did—were only accessories. They were of no use whatever in the hands of a numskull.—The moral of this little episode, which is not a digression, is, that in order to achieve literary success you must possess literary ability. And this ability does not consist in a mere facility in stringing words and sentences and paragraphs together. The words, sentences, and paragraphs must have something higher to recommend them than mere consecutiveness. They must not only *express*, but they must likewise *suggest*.—I spoke of literary fame and wealth a moment ago. Now, leaving permanent literary fame altogether out of the question, as being totally unattainable by such commonplace specimens of the *genus homo* as you and myself, how many literary men do you suppose there are in the world at the present moment who are making more than a bare living? Not one in a hundred, I give you my word of honour. And what a task do they find it, even to do so much? Don't you see that I am rapidly wearing myself out, even for such pitiful success as falls to my lot. No

labour on earth is so hard as literary labour, and no labour is so inadequately paid for—unless you happen to be the fortunate one man out of the hundred. Hackneyed as is the saying that literature is a good staff but a bad crutch, it is worth quoting again.

"My system of literary composition is one very commonly resorted to by writers everywhere. The marvel that editors can be found who will accept articles so composed, is only surpassed by the marvel that a public is to be found who will read them. I wonder at this more and more every week of my life. And then, what self-contempt one experiences, to be guilty of such miserable petty-larceny: to be daily and nightly pilfering the thoughts and suggestions of one's betters, and selling them, without material addition or any improvement, as one's own.

"Mind you, the system is legitimate and honourable enough, if confined within certain bounds. Shakspeare himself stole the plots of all his dramas, after he had surfeited himself (if the tale be true, which I suppose it isn't) with stealing deer in Charlcote Park. But then, the matter grew, and improved, and waxed mighty under his hands. He found pebbles and left them pearls. *Nullum quod teligit non ornavit*—which remark, by the way, has been made once or twice before. Pass the lager—by heaven, I have become so demoralized that I can't even *talk* without stealing. Pass the lager, I say."

I did as I was bidden, and another pint disappeared.

"Do you know, Paul, I have an idea?" I remarked, after a pause.

He sprang to his feet, seized the poker, and made a long, dingy mark on the paper of the wall; saying, as he did so:

"Bravo! that's more than you ever had when you were writing that infernally stupid novel; and thus I register the fact."

He seemed excited, and was evidently getting tipsy. That last pint had been too much for him.

"Let us hear it," he exclaimed.

"Well, it has occurred to me to report the lecture with which you have just favoured me, and to forward it to ARCTURUS for publication."

"Ha! well, those are *two* ideas; so I'll make another mark," he replied, suiting the action to the word: "and I give you my solemn assurance that if you do, I'll make a *third*—on your head. In other words, I'll knock your brains out."

All this, as previously intimated, took place last night. He has gone to the office of one of the daily newspapers this morning, and will be there all day. Before he returns, this MS. will be in the post. If it is accepted, I shall take passage for New York as soon as ever the editor apprises me of the fact; for Paul will be savage enough to keep his word.

A PHOTOGRAPHER writes to the *Camera Magazine* that he once took a photograph of a child that was seemingly in good health and with a clear skin. The negative showed the face to be thickly covered with an eruption. Three days afterward the child was covered with spots due to prickly heat. "The camera had seen and photographed the eruption three days before it was visible to the naked eye." It is said that another case of a similar kind is recorded, where a child showed spots on his portrait which were invisible on his face a fortnight previous to an attack of small-pox.

A REMARKABLE incident occurred at a private sale in England a few days ago, which illustrates the saying that worth will out. In a private auction of household effects in Stratton Place, including beds and bedding, chairs and oil-cloth, a little picture by Meissonier came under the hammer. It measured 8 inches by 5½. It was painted in 1862—about three years before the master's best period—and represented "A Smoker." A few collectors, of that race which instinctively scents out a good thing, were present in hopes of a bargain, but one or two of the picture dealers had got wind of the affair. After much spirited bidding, the picture was finally disposed of for \$4,975—a pretty stiff price.