



MAKING A MAGAZINE
(The Dream of a Contributor)

*VI.—Making a Magazine.—The Dream
of a Contributor*

I DREAMT one night not long ago that I was the editor of a great illustrated magazine. I offer no apology for this : I have often dreamt even worse, of myself than that. In any case I didn't do it on purpose. Very often, I admit, I try to dream that I am President Wilson, or Mr. Bryan, or the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, or a share of stock in the Standard Oil Co. for the sheer luxury and cheapness of it. But this was an accident. I had been sitting up late at night writing personal reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln. I was writing against time. The presidential election was drawing nearer every day and the market for reminiscences of Lincoln was extremely brisk, but, of course, might collapse any moment. Writers of my class have to

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consider this sort of thing. For instance, in the middle of Lent, I find that I can do fairly well with "Recent Lights on the Scriptures." Then, of course, when the hot weather comes, the market for Christmas poetry opens and there's a fairly good demand for voyages in the Polar Seas. Later on, in the quiet of the autumn, I generally write some "Unpublished Letters from Goethe to Balzac," and that sort of thing.

But it's a wearing occupation, full of disappointments, and needing the very keenest business instinct to watch every turn of the market.

I am afraid that this is a digression. I only wanted to explain how a man's mind could be so harassed and overwrought as to make him dream that he was an editor.

I knew at once in my dream where and what I was. As soon as I saw the luxury of the surroundings: the spacious room with its vaulted ceiling, lit with stained glass; the beautiful mahogany table at which I sat writing with a ten-dollar fountain pen—the gift of the

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manufacturers—on embossed stationery—the gift of the embosser—on which I was setting down words at eight and a half cents a word and deliberately picking out short ones through sheer business acuteness ;—as soon as I saw this I said to myself—

“I am an editor, and this is my editorial sanctum.” Not that I have ever seen an editor or a sanctum. But I have sent so many manuscripts to so many editors and received them back with such unfailing promptness, that the scene before me was as familiar to my eye as if I had been wideawake.

As I thus mused, revelling in the charm of my surroundings and admiring the luxurious black alpaca coat and the dainty dicky which I wore, there was a knock at the door.

A beautiful creature entered. She evidently belonged to the premises, for she wore no hat and there were white cuffs upon her wrists. She had that indescribable beauty of effectiveness such as is given to hospital nurses.

This, I thought to myself, must be my private secretary.

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“I hope I don’t interrupt you, sir,” said the girl.

“My dear child,” I answered, speaking in that fatherly way in which an editor might well address a girl almost young enough to be his wife, “pray do not mention it. Sit down. You must be fatigued after your labours of the morning. Let me ring for a club sandwich.”

“I came to say, sir,” the secretary went on, “that there’s a person downstairs waiting to see you.”

My manner changed at once.

“Is he a gentleman or a contributor?” I asked.

“He doesn’t look exactly like a gentleman.”

“Very good,” I said. “He’s a contributor for sure. Tell him to wait. Ask the caretaker to lock him in the coal cellar, and kindly slip out and see if there’s a policeman on the beat in case I need him.”

“Very good, sir,” said the secretary.

I waited for about an hour, wrote a few editorials advocating the rights of the people,



WITH ALL THE LOW CUNNING OF AN AUTHOR STAMPED ON HIS FEATURES

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smoked some Turkish cigarettes, drank a glass of sherry, and ate part of an anchovy sandwich.

Then I rang the bell. "Bring that man here," I said.

Presently they brought him in. He was a timid-looking man with an embarrassed manner and all the low cunning of an author stamped on his features. I could see a bundle of papers in his hand, and I knew that the scoundrel was carrying a manuscript.

"Now, sir," I said, "speak quickly. What's your business? What do you want?"

"I've got here a manuscript," he began.

"What!" I shouted at him. "A manuscript! You'd dare, would you! Bringing manuscripts in here! What sort of a place do you think this is?"

"It's the manuscript of a story," he faltered.

"A story!" I shrieked. "What on earth do you think we'd want stories for! Do you think we've nothing better to do than to print your idiotic ravings. Have you any idea, you idiot, of the expense we're put to in setting up our fifty pages of illustrated advertising?"

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Look here," I continued, seizing a bundle of proof illustrations that lay in front of me, "do you see this charming picture of an Asbestos Cooker, guaranteed fireless, odourless, and purposeless? Do you see this patent motor-car, with pneumatic cushions, and the full-page description of its properties? Can you form any idea of the time and thought that we have to spend on these things, and yet dare to come in here with your miserable stories? By Heaven!" I said, rising in my seat, "I've a notion to come over there and choke you. I'm entitled to do it by the law, and I think I will."

"Don't, don't," he pleaded. "I'll go away. I meant no harm. I'll take it with me."

"No you don't," I interrupted; "none of your sharp tricks with this magazine. You've submitted this manuscript to me, and it stays submitted. If I don't like it, I shall prosecute you, and, I trust, obtain full reparation from the courts."

To tell the truth, it had occurred to me that perhaps I might need after all to buy the

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miserable stuff. Even while I felt that my indignation at the low knavery of the fellow was justified, I knew that it might be necessary to control it. The present low state of public taste demands a certain amount of this kind of matter distributed among the advertising.

I rang the bell again.

"Please take this man away and shut him up again. Have them keep a good eye on him. He's an author.

"Very good, sir," said the secretary.

I called her back for one moment.

"Don't feed him anything," I said.

"No," said the girl.

The manuscript lay before me on the table. It looked bulky. It bore the title *Dorothy Dacres, or, Only a Clergyman's Daughter*.

