ERICHSEN HUGO

METHODS OF AUTHORS

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Содержание

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PREFACE

When I began to gather the material for this volume I was quite doubtful as to whether the public would be interested in a work of this kind or not. As my labor progressed, however, it became evident that not only the body of the people, but authors themselves, were deeply interested in the subject, and would welcome a book treating of it. Not only M. Jules Claretie, the celebrated Parisian literarian, but the late Dr. Meissner and many others assured me of this fact.

Nor is this very surprising. Who, after reading a brilliant novel, or some excellent treatise, would not like to know how it was written?

So far as I know, this volume is a novelty, and Ben Akiba is outwitted for once. Books about authors have been published by the thousands, but to my knowledge, up to date, none have been issued describing their methods of work.

In the preparation of this book I have been greatly aided by the works of Rev. Francis Jacox, an anonymous article in *All the Year Round*, and R. E. Francillon's essay on "The Physiology of Authorship," which appeared first in the *Gentleman's Magazine*.

I was also assisted in my labor by numerous newspaper clippings and many letters from writers, whose names appear in this volume, and to all of whom I return my sincere thanks.

H. E.

Detroit, Mich.

I.
Eccentricities in Composition

The public – that is, the reading world made up of those who love the products of authorship – always takes an interest in the methods of work adopted by literary men, and is fond of gaining information about authorship in the act, and of getting a glimpse of its favorite, the author, at work in that "sanctum sanctorum" – the study. The modes in which men write are so various that it would take at least a dozen volumes to relate them, were they all known, for: —

"Some wits are only in the mind
When beaux and belles are 'round them prating;
Some, when they dress for dinner, find
Their muse and valet both in waiting;
And manage, at the self-same time,
To adjust a neckcloth and a rhyme.

"Some bards there are who cannot scribble
Without a glove to tear or nibble;
Or a small twig to whisk about —
As if the hidden founts of fancy,
Like wells of old, were thus found out
By mystic tricks of rhabdomancy.

"Such was the little feathery wand,
That, held forever in the hand
Of her who won and wore the crown
Of female genius in this age,
Seemed the conductor that drew down
Those words of lightning to her page."

This refers to Madame de Staël, who, when writing, wielded a "little feathery wand," made of paper, shaped like a fan or feather, in the manner and to the effect above described.

Well may the vivacious penman of "Rhymes on the Road" exclaim: —

"What various attitudes, and ways,
And tricks we authors have in writing!
While some write sitting, some, like Bayes,
Usually stand while they're inditing.
Poets there are who wear the floor out,
Measuring a line at every stride;
While some, like Henry Stephens, pour out
Rhymes by the dozen while they ride.
Herodotus wrote most in bed;
And Richerand, a French physician,
Declares the clockwork of the head
Goes best in that reclined position.
If you consult Montaigne and Pliny on
The subject, 'tis their joint opinion
That thought its richest harvest yields

Abroad, among the woods and fields."

M. de Valois alleges that Plato produced, like Herodotus, "his glorious visions all in bed"; while

"'Twas in his carriage the sublime
Sir Richard Blackmore used to rhyme."

But little is known of the habits of the earliest writers. The great Plato, whose thoughts seemed to come so easy, we are told, toiled over his manuscripts, working with slow and tiresome elaboration. The opening sentence of "The Republic" on the author's tablets was found to be written in thirteen different versions. When death called him from his labor the great philosopher was busy at his desk, "combing, and curling, and weaving, and unweaving his writings after a variety of fashions." Virgil was wont to pour forth a quantity of verses in the morning, which he decreased to a very small number by incessant correction and elimination. He subjected the products of his composition to a process of continual polishing and filing, much after the manner, as he said himself, of a bear licking her cubs into shape. Cicero's chief pleasure was literary work. He declared that he would willingly forego all the wealth and glory of the world to spend his time in meditation or study.

The diversity in the methods adopted by authors is as great as the difference in their choice of subjects. A story is often cited in illustration of the different characteristics of three great

nationalities which equally illustrates the different paths which may be followed in any intellectual undertaking.

An Englishman, a Frenchman, and a German, competing for a prize offered for the best essay on the natural history of the camel, adopted each his own method of research upon the subject. The German, providing himself with a stock of tobacco, sought the quiet solitude of his study in order to evolve from the depths of his philosophic consciousness the primitive notion of a camel. The Frenchman repaired to the nearest library, and overhauled its contents in order to collect all that other men had written upon the subject. The Englishman packed his carpet-bag and set sail for the East, that he might study the habits of the animal in its original haunts.

The combination of these three methods is the perfection of study; but the Frenchman's method is not unknown even among Americans. Nor does it deserve the condemnation it usually receives. The man who peruses a hundred books on a subject for the purpose of writing one bestows a real benefit upon society, in case he does his work well. But some excellent work has been composed without the necessity either of research or original investigation. Anthony Trollope described his famous archdeacon without ever having met a live archdeacon. He never lived in any cathedral city except London; Archdeacon Grantly was the child of "moral consciousness" alone; Trollope had no knowledge, except indirectly, about bishops and deans. In fact, "The Warden" was not intended originally to be a novel

of clerical life, but a novel which should work out a dramatic situation – that of a trustworthy, amiable man who was the holder, by no fault of his own, of an endowment which was in itself an abuse, and on whose devoted head should fall the thunders of those who assailed the abuse.

