

ARTICLE III.

COMMONPLACE BOOKS: A LECTURE.

BY PROF. JAMES DAVIE BUTLER, LL.D., OF MADISON, WIS.

It was once my fortune to spend a morning in the study of John Quincy Adams while it still remained just as he left it. I read many a title on the backs of books arrayed in long lines, and climbed the ladder to search on highest shelves for I knew not what of rich and rare. The printed books were ten thousand, but they were of small interest to me compared with a single square black chest, which was filled with the note-books of the president, — his life-blood treasured up for a life beyond life. By virtue of being well introduced, I was vouchsafed an hour's inspection of these manuscripts. The first I took up was written when the author was a boy of fifteen; the next marked "rubbish," was an account of his journey, at the close of his administration, from Washington to Boston. Many a volume was written throughout with observations, thoughts, and feelings during more than half a century. Mrs. Adams told me that when her husband took a journey he seemed to have no thought of books, or silver, or children; but always said, "Now Mary, if the house takes fire, look out for this chest!" In that chest I saw the well-spring whence had flowed the speeches and published writings of the most active, versatile, and erudite of our chief magistrates, and could not doubt but that Adams had inured himself to read and think "pen in hand," as a help to retain and fit for use whatever he acquired or excogitated. In this habit I detected, as I thought, the secret of that talent, so diversified and ready, which made men say of Adams,

"Turn him to any cause of policy,
The Gordian knot of it he will unloose,
Familiar as his garter."

A similar habit of writing in connection with study seems to me useful to every scholar who would make the most of himself, and accordingly I shall now set forth before you some uses, as they lie in my mind, of keeping what, for want of a better term, I will call a commonplace book.

But first permit me to state what I mean by keeping a commonplace book. Do I mean, as many do, copying the books we read, or extracts from them, or the indexes to them? Do I mean, merely or chiefly, copying of any sort? No, nothing of the kind. What then? My idea of a commonplace book is a blank volume in which you first set down the name of the first subject concerning which you purpose to speak, read, or write, or in which you feel special interest. Suppose the first topic to be commonplace books themselves. Under this heading you will note the names of scholars who have made that kind of book, or have advised to make it, the volume and page where you find such facts. You will add from time to time hints at reasons for (or against) the habit of commonplacing. Nor will you fail to record catchwords which recall new applications of old sayings, and illustrations of the matter in hand. You will write out under the same heading, those epigrammatic ideas which resemble the honey-bee — short, sweet, and with a sting at the end, and you will cage in black and white those magic phrases which no man can improve, stamped in nature's mint of ecstasy, "What all have thought, but none so well expressed," — the immortal part of books, — common-sense sharpened till it shines.

"Jewels five words long,
That on the stretched forefinger of all time
Sparkle forever."

After due practice, you will learn to store into half a page — as in a "box where sweets compacted lie," or as in the purse of Peter Schlemihl — the materials on any theme which it costs you a month to master, fortuitous discoveries in widely devious paths of life and literature, and, since all jewels are small, you will there cork up quintessences which, at your bidding, will expand almost of themselves into an

hour's lecture, — or indeed into one two hours long, could you find hearers who would tolerate such prolixity. In a similar style to that I have described would I have you proceed with topic after topic as, "living wisdom with each studious year," you shall admit one after another into your book of record as into its honey-cell. Concerning arrangement, my habit is to assign an equal number of pages to each letter of the alphabet, and that in alphabetical order; you can thus turn to each topic as easily as to the words in a dictionary. If the space allotted to any letter becomes full, though it will not so soon as you imagine, you will always see vacant space under other letters, — vacancies provoking you to fill them as irresistibly as vacant houses provoke boys to break their windows. Many scholars as they go on in life will make two other books, one devoted to their profession and the other to that specialty into which they sally on excursions from their home-field. But I am no stickler for forms. I am so far from it, that I am ready to say, altering Pope a little,

*"For forms of record-books let fools contest,
Whate'er is best administered is best."*

How best to keep such a book you will learn by keeping it. Refuse to begin till you ascertain that best mode, and you will procrastinate till he leaps into the river who will not touch water till he can swim, or till she eats tomatoes who will not taste them till she likes them. Will you forget your topics? Seldom, if you remember anything, for they ought to be — I have presupposed them to be — the things you feel most interest in, and oftenest think of, — places so common that they are as well known to you as Boston common is to Bostonians. When you are used to hang your hat on a particular peg you do not often forget where that peg is. How many men forget the location of the bank where they have laid up all their savings? Hide a man's spectacles in his Bible, how long will they remain unfound, if his habits are such as they ought to be? But one subject runs into another. All the better. Make mutual references —

clues of Ariadne—to guide you from one co-ordinate to another, as well as from genus to species and from species to genus. All truths are interdependent; linked to each other by golden chains.

The term “commonplaces” is at least as old as Cicero. The word “places” signifies the points on which arguments rest, or from which they are deduced. They are called “common” because they afford considerations bearing on both sides of a question, or on more than one question. To ladies I may say they are filling for the scholar’s scrap-bag, where nothing is in the way and nothing out of the way.

It is sometimes objected that commonplacing will cost too much time. But you know time spares nothing which has not cost time; and then I insist that you condense what you write, till a single entry will find ample room in a single line. Thus your task will become like a clock’s—only one tick at a time. Doubtless in naming topics, and in arranging collections or creations, a beginner will be perplexed; but what veritable study is not perplexing? and that the more, the more it is worth our best energies?