I rang the bell again.

"Kindly ask the janitor to step this way."

He came in. I could see from the straight, honest look in his features that he was a man to be relied upon.

"Jones," I said, "can you read?"

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“Yes, sir,” he said, “some.”

“Very good. I want you to take this manuscript and read it. Read it all through and then bring it back here.”

The janitor took the manuscript and disappeared. I turned to my desk again and was soon absorbed in arranging a full-page display of plumbers' furnishings for the advertising. It had occurred to me that by arranging the picture matter in a neat device with verses from “Home Sweet Home” running through it in double-leaded old English type, I could set up a page that would be the delight of all business readers and make this number of the magazine a conspicuous success. My mind was so absorbed that I scarcely noticed that over an hour elapsed before the janitor returned.

“Well, Jones” I said as he entered, “have you read that manuscript?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And you find it all right—punctuation good, spelling all correct?”

“Very good indeed, sir.”

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“And there is, I trust, nothing of what one would call a humorcous nature in it? I want you to answer me quite frankly, Jones—there is nothing in it that would raise a smile, or even a laugh, is there?”

“Oh, no, sir,” said Jones, “nothing at all.”

“And now tell me—for remember that the reputation of our magazine is at stake—does this story make a decided impression on you? Has it,” and here I cast my eye casually at the latest announcement of a rival publication, “the kind of *tour de force* which at once excites you to the full *qui vive* and which contains a sustained *brio* that palpitates on every page? Answer carefully, Jones, because if it hasn’t, I won’t buy it.”

“I think it has,” he said.

“Very well,” I answered; “now bring the author to me.”

In the interval of waiting, I hastily ran my eye through the pages of the manuscript.

Presently they brought the author back again. He had assumed a look of depression.

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“I have decided,” I said, “to take your manuscript.”

Joy broke upon his face. He came nearer to me as if to lick my hand.

“Stop a minute,” I said. “I am willing to take your story, but there are certain things, certain small details which I want to change.”

“Yes?” he said timidly.

“In the first place, I don’t like your title. *Dorothy Dacres, or, Only a Clergyman’s Daughter* is too quiet. I shall change it to read *Dorothea Dashedaway, or, The Quicksands of Society.*”

“But surely——” began the contributor, beginning to wring his hands.

“Don’t interrupt me,” I said. “In the next place, the story is much too long.” Here I reached for a large pair of tailor’s scissors that lay on the table. “This story contains nine thousand words. We never care to use more than six thousand. I must therefore cut some of it off.” I measured the story carefully with a pocket tape that lay in front of me, cut off three thousand words and handed them back to the author. “These

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words," I said, "you may keep. We make no claim on them at all. You are at liberty to make any use of them that you like."

"But please," he said, "you have cut off all the end of the story: the whole conclusion is gone. The readers can't possibly tell——"

I smiled at him with something approaching kindness.

"My dear sir," I said, "they *never* get within three thousand words of the end of a magazine story. The end is of no consequence whatever. The beginning, I admit, may be, but the end! Come! Come! And in any case in our magazine we print the end of each story separately, distributed among the advertisements to break the type. But just at present we have plenty of these on hand. You see," I continued, for there was something in the man's manner that almost touched me, "all that is needed is that the last words printed must have a look of finality. That's all. Now, let me see," and I turned to the place where the story was cut, "what are the last words here: 'Dorothy sank into a chair.

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There we must leave her !' Excellent !. What better end could you want ? She sank into a chair and you leave her. Nothing more natural."

The contributor seemed about to protest. But I stopped him.

"There is one other small thing," I said. "Our coming number is to be a Plumbers' and Motor Number. I must ask you to introduce a certain amount of plumbing into your story." I rapidly turned over the pages. "I see," I said, "that your story as written is laid largely in Spain in the summer. I shall ask you to alter this to Switzerland and make it winter time to allow for the breaking of steam-pipes. Such things as these, however, are mere details ; we can easily arrange them."

I reached out my hand.

"And now," I said, "I must wish you a good afternoon."

The contributor seemed to pluck up courage.

"What about remuneration ?" he faltered.

I waived the question gravely aside. "You will, of course, be duly paid at our usual rate.

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You receive a cheque two years after publication. It will cover all your necessary expenses, including ink, paper, string, sealing-wax and other incidentals, in addition to which we hope to be able to make you a compensation for your time on a reasonable basis per hour. Good-bye."

He left, and I could hear them throwing him downstairs.

Then I sat down, while my mind was on it, and wrote the advance notice of the story. It ran like this:

"NEXT MONTH'S NUMBER OF THE MEGALOMANIA
MAGAZINE WILL CONTAIN A THRILLING
STORY, ENTITLED

*DOROTHEA DASHAWAY, OR, THE
QUICKSANDS OF SOCIETY.*

"The author has lately leaped into immediate recognition as the greatest master of the short story in the American World. His style has a brio, a poise, a savoir-faire, a je ne sais quoi, which stamps all his work with the cachet of literary superiority. The sum paid for the

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story of *Dorothea Dashaway* is said to be the largest ever paid for a single MS. Every page palpitates with interest, and at the conclusion of this remarkable narrative the reader lays down the page in utter bewilderment, to turn perhaps to the almost equally marvellous illustration of Messrs. Spiggott and Fawcett's Home Plumbing Device Exposition which adorns the same number of the great review."

I wrote this out, rang the bell, and was just beginning to say to the secretary—

"My dear child, pray pardon my forgetfulness. You must be famished for lunch. Will you permit me——"

And then I woke up—at the wrong minute, as one always does.