Bryan Waller Proctor, the poet (who, I believe, is better known under the name of "Barry Cornwall"), had never viewed the ocean when he committed to paper that beautiful poem, "The Sea." Many of his finest lyrics and songs were composed mentally while he was riding daily to London in an omnibus. Schiller had never been in Switzerland, and had only heard and read about the country, when he wrote his "William Tell." Harrison Ainsworth, the Lancashire novelist, when he composed "Rookwood" and "Jack Sheppard," depended entirely on his ability to read up and on his facility of assimilation, for during his lifetime he never came in personal contact with thieves at all. It is said that when he wrote the really admirable ride of Turpin to York he only went at a great pace over the paper, with a road-map and description of the country in front of him. It was only when he heard all the world say how faithfully the region was pictured, and how truly he had observed distances and localities, that he actually drove over the ground for the first time, and declared that it was more like his account than he could have imagined.

Erasmus composed on horseback, as he pricked across the country, and committed his thoughts to paper as soon as he reached his next inn. In this way he composed his "Encomium

Moriæ," or "Praise of Folly," in a journey from Italy to the land of the man to whose name that title bore punning and complimentary reference, his sterling friend and ally, Sir Thomas More.

Aubrey relates how Hobbes composed his "Leviathan": "He walked much and mused as he walked; and he had in the head of his cane a pen and inkhorn, and he carried always a note-book in his pocket, and 'as soon as the thought darted,' he presently entered it into his book, or otherwise might have lost it. He had drawn the design of the book into chapters, etc., and he knew whereabouts it would come in." Hartley Coleridge somewhere expresses his entire conviction that it was Pope's general practice to set down in a book every line, half-line, or lucky phrase that occurred to him, and either to find or make a place for them when and where he could. Richard Savage noted down a whole tragedy on scraps of paper at the counters of shops, into which he entered and asked for pen and ink as if to make a memorandum.

"A man would do well to carry a pencil in his pocket, and write down the thoughts of the moment. Those that come unsought are generally the most valuable, and should be secured, because they seldom return." This was the advice of Lord Bacon, whose example has been followed by many eminent men. Miss Martineau has recorded that Barry Cornwall's favorite method of composition was practised when alone in a crowd. He, like Savage, also had a habit of running into a shop to write down his verses. Tom Moore's custom was to compose as he walked. He

had a table in his garden, on which he wrote down his thoughts. When the weather was bad, he paced up and down his small study. It is extremely desirable that thoughts should be written as they rise in the mind, because, if they are not recorded at the time, they may never return. "I attach so much importance to the ideas which come during the night, or in the morning," says Gaston Plante, the electrical engineer, "that I have always, at the head of my bed, paper and pencil suspended by a string, by the help of which I write every morning the ideas I have been able to conceive, particularly upon subjects of scientific research. I write these notes in obscurity, and decipher and develop them in the morning, pen in hand." The philosopher Emerson took similar pains to catch a fleeting thought, for, whenever he had a happy idea, he wrote it down, and when Mrs. Emerson, startled in the night by some unusual sound, cried, "What is the matter? Are you ill?" the philosopher softly replied, "No, my dear; only an idea."

George Bancroft, the historian, had a similar habit. His bedroom served also as a library. The room was spacious, and its walls were lined, above and below, with volumes. A single bed stood in the middle of the apartment, and beside the bed were paper, pencil, two wax candles, and matches; so that, like Mr. Pecksniff, Mr. Bancroft might not forget any idea that came into his mind in a wakeful moment of the night.

As curious a mode of composition as perhaps any on record, if the story be credible, is that affirmed of Fuller – that he used

to write the first words of every line near the margin down to the foot of the paper, and that then, beginning again, he filled up the blanks exactly, without spaces, interlineations, or contractions, and that he would so connect the ends and beginnings that the sense would appear as complete as if it had been written in a continued series after the ordinary manner.

Several distinguished American writers have the habit of jotting a sentence, or a line or two here and there, upon a long page, and then filling up the outline thus made with persistent revision.

With some great writers, it has been customary to do a vast amount of antecedent work before beginning their books. It is related of George Eliot that she read one thousand books before she wrote "Daniel Deronda." For two or three years before she composed a work, she read up her subject in scores and scores of volumes. She was one of the masters, so called, of all learning, talking with scholars and men of science on terms of equality. George Eliot was a hard worker, and, like many gifted writers, she was often tempted to burn at night the lines she had written during the day. Carlyle was similarly tempted, and it is to be regretted that the great growler, in many instances, did not carry out the design. Carlyle spent fifteen years on his "Frederick the Great." Alison perused two thousand books before he completed his celebrated history. It is said of another that he read twenty thousand volumes and wrote only two books. "For the statistics of the negro population of South America alone," says Robert Dale

Owen, "I examined more than 150 volumes." David Livingstone said: "Those who have never carried a book through the press can form no idea of the amount of toil it involves. The process has increased my respect for authors a thousandfold. I think I would rather cross the African continent again than to undertake to write another book."

