What in particular, does a person gain when he or she becomes a serious collector?

People tend to amass possessions, sometimes without being aware of doing so.

Indeed, they can have a delightful surprise when they find something useful which they did not know they owned.

Those who never have to move house become indiscriminate collectors of what can only be described as clutter.

They leave unwanted objects in drawers, cupboards, and attics for years, in the belief that they may one day need just those very things.

As they grow old, people also accumulate belongings for two other reasons, lack of physical and mental energy, both of which are essential in turning out and throwing away, and sentiment.

Things owned for a long time are full of associations with the past, perhaps with relatives who are dead, and so they gradually acquire a value beyond their true worth.

Some things are collected deliberately in the home in an attempt to avoid waste.

Among these, I would list string and brown paper, kept by thrifty people when a parcel has been opened, to save buying these two requisites.

Collecting small items can easily become a mania.

I know someone who always cuts sketches out from newspapers of model clothes that she would like to buy if she had the money.

As she is not rich, the chances that she will ever be able to afford such purchases are remote, but she is never sufficiently strong-minded to be able to stop the practice.

It is a harmless habit, but it littered up her desk to such an extent that every time she opens it, loose bits of paper fall out in every direction.

Collecting as a serious hobby is quite different and has many advantages.

It provides relaxation for leisure hours, as just looking at one's treasures is always a joy.

One does not have to go outside for amusement, since the collection is housed at home.

Whatever it consists of, stamps, records, first editions of books, china, glass, antique furniture, pictures, model cars, stuffed birds, toy animals, there is always something to do in connection with it, from finding the right place for the latest addition, to verifying facts in reference books.

This hobby educates one not only in the chosen subject, but also in general matters which have some bearing on it.

There are also other benefits.

One wants to meet like-minded collectors, to get advice, to compare notes, to exchange articles, to show off the latest find.

So one's circle of friends grows.

Soon the hobby leads to travel, perhaps to a meeting in another town, possibly a trip abroad in search of a rare specimen, for collectors are not confined to any one country.

Over the years, one may well become an authority on one's hobby and will very probably be asked to give informal talks to little gatherings and then, if successful, to larger audiences.

In this way, self-confidence grows, first from mastering a subject, then from being able to talk about it.

Collecting, by occupying spare time so constructively, makes a person contented, with no time for boredom.

Collecting provides hours of relaxation, for looking at your treasures is a joy.

If you have a collection at home, why go out?

There is always something to do, from finding the right place for the latest addition to verifying facts in reference books.

Collecting is educational, too, and through meeting people, it increases your circle of friends.

The hobby can lead to travel, nationally and internationally.

You may become an authority on the subject and be asked to give talks.

There was a knock on the window.

At first, it was hardly noticeable, almost as if a branch on the large oak tree outside had brushed against the window.

It was repeated, and then there was silence.

I got up and looked out of the window.

I couldn't see anybody and my dog hadn't started barking.

It was mid-afternoon, about three o'clock and I had been listening to the radio and reading a book.

The house stands on its own, at the end of a long lane in the middle of the countryside, so it is very lonely.

I have few neighbours, but the neighbours I have are very good, even though we don't see each other very often.

I had gotten so nervous recently that I had to summon up enough courage to unlock the front door and go outside.

There was no one there.

True, there was a light breeze and the wind was shaking the branches of the oak tree, but the only other sound was the noise of the traffic on the main road a mile away.

For one moment, I thought I saw someone hiding behind the fence, but nothing moved, so I thought I must be wrong.

I came back in and settled down by the fire with my book.

Then there was a knock on the window, this time louder.

It was a real knock with a human hand, no doubt about it- well, certainly not the branch of a tree- and my heart started pounding.

I looked up and there, outside the window, was the little girl from down the lane.

Her mother had sent her down to see if I was all right, and she had decided to play a trick on me!

What differentiates the indiscriminate collector from the serious one? What he collects is only of personal rather than communal interest.

The author's friend is typical of the indiscriminate collector in that she never gets round to sorting out the clutter she has accumulated.

The serious collector can spend his leisure time at home, as his collection is sufficient entertainment in itself.

People deliberately collect some things in the home in an attempt to avoid waste.

Some things are collected intentionally in the home so as to avoid waste.

Collecting as a serious hobby is altogether separate and has many advantages.