

*The Editor*  
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***On the Writer's Philosophy of Life***

The literary hack, the one who is satisfied to turn out "pot boilers" for the rest of his life, will save time and vexation by passing this article by. It contains no hints as to the disposing of manuscript, the vagaries of the blue-pencil, the filing of material, nor the innate perversity of adjectives and adverbs. Petrified "Pen-trotters," pass on! This is for the writer—no matter how much hack-work he is turning out just now—who cherishes ambitions and ideals, and yearns for the time when agriculture newspapers and home magazines no more may occupy the major portion of his visiting list.

How are you, dear sir, madam, or miss, to achieve distinction in the field you have chosen? Genius? Oh, but you are genius. If you were you would not be reading these lines. Genius is irresistible; it casts aside all shackles and restraints; it cannot be held down. Genius is a *rara avis* not to be found fluttering in every grove as are you and I. But then you are talented? Yes, in an embryonic sort of way. The biceps of Hercules was a puny affair when he rolled about in swaddling-clothes. So with you—your talent is undeveloped. If it had received proper nutrition and were well matured, you would not be wasting your time over this. And if you think your talent really has attained its years of discretion, stop right here. If you think it has not, then by what methods do you think it will?

*By being original*, you at once suggest; then add, *and by constantly strengthening that originality*. Very good. But the question is not merely being original—the veriest tyro knows that much—but now can you be for your own work? to force the publishers to pant for it? You cannot expect to become original by following the blazed trail of another, by reflecting Scott or Dickens, for Poe or Longfellow, for George Eliot or Mrs. Crane, and many others of the lengthening list. Yet publishers and public have clamored for their ware. They conquered originality. And how? By not being silly weather-cocks, turning to every breeze that flows. They, with the countless failures, started even in the race; the world with its traditions was their common heritage. But in one thing they differed from the failures; they drew straight from the source, rejecting the material which filtered through other hands. They had no use for the conclusions and the conceits of others. They must put the stamp of "self" upon their work—a trade mark of far greater value than copyright. So, from the world and its traditions—which is another term for knowledge and culture—they drew at first hand, certain materials, which they builded into an individual philosophy of life.

Now this phrase, "a philosophy of life," will not permit of precise definition. In the first place it does not mean a philosophy on any one thing. It has no special concern with any one of such questions as the past and future travail of the soul, the double and single standard of morals for the sexes, the economic independence of women, the possibility of acquired characters being inherited, spiritualism, reincarnation, temperance, etc. But it is concerned with all of them, in a

way, and with all the other ruts and stumbling blocks which confront the man or woman who really lives. In short, it is an ordinary working philosophy of life.

Every permanently successful writer has possessed this philosophy. It was a view peculiarly his own. It was a yardstick by which he measured all things which came to his notice. By it he focused the characters he drew, the thoughts he uttered. Because of it his work was sane, normal, and fresh. It was something new, something the world wished to hear. It was his, and not a garbled mouthing of things the world had already heard.

But make no mistake. The possession of such a philosophy does not imply a yielding to the didactic impulse. Because one may have pronounced views on any question is no reason that he assault the public ear with a novel with a purpose, and for that matter, no reason that he should not. But it will be noticed, however, that this philosophy of the writer rarely manifests itself in a desire to sway the world to one side or the other of any problem. Some few great writers have been avowedly didactic, while some, like Robert Louis Stevenson, in a manner at once bold and delicate, have put themselves almost wholly into their work, and done so without once imparting the idea that they had something to teach.

And it must be understood that such a working philosophy enables the writer to put not only himself into his work, but to put that which is not himself but which is viewed and weighted by himself. Of none is this more true than of that triumvirate of intellectual giants—Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac. Each was himself, and so much so, that there is no point of comparison. Each had drawn from this store his own working philosophy. And by this individual standard they accomplished their work. At birth they must have been very similar to all infants; but somehow, from the world and its traditions, they acquired something which their fellows did not. And this was neither more or less than *something to say*.

Now you, young writer, have you something to say, or do you merely think you have something to say? If you have, there is nothing to prevent your saying it. If you are capable of thinking thoughts which the world would like to hear, the very form of thinking is the expression. If you think clearly, you will write clearly; if your thoughts are worthy, so will your writing be worthy. But if your expression is poor, if narrow, because you are narrow. If your ideas are confused and jumbled, how can you expect a lucid utterance? If your knowledge is sparse or unsystematized, how can your words be broad or logical? And without the strong central thread of a working philosophy, how can you make order out of chaos? how can your foresight and insight be clear? how can you have a quantitative and qualitative perception of the relative importance of every scrap of knowledge you possess? how can you have something for the jaded ear of the world?

The only way of gaining this philosophy is by seeking it, by drawing the materials which go to compose it from the knowledge and culture of the world. What do you know of the world beneath its bubbling surface? What can you know of the bubbles unless you comprehend the forces at work in the depths of the cauldron? Can an artist paint an “Ecce Homo” without having a conception of the Hebrew myths and history, and all the varied traits which form collectively the character of the Jew, his beliefs and ideals, his passions and his pleasures, his hopes and fears! Can a musician compose a “Ride of the Valkyries” and know nothing of the great Teutonic epics? So with you—you must study.

You must come to read the face of life with understanding. To comprehend the characters and phases of any movement, you must know the spirit which moves to action individuals and peoples, which gives birth and momentum to great ideas, which hangs a John Brown or crucifies a Savior. You must have your hand on the inner pulse of things. And the sum of all this will be

your working philosophy, by which, in turn, you will measure, weigh, and balance, and interpret to the world. It is this stamp of personality of individual view, which is known as individuality.

What do you know of history, biology, evolution, ethics, and the thousand and one branches of knowledge? "But," you object, "I fail to see how such things can aid me in the writing of a romance or a poem." Ah, but they will. They broaden your thought, lengthen out your vistas, drive back the bounds of the field in which you work. They give you your philosophy, which is like unto no other man's philosophy, force you to original thought.

"But the task is stupendous," you protest; "I have not time." Others have not been deterred by its immensity. The years of your life are at your own disposal. Certainly you cannot expect to master it all, but in the proportion you do master it, just so will your efficiency increase, just so will you command the attention of your fellows. Time! When you speak of its lack you mean lack of economy in its use. Have you really learned *how* to read? How many insipid short stories and novels do you read in the course of a year, endeavoring either to master the art of storywriting or of exercising your critical faculty? How many magazines do you read clear through from beginning to end? There's time for you, time you have been wasting with a fool's prodigality—time which can never come again. Learn to discriminate in the selection of your reading and learn to skim judiciously. You laugh at the doddering graybeard who reads the daily paper, advertisements and all. But is it pathetic, the spectacle you present in trying to breast the tide of current fiction? But don't shun it. Read the best, and the best only. Don't finish a tale simply because you have commenced it. Remember that you are a writer, first, last and always. Remember that these are the mouthings of others, and if you read them exclusively, that you may garble them; you will have nothing else to write about. Time! If you cannot find time, rest assured that the world will not find time to listen to you.