Thackeray confessed that the title for his novel, "Vanity Fair," came to him in the middle of the night, and that he jumped out of bed and ran three times around the room, shouting the words. Thackeray had no literary system. He wrote only when he felt like it. Sometimes he was unable to write two lines in succession. Then, again, he could sit down and write so rapidly that he would keep three sheets in the wind all the time. While he was editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* he never succeeded in getting copy enough ahead for more than five issues. In this negligence he fell far behind the magazine editors of the present time. They always have bundles of copy on hand.

II.
Care in Literary Production

Indolence, that is to say, chronic fatigue, appears to be the natural habit of imaginative brains. It is a commonplace to note that men of fertile fancy, as a class, have been notorious for their horror of formulating their ideas even by the toil of thought, much more by passing them through the crucible of the ink-bottle. In many cases they have needed the very active stimulant of hunger. The *cacoëthes scribendi* is a disease common, not to imaginative, but to imitative, minds. Probably no hewer of wood or drawer of water undergoes a tithe of the toil of those whose work is reputed play, but is, in fact, a battle, every moment, between the flesh and the spirit. Campbell, who at the age of sixty-one could drudge at an unimaginative work for fourteen hours a day like a galley-slave, "and yet," as he says in one of his letters, "be as cheerful as a child," speaks in a much less happy tone of the work which alone was congenial to him: "The truth is, I am not writing poetry, but projecting it, and that keeps me more idle and abstracted than you can conceive. I pass hours thinking about what I am to compose. The actual time employed in composition is but a fraction of the time lost in setting about it." "At Glasgow," we read of him even when a young man, "he seldom exercised his gift except when roused into action either

by the prospect of gaining a prize or by some striking incident." Campbell, if not a great man, was a typical worker.

A playwright, who had written five hundred lines in three days, taunted Euripides because he had spent as much time upon five lines. "Yes," replied the poet, "but your five hundred lines in three days will be forgotten, while my five will live forever."

It is said of one of Longfellow's poems that it was written in four weeks, but that he spent six months in correcting and cutting it down. Longfellow was a very careful writer. He wrote and rewrote, and laid his work by and later revised it. He often consulted his friends about his productions before they were given to the world. Thus he sent his work out as perfect as great care and a brilliant intellect could make it. The poet's pleasant surroundings must have acted as a stimulus upon his mind. His library was a long room in the northeastern corner of the lower floor in the so-called Craigie House, once the residence of General Washington. It was walled with handsome bookcases, rich in choice works. The poet's usual seat here was at a little high table by the north window, looking upon the garden. Some of his work was done while he was standing at this table, which reached then to his breast.

Emerson wrote with great care, and would not only revise his manuscript carefully, but frequently rewrite the article upon the proof-sheets.

John Owen was twenty years on his "Commentary on the Epistle of the Hebrews."

The celebrated French critic, Sainte-Beuve, was accustomed to devote six days to the preparation of a single one of his weekly articles. A large portion of his time was passed in the retirement of his chamber, to which, on such occasions, no one – with the exception of his favorite servant – was allowed to enter under any circumstances whatever. Here he wrote those critical papers which carried captive the heart of France, and filled with wonder cultivated minds everywhere.

The historian Gibbon, in speaking of the manner in which he wrote his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," said: "Many experiments were made before I could hit the middle tone between a dull tone and a rhetorical declamation. Three times did I compose the first chapter, and twice the second and third, before I was tolerably satisfied with their effect." Gibbon spent twenty years on his immortal book Lamb toiled most laboriously over his essays. These papers, which long ago took their place in the English classical language and which are replete with the most delicate fancies, were composed with the most exacting nicety, yet their author is regarded the world over as possessed of genius of a high order.

La Rochefoucauld was occupied for the space of fifteen years in preparing for publication his little work called "Maximes," rewriting many of them more than thirty times.

Honoré de Balzac had just completed his teens when he arrived in Paris, and till 1830, some nine years, he lived, not in a garret, but in the apartment over that, called a *grenier*; his daily

expenses amounted to about half a franc – three sous for bread, three for milk, and the rest for firewood and candles. He passed his days in the public library of the Arsenal, devouring books. In the evening he transcribed his notes, and during the nights he took his walks abroad, and so gained an insight into the depths of human depravity.

