

SOLD THE POETRY

How a Young Verse Writer Got His Lines Accepted.

Interesting Magazine Editors—Mr. Alden, of Harper's, Criticless, But Richard Henry Stoddard Promises to Review Them in Print.

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EVER again will I believe that poetry—more particularly spring poetry—is a drug in the market. Experience has just convinced me to the contrary. For, although destitute of literary fame, and without previous experience in the art of versification, I sat down and wrote a poem on spring which I submitted personally to the editors of New York's leading magazines. All of these gentlemen are entire strangers to me, yet inside of two hours my verses were accepted for publication by an editor who is himself a poet of national reputation. Not only that, but this same poet promised to write an article on my poem and print it with the verses.

This is how it came about. For some time I had felt an impulse, an inspiration, or whatever it may be called, to write a poem. This is something unusual with me, for, as I have said, I do not write poetry as a regular thing. Moreover, I had gathered that poetry is a drug in the market, especially if it be in any way connected with the subject of spring. However, one evening, just before going to bed, I sat down in the dining-room of my flat and wrote the following, almost without effort:

THE VOICE OF SPRING
Hail, gentle spring!
Thou mildly soothing thing,
Whose soft, sweet kiss
Is highest bliss.

Thy happy hours
Bring new born flowers
To haunts of gloomy man,
Go not again!

So, gentle spring,
Of thee I sing.
Stay, stay, oh stay
On earth always.

My sorrowing heart rejoices. Its first choice is ever to find solace in thy voice.

I determined to lose no time in marketing this production, and with that end in view, took it next day to the editor of Harper's Magazine, Mr. Henry M. Alden. He is the most accessible of men. I found him in his little office at Franklin square, and upon introducing myself and stating the nature of my business, he received me most courteously and asked me to take a chair. There is an incomprehensible aspect of youth in Mr. Alden's gray hair and beard and even in his spectacles. As

he took my poem and began an attentive perusal of it, I had an opportunity to study his face. If Horace lived in the nineteenth century, I believe he would look and dress like Mr. Alden. I think the famous editor must have read my poem at least three times. Then he looked gravely through his spectacles at me and said: "Where's the rest of it?" I told him there wasn't any more of it. Mr. Alden laid the manuscript upon his desk, brought his hand down upon it and said, with a smile that wreathed all his features: "That's a good poem. My heart gave a leap. Then you will accept it for Harper's?" "Well, no," said Mr. Alden, pleasantly. "When I say it is good I mean that it is as good as the verses of any five hundred people who write poetry would be. For you will be surprised at the large number of people who, like yourself, can write good poetry. That circumstance, in fact, is one of the most wonderful things I have come across in all my editorial experience. Poetry is submitted here to an extent that I hardly dare estimate off-hand. And, as I said, it is poetry that is largely as meritorious as the verses you bring me. And while a great many people can write good poetry, it is impossible for me to accept more than some twenty poems a year. And," concluded Mr. Alden, with a smile that was pleasanter than ever, "your poem does not possess, to my mind, the sort of merit that would warrant me in accepting it for the magazine."

"May I ask," I faltered, "what is the defect in my poem? I need hardly say that I am highly gratified that you consider it good." Mr. Alden took up the poem from his desk and bent his brows over it again. Then he looked at me and smiled once more. "It is trite," he said. "Spring is not a subject that commends itself to me as strikingly original. A poem should have a new note if written to-day. Otherwise it is apt to be a repetition of what other poets have said. Hence I, and if I am not in error, other editors are on the lookout for a new note. That note, I freely admit, does not make itself evident to me in your verses."

Whereupon Mr. Alden folded the paper on which my poem was written and handed it to me with the most engaging smile I have ever seen on a man's face. "A last question, sir," I hazarded. "Would you judge, from this poetry, that I have in me the makings of a good poet?" The editor leaned back in his chair

crossed one leg over the other and stroked his beard. "Yes, I do," he replied. "I do not undertake to predict what sort of a name you may or may not make for yourself. That would, obviously, be impossible in view of the great number of persons of whom it might be said that they have in them the makings of a good poet. We are all poets, more or less, but some of us are denied the gift of expression."

I thereupon told Mr. Alden that I would detain him no longer and he smilingly bade me a most cordial farewell. I walked up to Union square and entered the Century Magazine's office. Mr. Robert Underwood Johnson is the gentleman who receives poets there

when they have anything to sell. Mr. Johnson is a poet, like myself. His verses have been collected into a book and extensively sold. Some persons tell me that Mr. Johnson writes lyrics. When I handed him my manuscript he took it, unfolded it, gave one look at it, folded it up again and handed it back to me. He declared that he couldn't look at it—I must excuse him. He couldn't be unfair to others.

Then I resolved to take my poem to Mr. Richard Henry Stoddard and ask him to advise me. When I reached his house at No. 329 East Fifteenth street it was passed midday, my verses were still on my hands and I felt discouraged. I sat down in the parlor while the servant went upstairs with my card. Very soon I heard slow, labored footsteps and the sound of a cane. A calm, aged face, framed in a venerable white beard, was next thrust through a pair of curtains. It was the old poet.

"Mr. Stoddard," said I, advancing with my sheet of paper outstretched, "although I am a stranger to you I have called to ask your opinion of some verses I have written. Will you do me the favor to give me your candid opinion of them? The lines are few. I have been vainly trying to sell them." "Come into this back room," said he, in his brave old tones, "where there is an open fire." He placed a chair for me to sit down and taking in his trembling hand the poetry which the editor of Harper's Magazine had called good, he sat down himself. "I must use glasses," he remarked, smiling over to me, "for my eyes are old and weak." He pulled out a pair of ancient spectacles and stuck them over his nose. Then he began to pore intently over my verses.

He pored while I could count, say, sixty. Then he turned the sheet over and looked on the other side. He arose suddenly. "I'll tell you what I will do," he said hurriedly. "I will print your verses in the Mail and Express—I will print them without having read them to you by your merchant is an evidence of his reliability, as he can sell you cheap ready-mixed paints and bogus White Lead and make a larger profit. Many short-sighted dealers do so.

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through. I will do more—I will print my opinion of them." I called his attention to the fact that his opinion of the verses might be unfavorable, in which case his published estimate would prove injurious to my poetic fame. "Well, I have no time to give you now," he said, still hastily. "I'm very busy. You must excuse me. But if you send me the verses, I will accept them for publication, as I said, and I will write them up. I am very busy now."

He handed the verses back and I arose. As I got to the front door he asked me if it was cold outside. I told him it was not, and thanked him, for I felt that his offer implied a great compliment. Then I passed out and left him standing at the foot of the stairs. Thus I got my poem accepted for publication inside of two hours, not to mention the triumph of an indorsement from the editor of a great monthly.

I can only say, finally, that if Mr. Stoddard will give my verses that free notice I will return the compliment by printing my opinion of his. Poets should not be jealous of each other. Most Reprehensible Extravagance. Franklin Hedwig—Here, Emmy, dear, pray accept this little birthday present. Franklin Emmy (looking up indignantly)—A hundred visiting cards? What extravagance! How much longer do you expect me to keep my own name?—Humoristische Blätter.

Some Difference. "I got an awful hair-brain with the wire-bristle hair-brush this morning," said Billie. "Pshaw!" said Johnnie. "That don't hurt." "Yes it does. Pa had the bristle side down."—Harper's Bazar.

Calm. "How are you getting along with your music lessons?" asked the caller. "Very peaceably, now," replied the recalcitrant girl. "What do you mean?" "The neighbors on both sides of us have moved."—Washington Star.

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