‘Sydney Smith’

A shorthand exercise written by Charles Dickens

‘Sydney Smith’ is among the exercises included in the notebooks of Dickens's shorthand pupil, Arthur Stone, at the Free Library of Philadelphia. A transcription is provided below each line of shorthand script.

A great deal of talent is lost to the world for the want of a little courage. Every day sends to their graves a number of obscure men who have only remained obscure because their timidity has prevented them from making a first effort; and who
they could only have been induced to begin would in all probability have gone great lengths in the career of fame. The fact is, that in order to do anything in this world worth doing, we must not stand shivering on the bank and thinking of the cold and the danger, but jump in and scramble through as well as we can. It will not do to be perpetually (calculating) risk and adjusting nice chances it did all very well before the Flood when a man could
consult his friends upon an intended publication for 150 years, and then live to see its success for six or seven centuries afterwards but at present a man waits and doubts and hesitates and consults his brother and his uncle and his first cousins, and his particular friends till one fine day he finds that he is sixty-five years of age that he has lost so much time in consulting first cousins and particular
friends, that he has no more time left to follow their advice. There is such little time for over-squeamishness at present the opportunity so easily slips away, the very period of life at which a man chooses to venture, if ever, is so confined, that it is no bad rule to preach up the necessity, in such instances, of a little violence done to the feelings, and of efforts made in defiance of strict and sober calculation. With respect to that fastidiousness
which disturbs the right conduct of the it must be understanding,

observed that there are two modes of judging of anything: one,

by the test of what has actually been done in the same way before; the other, by what we can conceive may be done in that way. Now this latter method of mere imaginary excellence can hardly be a just criterion, because it may be in fact impossible to reduce
practice what it is perfectly easy to conceive:

no man, before he has tried, can tell how difficult it is to manage prejudice, jealousy, and delicacy and to overcome all that friction which (the) world opposes to speculation. Therefore, the fair practical rule seems to be, to compare any exertion, by all similar exertions which have preceded it, and to allow merit to any one who has improved, or, at least, who has not deteriorated
the standard of excellence, in his own department of knowledge.