After his first novel, in 1830, he commenced earning money. Balzac, who had the disease of creative genius in its most outrageous form, "preached to us," says Théophile Gautier, "the strangest hygiene ever propounded among laymen. If we desired to hand our names down to posterity as authors, it was indispensable that we should immure ourselves absolutely for two or three years; that we should drink nothing but water, and eat only soaked beans, like Protogenes; that we should go to bed at sunset and rise at midnight, to work hard till morning; that we should spend the whole day in revising, amending, extending, pruning, perfecting, and polishing our night's work, in correcting proofs or taking notes, or in other necessary study." If the author happened to be in love, he was to see the lady of his heart only for one half-hour a year, but he might write to her, for the cold-blooded reason that letter-writing improves the style. Not only did Balzac preach this austere doctrine, but he practised it as nearly as he could without ceasing altogether to be a man and a Frenchman. Léon Gozlan's account of the daily life of the author of the "Comédie Humaine" has often been quoted. On the average he worked eighteen hours a day. He began his day with

dinner at six in the afternoon, at which, while he fed his friends generously, he himself ate little besides fruit and drank nothing but water. At seven o'clock he wished his friends good-night, and went to bed. At midnight he rose and worked – till dinner-time next day: and so the world went round. George Sand calls him, "Drunk on water, intemperate in work, and sober in all other passions." Jules Janin asks, "Where has M. de Balzac gained his knowledge of woman – he, the anchorite?" As it was, love and death came to him hand-in-hand. He married a wealthy Polish lady in 1848. They travelled over the battlefields of Europe, to collect notes for a work, and then settled down in a luxurious mansion in the Champs Elysées. Nothing was wanting in that palatial residence, for every fancy of Balzac had been gratified. Three months after the house-warming Balzac was dead.

Balzac, after he had made a plan of a novel, and had, after the most laborious research, gathered together the materials which he was to embody in it, locked himself in his private apartment, shut out all the light of day, and then, by the aid of his study lamp, he toiled day and night. His servants, knowing so well his peculiar habits, brought him food and drink. Finally, with his task completed, as he thought, he came forth from his retirement looking more dead than alive. But invariably his task was not altogether satisfactory to him, after all, for again he would seek the seclusion of his chamber to rearrange and make more perfect that which he had before supposed wholly complete. Then, too, when his work was in the hands of the

printer, he was as apt as not to alter, in one way and another, the manuscript, until both printer and publisher were on the verge of despair. He corrected up to as many as twelve proofs, and many of his "corrections" consisted in rewriting whole pages. What "copy" he must have produced during the twenty years in which he brought out ninety-seven volumes! Like Voltaire, Balzac had a passion for coffee, more to keep him awake than as a stimulant. That beverage shortened his life, which ended by hypertrophy of the heart. When he sat down to his desk, his servant, who regarded a man that abstained even from tobacco as scarcely human, used to place coffee within reach, and upon this he worked till his full brain would drive his starved and almost sleepless body into such forgetfulness that he often found himself at daybreak bareheaded, in dressing gown and slippers, in the Place du Carrousel, not knowing how he came there, miles away from home. Now, coffee acts upon some temperaments as laudanum acts upon others, and many of the manners and customs of Balzac were those of a confirmed opium-eater. He had the same strange illusions, the same extravagant ideas, the same incapacity for distinguishing with regard to outward things, between the possible and the impossible, the false and the true. His midnight wanderings, his facility in projecting himself into personalities utterly unlike his own, belong to the experiences of the "English Opium-eater."

Kinglake's beautiful "Eothen" was rewritten half a dozen times before it was given to a publisher.

Tennyson's song, "Come Into the Garden, Maud," was rewritten some fifty times before it gave complete satisfaction to the author.

Coming to the gifted Addison, whose diction is full of such grace and simplicity, so much so as to create envy, yet admiration, in the mind of every writer who has flourished since his day, we find that the great author wrote with the most painful deliberation. It is narrated that the press was stopped again and again, after a whole edition of the *Spectator* had been thrown off, in order that its author might make a slight change in a sentence.

Tom Moore, with all his wonderful brilliancy, considered it doing very well if he wrote fifty lines of his "Lalla Rookh" in a week.

Hawthorne was slow in composing. Sometimes he wrote only what amounted to half a dozen pages a week, often only a few lines in the same space of time, and, alas! he frequently went to his chamber and took up his pen, only to find himself wholly unable to perform any literary work.

The author of "Pleasures of Hope" was slow of thought, and consequently his mode of composition was toilsome in the highest degree. He wrote with extreme caution, weighing and shaping the effect of each particular line before he permitted it to stand.

Bret Harte, whose creations read as if they had come from his brain without a flaw or hindrance, showing brilliancy of thought with the grace of the artist, is still another writer who passes days

and weeks on a short story or poem before he is ready to deliver it into the hands of the printer. So it was with Bryant. Though in reality the sum total of his poetry might be included in a small volume, so few are his lyrics, we cannot fail to be impressed with the truth of the statement when we are told that even these few gems of verse cost our late Wordsworth hard toil to bring into being, and endow with the splendor of immortality.

Bernardine de St. Pierre copied his sweet and beautiful "Paul and Virginia" nine times to make it more perfect.

Béranger *composait toutes ses chansons dans sa tête*. "Once made, I committed them to writing in order to forget them," he said. He tells of having dreamt for ten years of a song about the taxes that weigh down the rural population. In vain he tapped his brain-pan, – nothing came of it. But one night he awoke with the air and the refrain *tout trouvés*:

> "Jacques, lève-toi;
> Voici venir l'huissier du roi";

and in a day or two the song was a made thing.