But I proceed to state reasons for holding the keeping of a commonplace book an important element in liberal culture. Indeed, I hope to show the habit I inculcate to be of use to every man, somewhat as the post-office is. That institution, like the spring-time leaving no corner of the land untouched, is open to all alike. It is not, however, of equal value to all men, but it blesses each just in proportion as he makes proof of its facilities. For one I should be disposed to draw up such a book simply because such has been the custom of so many an eminent scholar. Regarding the author of *Hudibras*, Johnson remarks: “Butler had a commonplace book, in which he repositied such similitudes, allusions, assemblages, or inferences, as occasion prompted or inclination produced, those thoughts which were generated in his own mind and might be applied to some future purpose.” Johnson himself had provided a volume of hints before he wrote the first number of his *Rambler*; nor did Addison issue one of his

Spectators, till he had filled three folios with materials. I might occupy many pages with similar testimonies respecting Euripides, Dante, Alfred, Ben Jonson, Milton, Hobbes, Bentley, Bacon, Locke, Swift, Warburton, Gibbon, Voltaire, Coleridge, Southey, Wilberforce, Sir Matthew Hale, Sir William Jones, Richter, Flaxmann, Macaulay, Franklin, Edwards, Rush, Hawthorne, Emerson, and others, giants in culture, testimonies evincing that no printed books have done so much for their development as blank books have done.

But I proceed to show that the ripest scholars recommend the practice by precept no less than by example. What says Shakespeare?

"Look! what thy memory cannot contain,
Commit to these waste blanks."

What says Bacon? "I hold the entry of commonplaces," says he, "to be a matter of great use and essence in studying as that which assurcth fulness of invention, and contracteth judgment to strength. A man would do well to carry a pencil in his pocket, and write down the thoughts of the moment. Those that come unsought for are generally the most valuable, and should be secured because they seldom return." What says Franklin? "I would advise you," his words are, "to read with a pen in your hand, and enter in a books hints of what you find that is curious or may be useful." What says Locke? He published the plan of a notebook according to a method he had himself tried a quarter of a century. What say Cicero and Aristotle, the greatest masters, the one of oratorical and the other of philosophical reasoning? They each wrote a book entitled "Topics," consisting of what I would have you fill yours with. If there be any lawyer here, I would remind him of the last note of Lord Coke on Littleton, which is: "I had once intended for the ease of our student to have made a table (that is an index) of these Institutes; but when I considered that tables are most profitable to them that make them, I have left that work to every studious reader." Besides all this, those who have a commonplace against commonplacing, like sham

temperance men, privately practise what they publicly decry. The secret history of celebrated speakers, as Sheridan, shows that they prepare what are called *impromptus* beforehand. Whenever a man uncorks champagne for the delectation of congregated friends who does not know that some one has first bottled it up? Other considerations point the same way with the advice and practice of genuine scholars. Thus, whoever travels is bidden to write; is told that the poorest pencil is better than the best memory, and that half a word fixed on the spot is worth a cartload of recollections. But why record impressions when we move more than when we are at rest, especially as we travel no more than one month in the year? Why gather the gleaning and leave the harvest to rot?

Again, you believe in book-keeping. Every man keeps accounts. Why make no note of mental advancement, as well as of material? Memory is not enough for lucre you love too well; is it, then, for the true riches of which you are prone to make light? Why keep no record of what you may expect from a doctrine, as well as from a debtor? Be yours a ledger for that merchandise that is better than rubies, and let it be posted every night.

Let us next consider whether a note-book, kept as I have proposed, is a detriment or a help to memory. How do we remember? Metaphysicians all say, in proportion as we attend. But while reading, selecting, arranging, and writing an idea, we must attend to it more than while reading or thinking alone. Four are more than one. Again, memory is aided by order. But the recorder sets in order; and a writer so old that he has become new again tells us — and we knew it before — that “we can carry twice more weight trussed up in bundles than when it lies flapping about our shoulders.” In memory, as well as any other box, a good packer will stow more than a poor one. Had not the signers of the declaration of our independence hung together, they would have been hanged separate, and one by one. So fares it with the facts we learn. So long as they hang together they are

safe, while, devoid of orderly connection, they perish on as high a scaffold as Haman's.

Memory is also assisted whenever we associate a new thing with what is known to us, and dear to us. "How old are you, my boy?" asked Queen Elizabeth of Francis Bacon. The answer was: "Just two years younger than your majesty's blessed reign." That boy's age, do you suppose Queen Bess could ever forget it? Now, your topics ought to be—I have supposed them to be—each as well known to you, and as dear, as her coronation to a queen; and what you are to aim at is to group all things relevant around these topics. The more you do so, the more will you incorporate with yourself of genuine memoranda—things that must be remembered till a maid forgets her ornaments, and a bride her attire. According to my experience, every heading entered in an *index rerum* is as serviceable as the knot a seamstress ties in the end of her thread. It has kept many a stitch from slipping through.

"Time but the impression stronger makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear."

Besides, every new head under which you class a fact is a new handle by which to hold it, and a new hilt with which to wield it. Moreover, the more we examine why a thing is, the better we remember, and I have advised to record the reasons of things; for a principle, like the silver cord of Aeolus, confines where you would have them a legion of facts which otherwise, like enfranchised winds, scatter beyond control. In every view, then, the device I speak of will make you retain the contents of those books you have borrowed as easily as you now keep those borrowed books. It is, then, the best mnemonics. Its grasp is tenacious as the hundred hands of Briareus.

Again, through writing such memoranda as I recommend, you will render your knowledge exact. Lest you blot your book, you will look twice before putting pen to paper, to see whether your first impression was correct; and often discover that it was not, though, but for your purpose to write,

it would have always seemed so, and you would have gone on in a blunder forever.

“Thoughts disentangle passing o’er the pen.”

