

## Getting Into Print.

~~By JACK LONDON.~~



SOON as a fellow sells two or three things to the magazines, or successfully inveigles some publisher into bringing out a book, his friends all ask him how he managed to do it. So it is fair to conclude that the placing of books and of stories with the magazines is a highly interesting performance.

I know it was highly interesting to me; vitally interesting, I may say. I used to run through endless magazines and newspapers, wondering all the time how the writers of all that stuff managed to place it. To show that the possession of this knowledge was vitally important to me, let me state that I had many liabilities and no assets, no income, several mouths to feed, and for landlady a poor widow woman whose imperative necessities demanded that I should pay my rent with some degree of regularity. This was my economic situation when I buckled on the harness and went up against the magazines.

Further, and to the point, I knew positively nothing about it. I lived in California, far from the great publishing centers. I did not know what an editor looked like. I did not know a soul who had ever published anything; nor yet again, a soul, with the exception of my own, who had ever tried to write anything, much less tried to publish it. ~~Still worse, and to show how badly off I really was, I did not know "500 Places to Sell Manuscripts," or THE EDITOR.~~

I had no one to give me tips, no one's experience to profit by. So I sat down and wrote in order to get an experience of my own. I wrote everything—short stories, articles, anecdotes, jokes, essays, sonnets, ballads, vilanelles, triolets, songs, light plays in iambic tetrameter, and heavy tragedies in blank verse. These various creations I stuck into envelopes, enclosed return postage, and dropped into the mail. Oh, I was prolific. Day by day my manuscripts mounted up, till the problem of finding stamps for them became as great as that of making life livable for my widow landlady.

All my manuscripts came back. They continued to come back. The process seemed like the working of soulless machine. I dropped the manuscript into the mail box. After the lapse of a certain approximate length of time, the manuscript was brought back to me by the postman. Accompanying it was a stereotyped rejection slip. A part of the machine, some cunning arrangement of cogs and cranks at the other end, (it could not have been a living, breathing man with blood in his veins), had transferred the manuscript to another envelope, taken the stamps from the inside and pasted them outside, and added the rejection slip.

This went on for some months. I was still in the dark. I had not yet gained the smallest particle of experience. Concerning which was the more marketable, poetry or prose, jokes or sonnets, short stories or essays, I knew no more than when I began. I had vague ideas, however, dim and hazy ideas to the effect that a minimum rate of ten dollars a thousand words was paid; that if I only published two or three things the editors would clamor for my wares; that a manuscript held in some editor's hands for the small matter of four or five months did not necessarily mean a manuscript that was sold.

Concerning this minimum rate of ten dollars a thousand words, a thing in which I fondly believed, I must confess that I had gleaned it from some Sunday supplement. Likewise I must confess the beautiful and touching modesty with

which I aspired. Let other men, thought I, receive the maximum rate, whatever marvelous sum it may be. As for myself, I shall always be content to receive the minimum rate. And, once I get started, I shall do no more than three thousand words a day, five days only in the week. This will give me plenty of recreation, while I shall be earning six hundred dollars a month without overstocking the market.

As I say, the machine worked on for several months, and then, one morning, the postman brought me a letter, mark you. a letter, not a long thick one but a short thin one, and from a magazine. My stamp problem and my landlady problem were pressing me cruelly, and this short, thin letter from a magazine would of a certainty solve both problems in short order.

I could not open the letter right away. It seemed a sacred thing. It contained the written words of an editor. The magazine he represented I imagined ranked in the first class. I knew it held a four-thousand-word story of mine. What will it be? I asked. The minimum rate, I answered, modest as ever; forty dollars of course. Having thus guarded myself against any possible kind of disappointment, I opened the letter and read what I thought would be blazed in letters of fire on my memory for all time. Alas! the years are few, yet I have forgotten. But the gist of the letter was coldly to the effect that my story was available, that they would print it in the next number, and that they would pay me for it the sum of five dollars.

Five dollars! A dollar and a quarter a thousand! That I did not die right there and then convinces me that I am possessed of a singular ruggedness of soul which will permit me to survive and ultimately qualify for the oldest inhabitant.

Five dollars! When? The editor did not state. I didn't have even a stamp with which to convey my acceptance or rejection of his offer. Just then the landlady's little girl knocked at the back door. Both problems were clamoring more compellingly than ever for solution. It was plain

there was no such thing as a minimum rate. Nothing remained but to get out and shovel coal. I had done it before and earned more money at it. I resolved to do it again; and I certainly should have, had it not been for the "Black Cat."

Yes, the "Black Cat." The postman brought me an offer from it of forty dollars for a four-thousand-word story, which same was more lengthy than strengthly, if I would grant permission to cut it down half. This was equivalent to a twenty-dollar rate. Grant permission? I told them they could cut it down two-halves if they'd only send the money along, which they did, by return mail. As for the five dollars previously mentioned, I finally received it, after publication and a great deal of embarrassment and trouble.

*Ans. P* I forgot my coal-shoveling resolution and continued to whang away at the typewriter—"to drip adjectives from the ends of my fingers," as some young woman has picturesquely phrased it. ~~About this time, I do not remember how, I blundered upon THE EDITOR. The first number I read aroused in me a great regret for all my blind waste of energy. I may not tell a hundredth part of what I learned from THE EDITOR, but I may say that it taught me how to solve the stamp and landlady problems by means of hackwork. It taught me the market for hackwork and the prices I might expect. So I was enabled to do a certain quantity of hack each month, enough to pay expenses, and to devote the rest of my time to serious efforts, which are always hazardous financial undertakings.~~

In closing this brief narrative of experience, let me give a few painfully acquired generalizations. Don't quit your job in order to write unless there is none dependent upon you. Fiction pays best of all, and when it is of a fair quality is more easily sold. A good joke will sell quicker than a good poem, and, measured in sweat and blood, will bring better remuneration. Avoid the unhappy ending, the harsh, the brutal, the tragic, the horrible—if you care to see in print the things you write. (In this connection don't do as I do, but do as I say.)

Humor is the hardest to write, easiest to sell, and best rewarded. There are only a few who are able to do it. If you are able, do it by all means. You will find it a Klondike and a Rand rolled into one. Look at Mark Twain.

Don't dash off a six-thousand-word story before breakfast. Don't write too much. Concentrate your sweat on one story, rather than dissipate it over a dozen. Don't loaf and invite inspiration; light out after it with a club, and if you don't get it you will nonetheless get something that looks remarkably like it. Set yourself a "stint," and see that you do that "stint" each day; you will have more words to your credit at the end of the year.

Study the tricks of the writers who have arrived. They have mastered the tools with which you are cutting your fingers. They are doing things, and their work bears the internal evidence of how it is done. Don't wait for some good Samaritan to tell you, but dig it out for yourself.

See that your pores are open and your digestion is good. That is, I am confident, the most important rule of all. And don't fling Carlyle in my teeth, please.

Keep a notebook. Travel with it, eat with it, sleep with it. Slap into it every stray thought that flutters up into your brain. Cheap paper is less perishable than gray matter, and lead pencil markings endure longer than memory.

And work. Spell it in capital letters, WORK. WORK all the time. Find out about this earth, this universe; this force and matter, and the spirit that glimmers up through force and matter from the maggot to Godhead. And by all this I mean WORK for a philosophy of, life. It does not hurt how wrong your philosophy of life may be, so long as you have one and have it well.

The three great things are: GOOD HEALTH; WORK; and a PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE. I may add, nay, must add, a fourth—SINCERITY. Without this, the other three are without avail; with it you may cleave to greatness and sit among the giants.

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