The laborious pains bestowed by Alfieri on the process of composition may seem at first sight hard to reconcile with his impulsive character. If he approved his first sketch of a piece, – after laying it by for some time, not approaching it again until his mind was free of the subject, – he submitted it to what he called "development," *i. e.*, writing out in prose the indicated

scenes, with all the force at his command, but without stopping to analyze a thought or correct an expression. "He then proceeded to versify at his leisure the prose he had written, selecting with care the ideas he thought best, and rejecting those which he deemed" unworthy of a place. Nor did he ever yet regard this work as finished, but "incessantly polished it verse by verse and made continual alterations," as might seem to him expedient.

Hartley Coleridge so far resembled Alfieri that it was his custom to put aside what he had written for some months, till the heat and excitement of composition had effervesced, and then he thought it was in a fair condition to criticise. But he seldom altered. "Strike the nail on the anvil," was his advice; he never "kneaded or pounded" his thoughts, which have been described as always coming out *cap-à-pie*, like a troop in quick march. He used to brandish his pen in the act of composition, now and then beating time with his foot, and breaking out into a shout at any felicitous idea.

III.
Speed in Writing

Dr. Johnson was a very rapid writer. A modern critic says of him: "He had but to dip his pen in ink, and there flowed out a current of thought and language wide and voluminous as the Ganges in flood." Some of the best papers in the *Rambler* were written "*currente calamo*." Johnson struck off his *Ramblers* and *Idlers* at a heat when the summons of the press forbade his indolence to put off his work another moment: he did not give himself even a minute to read over his papers before they went to the printers. Often he sent a portion of the copy of an essay, and wrote the remainder while the earlier part was printing. His "Life of Savage" was dashed off at one sitting. Sir Joshua Reynolds was so fascinated with this eloquent and touching narrative, that he could not lay it down until he had finished it. Johnson would not have written "Rasselas" except for the necessity of paying the costs of his mother's funeral. He was an extremely indolent man, and yet he was a laborious worker where the imagination was not concerned. After spending the evening at the literary club in the society of Burke, Goldsmith, and other friends, he returned home between midnight and sunrise, went to bed, and was seldom seen before noon. Bennet Langton was so delighted with the *Rambler*, that he went to London to be introduced to

Johnson. He called upon him about twelve o'clock, but the great doctor was not yet visible. After waiting some time, the author of the *Rambler* made his appearance. The visitor expected to see a neatly dressed philosopher, but, instead, a huge, uncouth figure rolled into the room in a soiled morning-gown, with an ill-arranged wig, and stockings falling over his shoes.

The elder Dumas, in order to get any work done at all, had to forbid himself, by an effort of will, to leave his desk before a certain number of pages were written. Victor Hugo is said to have locked up his clothes while writing "Notre-Dame," so that he might not escape from it till the last word was written. In such cases the so-called "pleasures of imagination" look singularly like the pains of stone-breaking. The hardest part of the lot of genius, we suspect, has been not the emotional troubles popularly – and with absurd exaggeration – ascribed to it, but a disgust for labor during the activity of the fancy, and the necessity for labor when it is most disgusting.

Victor Hugo composed with wonderful rapidity. He wrote his "Cromwell" in three months, and his "Notre Dame de Paris" in four months and a half. But even these have been his longest periods of labor, and as he grew older he wrote faster. "Marion Delorme" was finished in twenty-four days, "Hernani" in twenty-six, and "Le Roi s'amuse" in twenty. Although the poet wrote very quickly, he often corrected laboriously. He rarely rewrote. Mme. Drouet, who was his literary secretary for thirty years, copied all his manuscripts. Otherwise the printers would have

found him one of the most difficult authors to put into type. Mme. Drouet saved them much worry, and himself or his publishers much expense in the way of composition. She also assisted in the correction of the proofs. He generally had several works in the stocks at the same time. Hugo considered a change of subject a recreation. He would go from poetry to fiction, from fiction to history, according to his mood. As a rule, he rose at six o'clock in the morning, took a cold bath, then took a raw egg and a cup of black coffee, and went to work. He never sat down to write, but stood at a high desk, and refreshed himself by an occasional turn across the room, and a sip of *eau sucrée*. He breakfasted at eleven. One of his recreations was riding on the top of an omnibus, a habit he contracted during a short visit to London, when he was advised that "the knife-board" was a good place from which to see the street life of the English metropolis. The "knife-board," indeed, was his favorite point of observation, whence he gathered inspiration from the passing crowds below. Many of his famous characters have been caught in his mind's eye while taking a three-sou drive from the Arc de Triomphe to the Bastile.

It is on record that Bulwer wrote his romance of "Harold" in less than a month, resting not at all by day, and scarcely at night. In a private letter Lord Lytton says: "The novel of 'Harold' was written in rather less than four weeks. I can personally attest this fact, as I was with my father when he wrote it – on a visit to his friend, the late Mr. Tennyson D'Eyncourt. D'Eyncourt

was a great collector of Norman and Anglo-Saxon chronicles, with which his library was well stored. The notes of research for 'Harold' fill several thick commonplace books… While my father was writing 'Harold' I do not think he put down his pen except for meals and half an hour's run before dinner 'round the terrace. He was at work the greater part of every night, and again early in the morning."