Or, writing is to an idea what a carpenter’s vise is to a block of wood ; it holds it fast till you can fashion it into shape. Then whatever is written abides, like peaches in an air-tight can, in its first freshness ; while whatever is unwritten fades, — ay, dwindles, like an onion when its coats are stripped off one after another ; or like King George the fourth, whom Thackeray describes as all bow and grin, padding and under waistcoats, and then nothing. The unwritten is your shadow in the glass ; the written is your photograph. The one is cobweb, the other cord of silk. Hence what you have forgotten, yet remember that you wrote, is good evidence in court ; so that a merchant may swear to his book-account.

Nor can any one keep such a book as I have in view without heightening mental activity. The more you mark down, the more will you remark what would otherwise escape notice. Whenever and wherever you read, converse, observe, or reflect, you will be asking, “What can I gather for my garner of notes ?” Your studies lead you like the bee into many a field ; you will tax them all for one hive, and, like the bee when honey-laden, you will steer a bee-line to that hive. You cannot write the hundredth part of what passes before your mind’s eye. You are hence enforced to think through what you see, till you pluck out the heart of each mystery. Wheat in the straw is bulky ; you must thresh before you put it in your sack. When you have seized an idea worth saving, you are in doubt to which of your multitudinous topics it belongs as the niche it was ordained to fill. That doubt is precious ; for it drives you to think, that is, to threshing your mind. What seems that niche turns out a false position. At length you classify your idea under a head to which it has some relation. While so doing, or afterwards, you perceive that it is more relevant to another, or to half a dozen others, or perhaps to some topic that hitherto has had no name to live in your treasury. Such a

suggestive fact will sometimes serenade you as sweetly as any flute till the night shall be filled with music. On the other hand, a fact unclassified, like a bone out of joint, will leave you little ease till you put it in its place.

When ignorance bursts upon you you say you never can learn anything, like Antaeus thrown down by Hercules; yet like that giant you spring up from the earth invigorated by its humbling touch. Surprised that you have been ignorant, you are too much mortified to continue so; your range of inquiry widens; your mind wakens to newness of life, — ay, “to moments worth living years for.” Thus your memoranda become a fault-book for self-correction. The reason men know so little is that they know not how little that little is. Hence says the epigram to the ignoramus:

“Thou may'st of double ignorance boast;
Thou knowest not that thou nothing know'st.”

A young friend who was about to read Hume's *England* once asked me how to read. I said: “Glean some keepsake from every page for your note-book. If you come to the bottom of a page, yet have caught nothing, look on your reading as thus far dropping buckets into empty wells, or brooding on eggs of chalk.” Meeting him a month afterward, I inquired whether he had followed my advice. He said he did till, turning to the end of the last volume, he espied there a better index than he could make, and so had laid away his commonplace book on a high shelf. My answer to him was: “No matter how much information the printed index gives, the inspiration which making one of your own would breathe into you it cannot give.” Another's index carries you a long way; your own would strengthen you to run. Another's is dainties; your own, exercise for giving appetite. Another's index is the mouse which the old cat throws on the floor half dead for her kitten to play with; your own resembles that kitten catching the mouse herself. Besides, the printed index — what is it? It is the key to what struck some other man as he read Hume. Yours, had you done as I advised, would have shown what struck

you — yourself, and not another, and therefore would be worth more to you than a better one from the hand of another.

“Why,” I continued, “would you rather travel through Italy than peruse the best book ever penned by tourist there? Not because you would see more than that tourist has described, — still less because you could describe as well, — but because, while his book shows you his impressions, a tour would stamp you with impressions all your own. On the same principle, the poorest notes drawn up by myself are more improving to me than the best ones composed by any one else can be. Each woman’s own piece-bag, — how much more it is worth to her than any other woman’s can be! Why is it? Because it is best suited to furnish repairs for the garments of her own household. It matches them. For the self-same reason your mental piece-bag is beyond all others of value for your own mind. It matches it. If I may reason in Hibernian style, I will call your own notes (that are poor) the moon, and another’s (that are good) the sun. They surely cannot differ more than that. But, said the Irishman, the moon is worth more than the sun; for the moon gives us light in the dark when we need it, while the sun shines only by day when we have a plenty already.”

“All others, says Pat, in the sun may delight;

But for the fair moon my praise shall be steady.

She shines in the night, when we need rays of light;

He only by day, when we’ve too much already.”

On reflection, I seem to have pointed out to my reader of Hume a path more sought for, alas, than the path to heaven, and as seldom found — the path to originality. My student of Hume would have been original so far as he made his own observations on what he read; while relying on another’s, he was a borrower, saying, “Give me of your oil; for my lamp has gone out.”

Why do we call Humboldt original? Others have seen whatever he saw, read whatever he read, and are not original. His peculiarity was that he caught more with the pen of what passed before his eye, and then more than others marshalled

the chaos into a cosmos — one whole consolidated of parts mutually related — a system where jagged atoms fit like smooth mosaic — *e pluribus unum*. Through thus spending ten years in tracing relations to one year in travel, Humboldt wrote his superscription on whatever he learned. We call that the best gift which has in it the most of the giver. Hence the pricelessness of the tears with which Mary washed the feet of her Lord. What, then, is the best writing? Clearly that which has in it most of the writer.

“Brightest and best there loves and graces shine
Where all the author lives in every line.”

Such a one has no need to write his name on his productions. He marks them all over. There are few Humboldts, either in nature, training, or facilities for research; yet many may pursue Humboldt's method; and so far as they thus classify and illustrate what they acquire, they develop not the originality of Humboldt, but whatever there is in them of originality. The mistake of most lies in throwing away what is peculiar to them, — “nature's livery,” — while they save what they have in common with others. Do n't you think so? They throw away the blush that nature's own sweet and cunning hand lays on, and then covet the hypocritical rouge they buy in Paris; so that, like houses newly coated with white lead, they need to be labelled: “Look out for paint!”

