

**HOW TO WRITE FOR THE
PRESS: A
PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR
BEGINNERS IN JOURNALISM**

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How to Write for the Press: A Practical Handbook for Beginners in Journalism by
Anonymous

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BY

AN EDITOR.

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HOW TO WRITE FOR THE PRESS.

INTRODUCTION.

So numerous are the handbooks on practical journalism and authorship that the addition of yet another to the list may seem to call for a few words of explanation, if not apology.

By way of this, I would state, in the first place, that the majority of such works have been written by men whose success in the realm to which they have posed as guides has been somewhat equivocal. That is to say, men whose connection with journalism has been of the very slightest nature, men who have had no real experience of practical newspaper work, have taken upon themselves the office of giving advice to others when they themselves stood much in need of it. It is quite unnecessary to mention names in this connection, as experienced journalists are well aware of the facts. Now, for a man who has not spent years in going through the daily work of a practical journalist, and has some difficulty in getting his own contributions accepted, to offer his wisdom and counsel to the beginner in journalism is nothing less than an impertinence. The bald-headed barber who urges you to buy his hair restorer and the individual in question are near relatives.

It seems to me, therefore, that there is at least one

merit which the writer of this little book may claim—for it is the work of a practical journalist, and of one, moreover, who has found journalism not only a delightful and congenial occupation, but a not unprofitable one withal. The writer of these pages has had actual experience, extending over a goodly number of years, of reporting, sub-editing, and editing, together with a fair amount of experience as a contributor to periodicals and magazines, and he has even rejoiced his enemies by writing books. He has edited an evening paper, a bi-weekly, a morning daily, and at the present time is entrusted with the control of one of the leading weekly newspapers connected with one of the best known of provincial dailies. These facts are mentioned in no vain-glorious spirit, but are simply entered here as the author's credentials.

The reason why the author came to write the papers which form this book has already been stated by inference. So much that has previously been written on the subjects here treated has been the work of people whose title to give advice was so dubitable, or whose advice appeared to lack practicability, that he determined to approach the task in a thoroughly practical manner, and depend upon his own experience for producing a handbook that might really prove helpful to the young man or woman who was desirous of becoming a "writer for the Press," either as an occupation for leisure hours or as a means of livelihood.

That the writer has thus succeeded in some measure he is encouraged to believe, as four of the following chapters have already been published in the *Young Man*, and there they met with much acceptance,

being widely noticed by the Press and attracting especially the attention of Mr. W. T. Stead, who, in the *Review of Reviews*, heartily commended them for the saneness and practical value of their advice. The chapters in question (II., III., VIII., and IX.) are the only ones that have thus been published, and the author wishes to draw attention to the fact that his references to particular years in these chapters have been allowed to stand, as they were written before the assumption of his present editorship necessitated the discontinuance of much of his work as a contributor to other periodicals and magazines. Their value, of course, is in no wise affected by their date.

Another thing might be urged by the writer in behalf of his little book, and that is the fact that while the outside contributor to the Press has invariably been the subject of some slight attention at the hands of those who have issued primers of journalism and authorship, he has never before been the subject of a special handbook. But the literary contributor has of late become important enough and numerous enough to warrant this attention. Indeed, it seems to me that the recent cheapening of periodical literature, and its attendant demand for increased literary work, make the appearance of such a book as this distinctly opportune.

Magazine editors and the conductors of all classes of periodicals are beginning to rely less on the work of authors who have been "boomed" into, oftentimes unreal, fame. An editor who is said to have given £250 for a story by Mr. Rudyard Kipling has confessed that its appearance did not add a single copy to the circulation of his magazine. The editors of

Pearson's Magazine and the *Royal* have recently made a similar statement; and we have seen the last-named magazine, as well as the *Harmsworth*, achieve without an author of note in its pages a circulation ten times greater than any of those magazines that make a show of "big names" on their contents pages. The moral of this is plain: the capable unknown is going to have his or her chance in magazinedom, and is no longer to be swamped by writers who have managed to get their logs rolled by friendly journalists.

The field which lies open to the literary contributor will increase in the near future rather than become more circumscribed, and it is to those who contemplate entering it that this little handbook is offered, in the hope that within its pages they may find not a few hints that will save them many galling experiences, and help, perchance, to smooth the pathway to success. But I would warn, at the outset, anyone who is in a good, permanent situation, be he a draper or a druggist, not to dream of vacating that and trusting to his pen for a livelihood until he has for *several years* been able to make from literary work done after business hours an income that would be sufficient for his requirements independent of his business salary. Many a man and woman can add a very acceptable sum each year to his or her income by writing for the Press, and I am sometimes inclined to think that they are better off than those who have to depend solely upon their pens for their livelihood. They enjoy the genuine delight of literary work; it never becomes a toil to them; and they can share modestly in its rewards.

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING "STYLE."

To use one's pen for the humblest literary office—the writing of a letter to a friend—is to long for the pleasure of being able to turn one's sentences with some degree of grace; to present one's thoughts in the most becoming dress. How different is the reading of a letter from one who has made some progress in this direction, compared with a letter from another who has never given a thought to literary form. Even upon the uncritical reader the subtle influence of style is not lost, and the manner of telling a story, or of describing a scene, has often interested a reader who could scarce explain why his attention was engaged.

In the wider world of literature style is essential to distinction; and no pains should be spared in its cultivation. How it may be acquired is one of those debatable questions which are always fruitful sources of discussion; just as critics have disputed for generations the teaching of the actor's art. There are those who contend that acting cannot be taught; that the actor, like the poet, cannot be the creation of academies, but must receive his tuition direct from Mother Nature; while others as stoutly maintain that the art is capable of being acquired at the hands of a competent instructor. So in regard to literary style