It is an interesting fact in regard to Lord Tennyson's drama on the same subject – with a dedication to the late Lord Lytton, in reconciliation of an old literary feud with his father – that the first sketch of "Harold" took the form of a drama, entitled "William the Norman." It was probably not written for publication, as the writer's way of composing many of his prose romances was to sketch them out first as dramas.

The "Lady of Lyons" was written in ten days. It was by no means uncommon with Bulwer to have two books in hand at once, and live alternate periods with the beings of his creation, as if he were passing in society from one company to another. Thus "Lucretia" and "The Caxtons," "Kenelm Chillingly" and "The Parisians," were written simultaneously. But despite his literary facility, Bulwer rewrote some of his briefer productions as many as eight or nine times before their publication. Another author tells us that he wrote paragraphs and whole pages of his book as many as fifty times.

Byron wrote the "Bride of Abydos" in a single night, and the quill pen with which he performed this marvellous feat is still

preserved in the British Museum.

Dryden wrote "Alexander's Feast" in two days.

"The Merry Wives of Windsor" was composed in a fortnight.

Beckford finished "Vathek" in two days and nights.

Henry Ward Beecher's publishers have favored the world with an account of his habits in composition. "He wrote," they tell us, "with inconceivable rapidity, in a large, sprawling hand, lines wide apart, and words so thinly scattered about that some of the pages remind one of the famous description of a page of Napoleon's manuscript – a scratch, a blot, and a splutter." This is, indeed, remarkable, but is far exceeded by the performance in that line of a famous Chinese novelist, who wrote with such fearful speed, that, throwing the finished sheets over his head, they soon accumulated to a pile large enough to darken his windows, and threaten him with suffocation.

Horace, in one of his satires, makes fun of a contemporary poet, whose chief claim to distinction was that he could compose two hundred verses standing on one leg. Horace did not think much of the verses, and, we suspect with good reason.

There are all conceivable habits of composition, and they range from the slow elaboration of John Foster to the race-horse speed of our doughty Southern countryman, Henry A. Wise, whose prodigious gubernatorial compositions are still remembered by a suffering world. Once, sitting by James Parton, he observed, tersely, "The best writing distils from the pen drop by drop." Sheridan once said to a friend who had a fatal facility

with his pen, "Your easy writing makes terribly hard reading."

I would not, for the world, have the young men of the country believe that in writing speed is all. One should not be ambitious to write or do anything else any faster than he can do it well. It was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow who once gave this excellent advice to a young author: "Always write your best; remember, your best."

Wilkie Collins' book, "Heart and Science," so mercilessly excited him that he says he continued writing week after week without a day's interval or rest. "Rest was impossible. I made a desperate effort; rushed to the sea; went sailing and fishing, and was writing my book all the time 'in my head,' as the children say. The one wise course to take was to go back to my desk and empty my head, and then rest. My nerves are too much shaken for travelling. An armchair and a cigar, and a hundred and fiftieth reading of the glorious Walter Scott, – King, Emperor, and President of Novelists, – there is the regimen that is doing me good. All the other novel-writers I can read while I am at work myself. If I only look at the 'Antiquary' or 'Old Mortality,' I am crushed by the sense of my own littleness, and there is no work possible for me on that day."

Wilkie Collins made the skeleton of a novel and then proceeded to put the flesh on it. He was the greatest plotter that ever lived. He created no truly great characters, but his stories are full of thrilling pitfalls, into which the reader lunges.

Hugo Rosenthal-Bonin, the editor of *Ueber Land und Meer*

(one of the most prominent of the illustrated journals of Germany), and the author of many successful novels, writes for two hours immediately after breakfast and dinner, and within this time regularly composes five columns of reading matter, never rewriting a single line. While writing, he has a piece of looking-glass lying beside him, the glittering of which (so he says) stimulates and refreshes him; he also smokes cigars during working hours, otherwise seldom. He works with ease and rapidity, just as if he were speaking. Therefore, a novel of ten columns is finished within two days, and a romance of one hundred columns is completed in less than a month. He has never written more than one long novel a year, his literary productiveness being limited by his duties as editor.

Mrs. Helen Hunt Jackson ("H. H.") composed with great rapidity, writing on large sheets of yellow post-office paper, eschewing pen and ink, and insisting that a lead pencil alone could keep pace with the swiftness of her thoughts.

Emil Ritterhaus, the poet who "dwells by the castled Rhine," turns out lyrical poems without any difficulty, and with wonderful rapidity. That poem of his which was read at the consecration of the cathedral at Cologne was composed in a few minutes, in the presence of his friend, Ferdinand Hiller, not a line being changed afterward. When he is in the proper mood, many a speech of his turns involuntarily into an improvisation. Verses he pens in person, but he dictates all other literary work. When at work, a good Havana cigar, a glass of first-class wine, or a cup

of strong coffee are agreeable to him. When dictating, he is in the habit of lying on a sofa or walking slowly up and down the room. The poet makes it a rule not to write unless disposed to.