Tom Corwin, having consented to give a commencement address at Yale College, wrote such a speech as another man would write, and undertook to deliver it according to elocutionary rules. He soon saw that he was making a failure, stopped, and said: “I can do nothing as an Eastern rhetorician, let me speak as a Western wagoner.” He then burst out in his own vein, and showed himself a Samson, who brought down the house as though it were the temple of Dagon. You, too, shall be somebody, if you had as lief not be at all as not to be yourself. You will be yourself in proportion as you note and classify, according to your own laws of association, whatever you observe. In struggles to hold fast individuality you will trace the relations of what you

learn, and piece out by common sense what you cull by the five senses. Through such endeavors facts that once seemed isolated will shoot out roots and ramifications interweaving them in one web. Viewed thus in their relations, trifles come to resemble the widow's mites, which shall jingle in the treasury of the Lord to the end of the world. But what is a fact before you consider its relations. You are puzzled what to do with it, as much as the postmaster is where to send a letter addressed, "John Smith, Valley of the Mississippi."

On the other hand, when you scrutinize its relations, many a fact seems contrived on purpose to pay a treble debt like that old wall in Apehek which falling on Benhadad's soldiers gave them all at once not only death, but burial, and grave-stones into the bargain. Every fact once articulated may do yeoman service as an illustration to simplify, dignify, or adorn ideas for which you have long and vainly sought such an auxiliary. Of all faculties none is more important than that of illustration; reasons are pillars which sustain the roof and gallery, but similitudes are windows and chandeliers which afford light.

"We also know an apt similitude
Will on the curious fancy more intrude,
And will stick faster in the heart and head
Than things from similes not borrowed."

Many an illustration is likewise an argument. Witness the stories of Abraham Lincoln picked up in log-cabins, but good enough for the cabinet at the White House. For want of illustrations many a speech otherwise good, is as monotonous as that picture of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea which was all one dead wall, or barn door, of Spanish brown. When the painter was asked, "Where are the Hebrews?" he said: "They have all passed over," and when the question was, "Where are the hosts of Pharaoh?" "Why they," his answer was, "they are all drowned." All the people who would have given human interest to the painting had gone, either over, or under, — in Western parlance "gone up."

Men wonder that some writers are rich in illustrations that illuminate their ideas, giving to what is one like the ocean its vast variety of waves. They might as well wonder that certain men's drafts are honored at a bank. The secret is in both cases the same. He who would draw out must first make deposits. The munificence of the Boston Lawrences, who has not heard of it? How could they be thus generous? Not without petty layings up more than you could number. I have been in their factories. There were bobbins by the million from which threads were unwinding. Over each I observed a little cap cunningly catching every particle of cotton that flew off in the process, and tons, the foreman told me, are thus saved. Would you have much to lay out? you must lay up much. If your illustrations are original with you, they must often be homely, because most men are mostly keepers at home. But exactly because they are homely, they all the more come home to what men feel. They fly over nobody's head, but hit just in the heart. "To accumulate such a mass of sentiments as we see in *Hudibras*, at the call of accidental desire or sudden necessity," Johnson declares "beyond the power of any mind, however active and comprehensive." You should sooner expect spirits from the vasty deep to come at your call, than that many of the illustrations pertinent to any theme can be rallied to its standard in one single day. Yet whoso will, can enlist such recruits one by one.

Take, for instance, Tell shooting at the apple on the head of his boy. I have referred to this story as an illustration under some sixteen heads in my index rerum, while, but for my so seizing it by the forelock, that incident might fail to occur to me even once during my writing a lecture on each of those sixteen topics. Thus, the exploit of the Swiss archer suggested to me, in his boy, filial trustfulness; as to Gessler, it showed cruelty, tyranny, and the danger that irresponsible power will be abused; as to Tell himself, I marked not only skill, that all skill is of use, often of higher use than can be anticipated, but how men are roused to retaliate,

that fame is dear-bought, that emergencies drive to achievements, and that what seems a curse may prove a blessing. I further set down this miracle of archery as shedding light on the way that sympathy, hatred, fear, admiration, and emulation are excited,—as exemplifying the dependence of great events on small causes,—as reminding historians of parallels among Danes and Greeks, as leading sceptics to question the evidence of its reality, and, since such is the law of local association constraining the pilgrim to Altorf, in whose ears still twangs the cord, “dread bounding, sounding,” from the Switzer’s bow, to exclaim:

“Who that walks where men of other days
Have wrought with god-like arm their deeds of praise,
Feels not the spirit of the place control,
Exalt, and elevate his laboring soul?”

Some of your gleanings will thus enrich you with a galaxy of illustrations bright as the stars in our national flag,—or like stars in the sky, giving light to other things which without them could not be seen. Other trifles you pick up, coming as pat for your purpose as a square man for a square corner, or as Lincoln’s pegs for his holes, when he sent Butler to New Orleans, and Grant to Vicksburg, will correct false notions you have yourself imbibed, or those into which others have fallen. They will thus prove snuffers to prune and brighten the candle of your mind.

Since it cannot be foreseen which of your acquisitions shall thus become most useful, you will become a snapper up of trifles, which most neglect as they do pins in their pathway, or poor relations. You will then scorn no key, you know not what locks it may open,—and no needle, you know not how much pointless thread it may utilize.

“A spark from this or t’other caught
May kindle, quick as thought,
A glorious bonfire up in you.”

Let me give you a specimen. I once read, in a Connecticut newspaper, the following advertisement:

“**TWENTY DOLLARS REWARD.**—Stolen from me, the sub-

scriber, in the time of action, the sixteenth of August last, a Brown Mare, five years old, had a star in her forehead. Also a doe-skin seated saddle, blue housing trimmed with white, and a curbed bridle. It is earnestly requested of all committees of safety, and others in authority, to exert themselves to recover said thief and mare, so that he may be brought to justice and the mare brought to me; and the person whoever he be, shall receive the above reward for both, and for the mare alone, one half that sum. How scandalous, how disgraceful and ignominious must it appear to all friendly and generous souls, to have such sly, artful, designing villains enter into the field of action in order to pillage, pilfer, and plunder from their brethren when engaged in battle!

