8167

9/20

My dear sir:

There is nothing more difficult than to answer such a letter as yours. One cannot give advice to another because he knows nothing even with the closest intimacy of another's capacity and even if he did capability is but one of the elements of success + combination, opportunity, temperament and pecuniary condition are other important and essential elements.

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One can only safely consider hypothetical cases. If, for instance, you are a young man of independent means, who can afford to spend the greater part of your life in gratifying a very worthy ambition, I would advise you to employ some man in whose literary capacity and general discrimination, you have confidence, to examine your work point out its defects and from time to time, indicate what course you should pursue. Literature, is like

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Chirography: neither mere ability, simple aptitude; nor undirected practice are any of them sufficient to make a good penman or a good writer; ~~Alt~~. but all must co-exist to produce that result. A man may make himself a good penman by mere observation of the best ~~ex~~ examples and patient imitation and practice after them. So he may make himself a good writer or literary producer in like manner. In that case, ~~But~~ he must first learn and then

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teach himself. There has been no such thing as a school of literature, intended to prepare for literary production, simply because we have had a false idea of literature and literary capacity.

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On the other hand if you are a young man of limited means, looking forward to your own exertions for a livelihood, you would better do one of two things: 1st Study literature exclusively, or,

2d Devote yourself to the attainment of a reliable support by other means, before applying yourself seriously to authorship.

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Men may live by authorship: they may sometimes though very rarely make a respectable livelihood thereby without other vocation: in a few cases, so few as to be deemed almost miraculous they may acquire wealth commensurate with the exercise of the same talent in other fields. But nearly all who have made a livelihood by literature have drawn already developed a capacity to earn a living by other means.

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Longfellow, Holmes, Lowell were professors before ~~they~~ their works were a sufficient reliance for support. Whittier was able to live on a farm before his verse brought him a livelihood. Howells was a printer ~~an~~ And the same is true in most cases before he was a writer. For myself, I shall always be glad that I had ~~demonstrated a capacity to~~ lived by the law with some success before I allowed my name to appear on a title-page.

To embrace literature "as a profession" as the modern phrase is, without a certain means of ~~t~~ support

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on the demonstrated ability to make a livelihood otherwise, is to my mind as absurd as to jump into the middle of a river without having learned to swim or having on a life preserver. ~~merely~~ The fact that another is able to swim a mile or stay afloat for hours, does not in the least imply such capacity for all.

If ~~this~~ what I have written gives you any light or is of any service to you in lopping your

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course in life I shall be most happy, but I would no more think of trying to give you directions how to succeed in literature than of laying down a rules for making a horse trot under 2.10. The chances for a writer to make a fair living by literary work today are about equal to the chances a colt has of entering the 2.10 class. ~~If he does he will be~~ ~~the colt does enter the 2.10~~

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The man who owns the calf must take his chances on the calf growing a phenomenon and the man who holds the pen must determine in his own way, his own chances of success with it.

Sincerely yours