Gray found fault with Mason for fancying he should succeed best by writing hastily in the first fervors of his imaginations, and, therefore, never waiting for epithets if they did not occur at the time readily, but leaving spaces for them, and putting them in afterward. This enervated his poetry, said Gray, and he says the same thing of the same method by whomsoever adopted, for nothing is done so well as at the first concoction. One of Shelley's biographers came upon the poet in a pine forest, writing verses on a guitar, and, picking up a fragment, saw a "frightful scrawl," all smear, and smudge, and disorder – such a dashed-off daub as conceited artists are apt to mistake for genius. Shelley said: "When my brain gets heated with thought, it soon boils, and throws off images and words faster than I can skim them off. In the morning, when cooled down, out of that rude sketch, as you justly call it, I shall attempt a drawing."

IV.
Influence upon Writers of Time and Place

Nathaniel Hawthorne made innumerable notes of every fleeting, quaint fancy, strange anecdote, or eccentric person. These notes he afterward worked into his stories. Julian Hawthorne, his son, states in the *Century Magazine*: "The new husband and wife, Adam and Eve, as they liked to call themselves, were almost as poor in money as their prototypes, and in spite of their orchard and their vegetable garden, a good deal less able to get on without occasional remittances. Accordingly, the future author of the 'Scarlet Letter' was compelled to alternate his hoeing and digging, his rambles over the hills and his paddling on the river, with periods of application to pen and paper in his study, where he would sit with locked doors, clad in a long and ancient flowered dressing-gown, upon the lining of the left-hand skirt of which he was in the habit of wiping his pen. His wife noticed this habit, and said nothing about it; but one day, on bringing his pen to the accustomed spot, Hawthorne found stitched on there a pretty pen-wiper, in the shape of a butterfly with red and black wings, and this butterfly was ever after renewed from time to time, as necessity required. What was written in that little sunny-hued study, readers know,

but nobody, not even the author's wife, ever saw him in the act of writing. He had to be alone."

Burns usually composed while walking in the open air, influenced, perhaps, Dr. Currie suggests, by habits formed in early life. Until he was completely master of a tune, he never could write words for it; so his way was to consider the poetic sentiment corresponding to his idea of the musical expression; then choose his theme; begin one stanza; when that was composed, – which was generally the most difficult part of the task, – to walk out, sit down now and then, look out for objects in nature around him, such as harmonized with the cogitations of his fancy, humming occasionally the air, with the verses already framed. When he felt his "muse beginning to jade," he retired to the solitary fireside of his study, and there committed his thoughts to paper; swinging at intervals on the hind leg of his elbow-chair, "by way," he says, "of calling forth my own critical strictures as my pen goes on." Sometimes, and more than once too often, he composed, to use his own expression, "by the leeside of a bowl of punch, which had overset every mortal in company, except the hautbois and the muse."

Whether in town or country, Landor reflected and composed habitually while walking, and, therefore, preferred at all times to walk alone. So did Buckle. Wordsworth was accustomed to compose his verse in his solitary walks, carry it in his memory, and get wife or daughter to write it down on his return. He used to compose aloud while walking in the fields and woods.

Sometimes he would use a slate pencil and the smooth side of a rock to jot down his lines. His excursions and peculiar habits gave rise to some anxious beliefs among the ignorant peasantry. Even his sanity was questioned. The peasantry of Rydal thought him "not quite hissel," because he always walked alone, and was met at odd times in odd places. Some poets have been in the habit of humming or repeating their verses aloud as they composed them. Southey, for instance, boomed his verses so as to be mistaken by Wilson, who was a keen sportsman, for a bittern booming. If this is true, Southey's voice must not have been very harmonious, for the bittern's cry is Shakespeare's "night-raven's dismal voice."

Douglas Jerrold worked at a desk without a speck upon it, using an ink-stand in a marble shell clear of all litter, his little dog at his feet. If a comedy was in progress, he would now and then walk rapidly up and down the room, talking wildly to himself. "If it be *Punch* copy, you shall hear him laugh presently as he hits upon a droll bit." And then, abruptly, the pen would be put down, and the author would pass out into the garden, and pluck a hawthorn leaf, and go, nibbling it and thinking, down the side walks; then "in again, and vehemently to work," unrolling the thought that had come to him along little blue slips of paper, in letters smaller than the type in which they were presently to be set.

Dr. Channing had the same habit of taking a turn in the garden, during which he was a study for the calm concentration of his look, and the deliberateness of his step: "Calmer, brighter,

in a few moments he is seated again at his table, and his rapidly flying pen shows how full is the current of his thoughts."

Jane Taylor, who commenced authorship as a very little girl indeed, and who used at that early stage to compose tales and dramas while whipping a top, – committing them to paper at the close of that exercise, – was in the habit, her brother Isaac tells us, of rambling for half an hour after breakfast, "to seek that pitch of excitement without which she never took up the pen."

Of Dickens we are told that "some quaint little bronze figures on his desk were as much needed for the easy flow of his writing as blue ink or quill pens."