Bennington, 11th Sept. 1777. JOHN STARK, B.D.G."

This morsel, picked from the wormholes of long-vanished days, seemed worthy of a note considered simply as a characteristic utterance of the hero who broke Burgoyne's left wing. The promise of ten dollars for a general's horse was also significant. The smallness of the reward showed how early horses were cheap in Vermont, and how scarce money had become, since Stark was so far from offering, like King Richard, a kingdom for a horse. Who also could be blind to Stark's patriotism, oozing out even in a call to stop a thief, and flaying as with scalping-knife the Tories of his time. But a year afterward, being invited to address the Vermont Legislature when they received from Congress the cannon taken at Bennington, I looked up the reference in my savings bank of old odd ends, quoted the advertisement in my speech, and found it a spice-island, a veritable oasis in the desert of details over which I was obliged to lead my legislative caravan. Through shaking my hearers with a laugh, it won a hearing for my history. At the end of a string of tame statistics it resounded as, before the railroad era, we used to hear the snapper at the end of a stage-driver's whiplash when he entered the village with good news.

Nor was this all. The same old scrap enabled me to correct a blunder into which Headley, Everett, Irving, Spencer,

and, I believe, every other historian, had fallen. Thus Headley says, "Stark's horse sunk under him." Everett writes, "The general's horse was killed in the action." Irving's words are, "The veteran had a horse shot under him." They were all led to a false inference concerning this sinking, killing, and shooting, by Stark's writing in the postscript of a letter these words: "I lost my horse in the action." How he lost him we have seen by his advertisement.

Nor is this half; for, on my writing to Mr. Everett, he acknowledged the justice of this correction, and paid the reward offered for the horse, in the shape of books for the library of my parish. Seldom are debts for "dead horses" collected so successfully, especially when they have been a century outlawed. Had all the authors whose mistake I had rectified been as liberal as Everett, I should have made my fortune. Dr. Sparks subsequently made my finding the text for a discourse on the sources of historical error. Mr. Everett also used it at a war-meeting in New York. Thus a mouse brought forth a mountain, and Jonah swallowed a whale. Who shall say that this antediluvian newspaper, from the dust of old oblivion raked, has not new uses yet to be revealed? Why, I am using it now, this minute. Often used, it is not yet used up, or a squeezed orange. All editors and merchants will confess that these results demonstrate that it is a good thing to advertise—that, in fact, there are millions in it—that advertising pays.

My discovery in the paper from the Nutmeg State may also serve as a proof that we sometimes espy what we need in places where no one would anticipate that it could come to light. An Englishman, fighting a duel with a Frenchman in a dark room, first received the fire of his antagonist, and then,—as he escaped unwounded,—not wishing to hit his adversary, shot his own pistol up the chimney. Notwithstanding, he brought down the Frenchman, who had no sooner discharged his piece than he softly slipped up from the fireplace as into a niche of safety. The man of notes repeats the experience of that Briton, and brings down many

a Frenchman from hiding-places where no one would look for a prize. Far as was that Englishman from expecting to do execution when he snapped his revolver up a flue, so far was I, on taking up the Connecticut Courant, from hope of exhuming such an historical gem as I now seem to have there detected. No matter how hackneyed a subject has become, it still abounds in good things not well applied, so that if you apply them fitly men will call you original. What says Irving? His words are: "Most of the traits that give individuality to Columbus in my biography of him were gathered from slightly-mentioned facts in his journal, letters, etc., which had remained almost unnoticed by former writers." Brightest blazes are lit up by unexpected sparks.

Proofs similar crowd upon me,—that we should spurn no part of knowledge, but gather all fragments since the least may prove in union with the greatest; and the moment it is so proved, what before was the charcoal of an old newspaper transforms to a diamond, bright as a boy wishes he could give his first love, or as she wishes might be given her,—with many faces, each radiating its own lustre. Some smile at this figure as sentimental. For such stoics let me derive one from our barn-yard fowls. There is no nutriment in gravel, and so it at first seems silly for a hen to swallow it. But it seems so no longer when once we learn that every grain of it adds grit to her gizzard.

Moreover, whoever will enter minutiae in such a record as I urge will save what turns out diamond-dust, and what he otherwise would have thrown away before its value was suspected; as the first papyrus rolls exhumed in Herculaneum were destroyed, being mistaken for charred sticks; and as, in darker ages, many an algebra was burned before it was dreamed that the sign plus might not be popish, and many a geometry was burned before it was ascertained that a circle might be something else than a conjurer's ring.

"The cunning workman never doth refuse
The meanest tool that he may chance to use."

It is true, the legion of the lazy will make light of you as

zealously affected in trifles. But they know not "how poor an instrument can do a noble deed"; and resemble the lookers-on in a Shaker meeting, who said to one of the dancers, "Friend, you have forgotten the text that 'bodily exercise profiteth little.'" His answer was, "Why, strangers, that 'little' is what I am after," and pushed on in his saltatory gyrations. Be yours his spirit, and you will catch up knowledge as tirelessly as your clock picks up every crumb of time. Many fail when a trifle more persistence would fix in them a habit which would perpetuate itself. A certain man gave as his excuse for not reading the Bible, that its words were too hard, and mentioned as an instance the word "so-met-i-mes," in the text, "Ye who so-met-i-mes were afar off." If he had looked but a little longer his mountain of difficulty would have dwindled to a mole-hill; for in the quadrisyllabic stranger "so-met-i-mes" he would have recognized his old familiar friend "sometimes."

