

Dilettante
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Editorial Crimes – A Protest

NOW the majority of editors are excellent men, courteous and sympathetic to a degree hardly to be expected under the circumstances. But there is no disguising the fact that there are unscrupulous editors, and it were well that the beginner be made acquainted with a few of their crimes and misdemeanors; for the results of such editorial wrong-doing are often cruel and always vexatious. And there is no reason for the perpetration of these crimes, except in the pitiable case of the mendicant journals, at the sanctum door of which the wolf of bankruptcy is always growling. To them all things are permissible. They are brilliant exponents of the law of self-preservation.

Not so with the rest of the fraternity. They can present no valid excuse for their misconduct. For instance: A writer spends his spare time in stamping and addressing countless envelopes and in keeping a large miscellany of manuscripts on the road. It behooves him to keep a short lookout against their being lost, strayed, or stolen with a newspaper, after the dispatch of the manuscript, he probably permits a month of silence to elapse; with a second rate magazine, six weeks; and with a first rate magazine, possibility two months. At the end of these respective periods, in the meantime having received no news of the wandering child of his head and hand, he sends off a 'trailer.' As a rule, this either brings him the return of the manuscript, or a note of acceptance. In either case the editor has been guilty of a misdemeanor. The manuscript is a commodity. The time element of the political economist enters into the determination of its value, though, forsooth, the writer is denied any monetary consideration on the same. A manufacturer, selling shoes on ninety days, demands and receives—and justly so—a larger price than if he sells for cash. Since the writer is denied this, it is the plain duty of the editor to create as little possible delay in the examination of his wares. The very fact that the 'trailer' elicited so prompt an editorial decision, proves that the editor was sinning.

But when, after long holding of the article, the editor takes no notice of the trailer, he is positively criminal. Common ethics demands a reply. And again, after several months of anxious waiting, a trailer will bring back the manuscript in the company of a stereotyped slip, upon which may be noted, among other things, the following: *Should a manuscript be held as presenting features worthy of additional consideration for a longer period than suits the convenience of the author, it will be immediately returned upon a request from the author.* Now the trailer distinctly stated that it did not wish the return of the manuscript, but was merely what it purported to be—an enquiry after its welfare and a desire to guard against its loss. Surely, the magazine in question could not in the practical nature of things have been holding more than a very limited number of manuscripts for 'additional consideration;' and it would have been a light task to inform the authors interested of the state of affairs.

Having had such an experience, the present writer, fearing a repetition, allowed a manuscript to remain six months with another magazine editor. But lack-a-day, it took four

trailers, thirty days apart, to compass its return. So, under such circumstances, the writer finds himself 'twixt the devil and the deep sea; on the one hand the touchiness of the editor, on the other the loss of the manuscript.

From another editor, after four months of holding, a trailer resurrected the manuscript and the accompanying note: It has merit but is too long. *While it does not suit our paper you will doubtless find a market.* In the name of common idiocy, did it take four months to reach this conclusion?

The return of manuscript written over and scrawled upon is not so unusual an occurrence in the course of marketing one's wares. And it is in no pleasant spirit that a writer sits down to re-type an article mutilated by a criminal editor. But even then, compensation sometimes plays its small part. I once submitted an afternoon's hack-work, in the form of a fifteen hundred word skit, to a New York weekly paper. If accepted, my fondest dreams could not picture a check of greater magnitude than five dollars. After two months of silence, I trailed it; and back it came by return mail. It was OK'd and signed with the editor's name across the face, and edited for the press, and blue-penciled throughout. Utterly ruined-so I thought; but in sheer despair, without removing one of the barbarian's ravages, I dispatched it to the most prominent boy's paper in the United States. Four weeks later came a check for twenty-five dollars. My maledictions upon the head of the barbarian turned to blessings. Even now my heart goes out to him. My benefactor!

The question of payment is another matter which involves much criminality. An editor, whose rates are extremely low, has no right, in dealing with a new contributor, to rush his work into print without first ascertaining whether these low rates are agreeable to the vendor of manuscripts. Yet this is often done. There is also the newspaper editor who accepts and pays for work, and when the writer asks for the number in which it was published, advises him to buy the files, or asks why did he not subscribe. Then there is the editor who writes one a pleasant little note of acceptance, saying nice little things about the 'contribution,' but omitting to make mention of that important little matter of payment. It will be noticed that he has inserted the thin end of the wedge when he refers to the manuscript as a 'contribution.' Keep an eye on him! Some day he will express unholy surprise at your daring to ask for your pay. Likewise, there is the editor one has always to dun. There is a custom among the 'silent, sullen people who run the magazines,' to make payment within thirty days after publication. With this no fault can be found. But there certainly can be with the editor who waits sixty or ninety days, or a year, or any other length of time after publication; and who, at any time past the thirty day limit, in reply to a dun, makes instant payment and profuse apology. It is too bad, but one sometimes has to deal with such fellows. But don't be bashful with them. Give them the limit, and then dun. If it turns out to be only a mistake on their part, why, nobody is hurt and everything is rectified. If it is no mistake, then rest assured that you have made no mistake either.

But a word for the good editors. More than once, pressed for money, I have written to them promptly upon publication of my work, or shortly afterward, and without exception they have at once made remittance. If they had been sensitive, it would have been very easy to seek refuge behind their thirty day custom.

It is perhaps better to end this article while the theme runs among the good editors, and no better way can I find to do so, than by describing the ideal management of a Massachusetts agricultural weekly. Doubtless many readers will be able to name it at sight. However, this is its method: A manuscript rarely remains with it a week pending decision. If unavailable, it is returned at once. If acceptable, it is accepted at once. In the latter case, a postal card is mailed to the writer, informing him that payment will be made thirty days after publication, and that a copy

of the number containing his article will be mailed him. These promises are fulfilled to the letter. It can hardly be hyperbole to say one is as sure of it as of the rising of the sun. It will be observed that it does away with much of the editorial misconduct I have described, and were it a general institution it would surely save the souls of many editors from damnation.