Emanuel Kant, the philosopher, lived the life of a student; in fact, his life may be taken as the type of that of a scholar. Kant, like Balzac, gave a daily dinner-party; but when his guests were gone he took a walk in the country instead of seeking broken slumbers in a state of hunger. He came home at twilight, and read from candle-light till bedtime at ten. He arose punctually at five, and, over one cup of tea and part of a pipe, laid out his plan of work for the day. At seven he lectured, and wrote till dinner-time at about one. The regularity of his life was automatic. He regulated his diet with the care of a physician. During the blind-man's holiday between his walk and candle-light he sat down to think in twilight fashion; and while thus engaged, he always placed himself so that his eyes might fall on a certain old tower. This old tower became so necessary to his thoughts that, when some poplar trees grew up and hid it from his sight, he found

himself unable to think at all, until, at his earnest request, the trees were cropped and the tower was brought into sight again.

Kant's old tower recalls Buffon's incapability of thinking to good purpose except in full dress, and with his hair in such elaborate order that, by way of external stimulus to his brain, he had a hairdresser to interrupt his work twice, or, when very busy, thrice a day. To Aubrey we owe this account of Prynne's method of study: "He wore a long quilt cap, which came two or three inches at least over his eyes, and served him as an umbrella to defend his eyes from the light. About every three hours his man was to bring him a roll and a pot of ale, to refocillate his wasted spirits; so he studied and drank and munched some bread; and this maintained him till night, and then he made a good supper." Refocillation is a favorite resource – whatever the word may be – with authors not a few. Addison, with his bottle of wine at each end of the long gallery at Holland House, – and Schiller, with his flask of old Rhenish and his coffee laced with old Cognac, at three in the morning, – occur to the memory at once. Shelley attempted to ruin his digestion by way of exciting the brain by continually munching bread while composing.

The venerable Leopold von Ranke, one of the most eminent historians of the age, composed in the night as well as in the daytime, and even when more than ninety years of age sometimes worked till midnight. He had two secretaries. He was a late riser, as most night-workers are. After getting up late, he worked with his first amanuensis from ten in the morning until three in the

afternoon. Thereupon, if the weather was fine, he took a walk in the public promenades, always accompanied by a servant. He dined at five P. M., and then dictated to his second secretary from six in the evening until, occasionally, one or two o'clock in the morning. He neither took stimulants nor smoked. He never worked when disinclined; in fact, the disinclination to write was foreign to his nature. He always felt like writing.

J. T. Trowbridge, the author of "The Vagabonds," always prefers daytime to night for literary work, but sometimes can compose verse only at night. He always sets out with a tolerably distinct outline in his mind – rarely on paper – of what he intends to write. But the filling in he leaves to the suggestions of thought in the hour of composition, and often gets on to currents which carry him into unexpected by-ways. He seldom begins a story that he would not like to make twice as long as his contract allows, so many incidents and combinations suggest themselves as he goes on. He never works under the influence of stimulants. Verse he never composes with a pen in his hand. It is seldom that he can compose any that is in the least satisfactory to himself; when he can, he walks in pleasant places, if the weather is favorable, or lounges on rocks or banks, or in the woods; or he lies on a sofa in a dimly-lighted room at night; or in bed, where he elaborates his lines, which he retains in his memory, to be written down at the first convenient season. He rarely puts pen to paper at night. When fairly launched in a prose composition, he writes from two to four hours a day, seldom five. The mere act of

writing is a sad drudgery to him, and he often has to force himself to begin. Then he usually forgets the drudgery in the interest excited by the development of his thoughts. But he never thinks it wise to continue writing when he cannot do so with pleasure and ease. In his younger days he used to think he must do a certain amount of work each day, whether he felt like it or not. But now he is of the opinion that it might have been better for his readers and himself if he had been governed more by his moods.

Robert Hamerling, the Austrian novelist, loved to compose in bed in the early hours of morning. He was an expert stenographer, and, therefore, made use of stenography when committing his thoughts to paper, thereby saving much time, which, of course, facilitated the mental labor. For this reason, he could also correct and improve the manuscript, as well as make additions to the same, with the least waste of time. He did not require refreshments at work, and wrote with remarkable facility. The duration of the time which he spent at the writing-desk depended upon the state of his health and the temper of his mind.

Frederick Friedrich, well known in Germany as a novelist, prefers the evening for literary work, although he conceives the plots of his stories in the course of the day. He asserts that the nerves are more stimulated and that the imagination is more lively in the evening. His novels are sent to the printer as they were written; he hardly ever makes corrections. While at work Friedrich fills the air with cigar smoke and drinks several glasses

of Rhine-wine. He must be alone, and the writing-table must be in the customary order; any new arrangement of the things on the table makes the author feel uncomfortable, so much so at times that it prevents him from writing. He is a facile writer, and composes with great speed. He never writes unless inclined to, and is governed by moods. Therefore, a week or two sometimes passes before he pens a line, being in perfect health, but lacking the inclination to perform intellectual work. He never devotes more than three hours a day to literary labor, generally less than that, but spends almost all day in thinking over the plots of his novels. He never begins a story until it is elaborated in his mind, and never makes notes. When once engaged in the composition of a novel, he keeps at it day after day until it is finished. While writing his own he is unable to read the novels of anybody else.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.