What more valueless than autumnal leaves? Yet half a dozen of them from a maple in Massachusetts were carried abroad in her herbal by the wife of our minister in London. As her husband's salary would only pay his rent, and he had no post-traderships to sell, she felt it a duty to economize. Accordingly, having, like Miss Flora McFlimsey, nothing to wear at a court ball, she put some of those leaves in her hair. Gorgeous beyond hues known to European forests, they eclipsed jewels; and the result is, that similar gems from the sugar-tree have been exported every year since. A wreath of them sent by New York ladies to the crown princess of Prussia was accepted with thanks. As the lady's herbal to the leaves of the maple, such is the book I propose to your native thoughts — often trodden under foot, yet worthy to stand before kings.

"Since that a pearl may in a toad's head dwell,
And may be found, too, in an oyster shell,
What our contempts do oftentimes hurl from us
We wish it ours again."

Not only is knowledge power; but the more we ken, the

more we can. A king is etymologically, according to Carlyle, he who kens most — the kenning man by way of eminence. There is a proverb, "Keep a thing seven years, and you will find a use for it." Long before that time you will utilize most acquisitions. Some of them, however, like the century-plant, will not bring fruit to perfection till the close of a still longer cycle. For ages the kite was only a boy's plaything. How long before it drew down lightning! how much longer before it drew a bridge over Niagara! When Franklin admired the first balloon that rose to the clouds, he was asked by some *nil admirari* utilitarian, "What's the use of this puff-ball?" His answer was, "What's the use of your new-born baby? It may become a man!" Already has the fate of battles hung in the scale of aeronautics, but it has not yet unfolded its century flower. In general, the longer fuel seasons before you need to burn it, the easier it kindles.

My subject grows upon me so that I can only allude to other utilities. Nothing is better adapted than the practice I advocate to keep an object for which to read, talk, observe, and think before your mind not merely on the eve of debate, but always and on many a theme, when you sit in the house and when you walk by the way. Why do we praise the bee more than the fly, when both are equally busy? The bee has an object, the fly none. The importance of a mark to aim at he only can appreciate who feels that

"Unless to some particular end designed,
Reading is but a specious trifling of the mind;
And then, like ill-digested food,
To humors turns, and not to blood."

But the more you read with the heart, the more will you learn by heart.

"The sweat of industry would dry and die,
But for the end it works to."

Through keeping a book of topics, you will be led to read also by topics, and not by volumes. He only who has formed this habit, and is always studying some subject, is master of books, instead of being mastered by them. Others are vaga-

bonds; he is a traveller. He can mentalize what others only memorize. Such a one's library (like that of Daniel Webster as I saw it in Marshfield while still left as in his lifetime) will be largely composed of indexes, encyclopedias, and "all the dictionaries and contradictionaries that ever were heard of"—books not so much to be read as to be referred to whenever curiosity is keen—books straightway supplying present demand, and guiding to the standards in each specialty. Consulting should be like going to a store and selecting from an assortment what you need; reading is prone to be attending an auction, where you buy what you do not want, and pay for it what you do.

Again, your list of topics—each a cord to string pearls on—will enlarge as naturally as a circle widens in water. Whenever you kindle a dry stick, many a green one will catch; and each new topic will rouse you to till those old fields which yield new corn, and will add to your eye precious seeing,—ay, telescopes and microscopes, till you discover Americas that lay hid from Columbus. Notes lead to queries which are the keys of knowledge, often to those which, though you cannot answer them for years, make you watchful for every clew to such labyrinths, and train you to habits of investigation.

In view of such considerations as I have now presented, most people say: "Oh that we had thought of these things sooner—when our school-days began, or at least when they ended; but now, alas, it is too late! For us the harvest is past." Let me remind these faint hearts that in a certain New England graveyard you may read this epitaph: "*Here lies one who existed seventy years, but lived only seven.*" Possibly that old man was first *married* at three score years and ten; or, as old bachelors think, he then became a widower. It seems more likely that at seventy years he began to keep a commonplace book, and found the practice a new birth,—a higher birth,—so that he reckoned former years, in which he hardly knew he was born, as existence, but not life.

Moreover, what more likely to lead to the best reading, and to dropping many a novel like a hot coal, than a habit which holds before you perpetual contrasts between that investment of time that is remunerative and that which brings no return ; between the harvest from sowing wheat and that from sowing wild oats ; between what inspires with virtue and what infects with virus ?

Nothing renders intellect dyspeptic sooner than gluttonous reading. What better check on such a surfeit than a style of training which bids you refuse a second meal till you have digested the first ? The mind of a voracious reader — what is it like ? It has been compared to a purse so full that it will not shut, but lets everything drop out. I will rather compare it to a hound unable to track a deer through a flower-garden, losing the scent through multiplicity of odors. It may find a still more apt emblem in that Thracian reveller who, when he could drink no more, poured wine on his clothes till he drenched himself from head to foot ; yet the wine was all outside. So is the voracious reader's reading, as the Koran is outside of many a Moslem who wears every word of it written on his shirt. Or, once again, the gluttonous reader resembles the patients of a doctor who fed such as had lost their appetite by soaking their feet in pails of soup. Still, the food is all outside. So is yours from omnivorous reading. You deprecate such a destiny. You will escape it, and make digestion as good as appetite, in proportion as you subordinate what you read to your own laws of thought. How can you do this better than by such writing as I urge ? Thus will you hold fast your individuality, as that John Bull did who, travelling in Indiana, when he expressed fears of fever and ague, was told by his landlady that he was out of danger ; for he carried so many English airs with him, such a British atmosphere, that he would remain proof against chills, even where all Hoosiers were shaking.

