

It is only the writer who takes the material on which he writes direct out of his own head that is worth reading. Book manufacturers, compilers, and the ordinary history writers, and others like them, take their material straight out of books; it passes into their fingers without its having paid transit duty or undergone inspection when it was in their heads, to say nothing of elaboration. (How learned many a man would be if he knew everything that was in his own books!) Hence their talk is often of such a vague nature that one racks one's brains in vain to understand of _what_ they are really thinking. They are not thinking at all. The book from which they copy is sometimes composed in the same way: so that writing of this kind is like a plaster cast of a cast of a cast, and so on, until finally all that is left is a scarcely recognisable outline of the face of Antinous. Therefore, compilations should be read as seldom as possible: it is difficult to avoid them entirely, since compendia, which contain in a small space knowledge that has been collected in the course of several centuries, are included in compilations.