



[FOR THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL.]
MR. BOK'S LITERARY LEAVES.

Success in Literature; How Obtained And What It Brings.

The earnings of authors is a favorite topic with the literary paragrapher, and it would be an interesting and fruitful one in many respects if the writers would adhere to facts. But only harm can come from the statements set afloat which give ambitious young authors an entirely mistaken idea of the revenues of the pen. It reads very nicely, for example, to say that Mr. Howells has a yearly income of \$25,000 from his literary work, as has recently been stated. But it is not true, as all know who have any knowledge at all of the earnings of literary people. Mr. Howells has undoubtedly a comfortable income, that is, comfortable for an author, but that income, I do not think, exceeds \$15,000, of which two-thirds represent his work as editor of the "Study" department in *Harpers' Magazine*. E. P. Roe has been quoted as having enjoyed a yearly income of \$50,000 for the last two years of his life. This figure is an exaggeration of just 100 per cent, as I happen to know. Mrs. Burnett's income has been rated as high as \$75,000 a year, which is another gross misstatement. Depend upon it, such incomes as those quoted are not enjoyed by authors in these times. If the average writer of novels and stories, and I grant him fame and a wide circle of readers, is able to live comfortably from the proceeds of his pen, and promptly pay his debts, he is fortunate above scores of his fellow-authors. It is right that the young in literature as well as in all professions and trades should look to the successful, and endeavor to emulate their examples. But while we are continually telling aspiring authors all about the Stevensons, the Burnetts, the Haggards, the Wallaces of literature, it is well, also, to occasionally say something about the hundreds of literary workers who hardly realize enough from their work to pay for stationery and postage.

LITERATURE NOT A BED OF ROSES.

There is by far too prevalent an impression that literature is a bed of roses, where all seed bears flowers. No calculation is safe that is made on products of the pen. I have known of several instances where young authors have assumed obligations based upon the probable success of their work. Disappointment invariably follows in such cases. In few professions are there so many uncertainties. Because a story is accepted this week, is no guarantee that you will have another accepted next week. Yet, again and again have I heard rising young authors make such a calculation. A young writer receives \$50 for an accepted story which has probably cost him a week's work. Immediately follows the multiplication of \$50 by 52 weeks. It apparently never occurs to him that for weeks, and perhaps months, he will receive only declinations. Literature makes a precarious foundation for financial calculations, and it would save much unhappiness and disappointment if this was more generally understood and credited. As in all callings, success in literature means hard, steady work, plenty of it, and even then success may not come. There are ten, yea twenty and forty failures to every success. The literary market has never been so full as at the present day, with sharp competition at every turn. Never have there been more people with pen in hand striving for a livelihood, each doing their utmost to outdistance the other. It will be well for young authors, too ready to adopt literature as a profession and too sanguine of success, to consider and digest some of the disadvantages of authorship as well as the rose-colored joys of fame and praise which are spread upon the canvas of their inexperienced visions.

EARNINGS OF POPULAR AUTHORS.

A simple glance over the list of American authors is in itself a convincing evidence that literature is not so profitable as our literary paragraphers would have us believe. Very few of our modern authors find themselves able to depend entirely upon the revenues of their work. I will not say that they could not do so; I merely state the fact that they do not. Mr. Cable for example devotes considerable time to lecturing. Mark Twain is now more of a publisher than an author. Joel Chandler Harris is an editor as is Richard Henry Stoddards. Dr. Holmes has found his medical practice immensely valuable to him for years before he reached an eminence in literature accorded to but few. Marion Harland and Margaret E. Sangster both find the editorial chair profitable; likewise, John Habberton, Mr. Aldrich, Mr. Warner and Mr. Gilder. Bret Harte's consulate was not purely accepted for the honor it brought. Mary Mapes Dodge doubtless finds more peace of mind in the assured income which her posi-

tion as editor of *St. Nicholas* brings her than in the lottery of simple authorship. Indeed there are but few authors of to-day who do not harness some other duties to the mere writing of stories, poems or novels. I do not write these facts in discouragement of rising literary talent; simply to counteract, if possible, some of the impressions likely to be made by paragraphers who are apt to be too reckless in their handling of the incomes of famous authors.

HOW TO GET A "START" AS AN AUTHOR.

I often hear aspiring young writers say, "If I could only get a start, I feel positive I would make a success as an author." A "start" in literature is best made by the individual efforts of the writer. It is a mistaken idea that influence is necessary to a foothold in the literary world. If a young writer has a manuscript finished, let her send it, with a brief simple note, to the editor of the magazine to which she believes it is best suited. But, just here is where hundreds of writers fail. They cannot adapt their work to the proper channel. I believe that more failures in authorship are due to this inability on the part of authors than to any other, except worthless and careless writing. I have known women—and men, too, for that matter—who repeatedly sent poems to *The Forum* and stories and serial novels to *The North American Review*; then express the utmost surprise at their declination. I believe that every manuscript written which has merit in it, finds its market somewhere and at some time; that it does not always find it at the outset is as often due to the lack of judgement in the author as to the manuscript itself. Each magazine has its distinct policy and constituency, and the character of these is reflected in the text. It is the duty of an ambitious author to study these before she begins to send her manuscripts around. Her chances will be increased by doing so, and her reputation among editors better, than those who throw their productions around indiscriminately.

VALUE OF INFLUENCE IN LITERATURE.

I should not be understood as belittling the value of a certain kind of influence exerted in behalf of a rising young author. A timely word, a gentle push given at just the right moment by just the right person in just the right manner, is invaluable. But for Mr. Gladstone's review of "Robert Elsmere," Mrs. Humphrey Ward would not hold the conspicuous position in literature she does to-day. "Ben Hur," after selling less than a thousand copies during the first year of its publication, was almost a "shelved" book when President Garfield gave it a timely reference that started it on its subsequently enormous sales. Mr. Aldrich may be regarded as the god-father of both Miss Murfree (Charles Egbert Craddock) and Mrs. Amelie Rives—Chanler, while Mr. Stedman did much to bring "Sidney Luska" into the prominence he has attained. But influence of this sort only helps an author; it never makes one. Without merit, all the "pushing" by those most influential is useless and unproductive. If influence of this sort is inaccessible, only a trifle harder work must be gone through by the ambitious young author. But, even in these busy and fast-going days, real talent is not very often allowed to go to waste. Upon this fact it is always safe to rely. There may be an exceptional case here and there, but as a rule literary talent is certain of recognition, although it may seem too long in coming. Editors are just as anxious to discover fresh talent as the authors are desirous of being discovered. It is an advantage to an editor to introduce a new author of talent, and one which he is always ready to grasp.

There is one safe rule, however, sure to prevent all disappointment in literature: Don't write. EDWARD W. BOK.

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