To but one more of the advantages resulting from devotion to commonplacing will I now advert ; and that is the aid thus ministered whenever you have need to recall what you have

learned; summoning into the living present whatever on any point you have ascertained in the dead past. "Without such a remembrancer," says Johnson, "recollection will come too late for use." "Knowledge," says Carlyle, "which wants an index wants everything." It is a clock-face without hands. For lack of it you have consumed days in a wild-goose chase for a passage, dodging like a flea, to which it would have given you a clew in a moment; for

"When index-keeping turns a student pale,
It holds the eel of science by the tail."

As "the table wherein all your thoughts are visibly characterized and engraved to lesson you," it will unroll, as on a map, all provinces of knowledge you have ever explored. You will have salt-pits that you can extract salt out of, and sprinkle where you will, and that to better purpose than throwing salt on the tails of pigeons. Your birds shall be in the hand, not in the bush. Thus you will seldom lack any ingredient needful to concoct a bowl of punch,

"Where strong, insipid, sharp, and sweet,
Each other duly tempering, meet—
A little sugar to make it sweet,
A little lemon to make it sour,
A little water to make it weak,
And a little whiskey to give it power."

Of course, I mean teetotaller's punch—the good, champagne-y, "old particular" brandy punch of feeling, thought, knowledge.

Once having occasion to publish proofs how valuable antique medals are for illustrating language, customs, dress, and all history, I accomplished my object in one day, thanks to my save-all, better than I otherwise could have done in a month. How is this? Why, while reading Gibbon some years before, I had entered by chapter and note in my book of memory a nugget from every placer I mined, that is, every instance in which his Decline and Fall is, from first to last, elucidated by coin or medal. In other cases more than I can number have I found that "a commonplace book contains many notions in garrison, whence the owner may draw

out an army into the field." Nay, what is it but the whistle of Roderick Dhu in the solitary forest, which we read of in the Lady of the Lake :

" He whistled shrill,
And he was answered from the hill;
Instant through copse and heath arose
Bonnetts and spears and bended bows;
That whistle manned the lonely glen
At once with twice five hundred men."

Promptness is power. Where is not prompt knowledge in request? I never saw a man out of work who was ready to communicate, and had said of learning, — what ladies say of secrets, — that if it were offered him on condition he should keep it all to himself he would not take it. Promptness is power. Ready money commands interest. What a little thing is a cannon-ball, compared with a battering-ram; but it is prompt — shattering that it may reach, and shattering what it reaches; and just because it works in hot haste, like the thunderbolt outrunning the thunder, it has superseded the battering-ram, the old fogy monarch of sieges. "Little fellow," said Goliath to David, "how much do you weigh?" The stripling's answer was, "Ordinarily I weigh in the scale one hundred and twenty; but whenever I get mad I weigh a ton — every ounce of it." When mad he was nimble, and hence his sling-stone outweighed the spear huge as a weaver's beam.

Promptness is power. The wheel of fortune rolls; but the prompt man is spry enough to keep atop of it all the time. Primaries fail; substitutes are called for, who can furnish, if not what is best in itself, yet the best they have, on the spur of the moment, prompt as a caudle-lecture. No year will elapse at some emergency in which you will not be more than yourself if you can collect your knowledge on some subject as readily as you can double up your fingers into a fist, and can express yourself not as enabled by the mercies of a moment, — not extempore, that is, extrumpery, — but bringing out not merely the froth of your beer, but the body of it, "things new and old"; things new as the latest tele-

gram ; things old like wine, which the longer it is kept the better it grows ; and all condensed like light in a flash, " with a wave-like upgathering to burst at the end."

He who thus holds knowledge in hand resembles that puny constable in Boston, who arrested a champion pugilist, and, when the giant threatened to flog him, cowed that Hercules by saying, " Whip me ! then you will whip the commonwealth of Massachusetts." No thews and sinews could stand before you, did past studies back you up. But they do not. You have, for instance, to prepare for a debate. You are assured that you have known something bearing on the matter in hand ; but your knowledge like sleep eludes your grasp, and dodges you the more the more you seek it and the more you need it, till you feel like the man who, comes home drunk, and when, groping at his door in the dark, he finds no opening for his night-key, swears some scoundrel has stolen the key-hole. No idea can you feel sticking up, like a rabbit's ears or jug-handle, for you to seize. Nothing at your fingers' ends,

" Like the lock in the Koran to Mussulmans given
For the angel to hold by that lugs them to heaven."

The reason is, that the handles of thought, like the hair of time in the primer, are all forelocks — not one hindlock. In the hour of need where are your facts and arguments ? Water spilt upon the ground.

" The keen demand, the clear reply,
The fine poetic image,
The grasp of concentrated intellect .
Wielding the omnipotence of truth," —

Where are they ? Gone, glimmering in the dream of things that were. Gone, as those who move West fade from Eastern memories. Gone, like that glorious nibble in the trout-hole when you failed to pull your hook in the nick of time. You set your mill running, but there is no grist in the hopper. How can you, then, turn out flour ? You will as soon cooper up a new barrel out of an old bung-hole, or hatch chickens from eggs of chalk.

"You beat your pate, in hopes that wit will come;
Knock as you will, there's nobody at home."

He who never saves will never have.

When the debate is over your ideas come flocking around you, and are about as welcome as the doctors who come to the funeral of your friend only to tell you that they have just discovered how he might have been cured, so that he had no business to die. Is there anything more heart-breaking than to be tantalized by knowledge always ready, like friends, — and umbrellas, — except when wanted?

Abound, then, in notes of preparation. Being forewarned, be forearmed. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise; which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." Go thou and do likewise. Stow so as to unlade,

"As warlike arms in magazines we place,
All ranged in order and disposed with grace, —
Not thus alone the curious eye to please,
But to be found, when need requires, with ease."

"Hast thou a thought on thy brain?
Catch it while thou canst,
Or other thoughts shall settle there,
And this shall soon take wing."

Ideas are customers; you must wait on them as soon as they come, or they will be gone to your rival who will. However we may have differed concerning the fugitive slave bill, let us be unanimous for a fugitive thought bill. Hurrah for a bill to detect, apprehend, and hold in custody runaway thoughts! Seize the fugitives! Chain them in a coffle. Fast bind, fast find.

"Since losers are sneakers,
Let finders be keepers."

The fault with many a man is not that he knows so little; it is rather that so much of his knowledge lies beyond his reach; that he is like that cousin of mine whose nose was so long that he could never hear himself sneeze, much less blow it.

What is a great scholar? De Quincy answers, "Not one who depends on an infinite memory, but also on an infinite power of combination, bringing together from the four winds,

like the angel of the resurrection, what else were dust from dead men's bones, into the unity of breathing life." He is a tree which includes in its last growth that of all former years :

"A power of arranging, combining, discerning,
Digesting the masses he learns into learning."

To recapitulate, or gather into a sheaf my gleanings : Such commonplacing as I advise helps retain knowledge ; it is mother of accuracy and order ; it fertilizes fancy ; it corrects error ; it quickens curiosity, widens its scope, and gives kingly command over one's havings.

"Each fainter trace that memory holds
So darkly of departed years,
In one broad glance man there beholds,
And all that was at once appears."

"Of all the best of men's best knowledges,
The contents, indexes, and title-pages
Through all past, present, and succeeding ages."

What is such a volume less than a cornucopia — Amalthea's horn of plenty, that flowed with nectar, ambrosia, and whatsoever she would. Such a feast — we do it wrong to name it "commonplace." Where, then, shall we find a name that will do justice to its nature ? I find none except the longest word in the world — the word coined by Aristophanes to denote the most delectable of delicacies, and which is the most polysyllabic that human lips have uttered, because it blends in its single self a smack of every dainty known to the Greeks. That one unique word of seventy-nine syllables is :

λοπαδοτεμαχοσελαχογαλεο-
κρανιολευψανοδριμυποτριμματο-
σιλφιοπαραομελιτοκατακεχυμενο-
κιχλεπικκοσσυφοφαττοπεριστερα-
λεκτρονοοπτεκεφαλιοκικυλοπε-
λειλαγωσοφραιοβαφτραγαν-
σπερέγγων.

Such is my name for a commonplace book — a name none too long or too good for its nature, but for which our poor vernacular affords no better equivalent than the monosyllable "hash."

I once lived in Cincinnati where four streets met, and was

sometimes waked at night by a bell. When I looked out, the gas-burner on the corner would show me the bell-ringer on horseback, and beside him another mounted man, who when the ringing stopped would cry out : " Oh yes ! Oh yes ! Child lost ! child lost ! boy, five years old, — straw hat, — light hair, — checked apron, — blue eyes — Mother lives at Race Street, No. 240." But, in spite of all this benevolent machinery, the parents of such a stripling wanderer must often have watched and waited the livelong night before the criers could ascertain who had picked up and cared for their darling. Such is our relation to our truant thoughts. We seek them, and they seek us ; but neither of us knows where to find the other.

They order this matter of missing boys otherwise in Boston. In that Puritan metropolis there has long been a depot for lost children. Thither whoever meets a rover too young to tell where his home is straightway leads the little prodigal. There the juvenile estrays are warmed, fed, and amused ; and to that asylum every mother, if her wee ones let out to play by the door are lured off by the marvels of the city or snared by its intricacies, so that they answer not her call, turns her hasty steps, confident that her urchins cannot be long in reaching its hospitable doors, and not so much distressed as exhilarated by the romance of her rogue's getting lost. In this lost-child depot of the Yankees behold my ideal of a veritable commonplace book. It is a place to lay up all you find, and to find whatever you have lost ; a depot to which you may lead every wanderer from other men's brains you know not what to do with, nor yet his relations, satisfied that he and his relations will there see eye to eye ; a depot in which you may be sure the children of your own soul — however while you are busy here and there they have vanished out of your sight — are safe and ready for you to rejoice over whensoever you will.

As men differ in ability to make full proof of every other means of culture, so must they in the tact to make the most of commonplacing. No doubt some will expect from the

expedient I have proposed miracles which no expedients can work. Some can make blank-books doubly blank. When a countryman was seen watching the geese on our university green at Madison, as they cackled, and was asked what he was doing, his answer was, that he supposed university geese must gabble in Greek, and so he was listening to hear what they would say. Yet I do not suppose a commonplace book can turn a goose into a Grecian: for spectacles are valueless to him who has no eyes. But to every one who will do what he can in this line, his note-book, as years roll on, will become a richer treasure than Vanderbilt's scrap-book of government bonds, or than that Roman table I gazed on in the Borghese palace, which is inlaid with a specimen of every known gem.

Whoso has a will shall get a sort of skill. His whole life shall gravitate toward it like water toward the ocean. Mark the water. In cisterns a prisoner, in rivers a passenger; dam it up here, and it is doubly impetuous there; plunge it in the bowels of the earth, it still gropes its way in the dark. It never rests till it reaches its goal. Nay, it rests not then. It evaporates, rises, returns whence it came as a fertilizing shower. That which the fountain sends forth returns again to the fountain. So whatever your mind as a fountain pours into your written reservoir, — the art preservative of all arts, — shall thence return to bless you altogether. Such a volume, when one has dealt with it half a lifetime, gathering daily manna, will be more to its possessor than any library of printed books; it is more than half of himself; yea, such a Mecca of the mind can be described only by Milton;

"Made porous to receive
And drink the liquid light, firm to retain
Her gathered beams, great palace now of light;
Hither as to a fountain countless stars
Repairing in their golden urns draw light."

Such a commonplace book — least of all books commonplace — may you live long enough to elaborate, and then may you live a good while after that!