

# WHY ARE MANUSCRIPTS REJECTED?

## A SYMPOSIUM

REFLECTING EDITORIAL VIEWS FROM AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE, THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE, THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY, THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE, THE CENTURY MAGAZINE, COLLIER'S WEEKLY, THE COSMOPOLITAN MAGAZINE, GOOD HOUSEKEEPING MAGAZINE, THE GREEN BOOK MAGAZINE, HARPER'S MAGAZINE, HARPER'S WEEKLY, THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL, McCLURE'S MAGAZINE, MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE, THE OUTLOOK, THE PICTORIAL REVIEW, THE RED BOOK MAGAZINE, THE REVIEW OF REVIEWS, THE SMART SET, VANITY FAIR, AND THE WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION.

*Fifty-six years ago a man who had contributed very materially to England's prose fiction of all time accepted the editorship of a new magazine. He sat in the editorial chair for a matter of two years. Then he resigned, discouraged, disappointed, and downhearted. One of the principal reasons for this resignation, discouragement, disappointment, and downheartedness, is suggested in the title of this symposium. Thackeray as the editor of "The Cornhill" did not like to reject or cause to be rejected the proffered manuscript. Since his day the world has seen many editors, but very few of them, we think, have derived much real pleasure from sending back these contributions that represent so much ardour, and effort, and ambition. But there are still a good many persons in the world who do not understand that, and the editorial chair still has its "thorns in the cushion." "Who is this man who declines my offering?" asks Luckless. "What are his motives of envy or malice?" Others, more charitably inclined, ascribe to him lack of judgment, inability to distinguish between the wheat and the chaff, or prejudice in favour of old friends. Old friends indeed! They do not know that the greatest joy of his existence comes with the discovery of an absolutely new writer. They do not see that in charging him with making his selections upon a basis of personal friendship they are crediting him with an altruism which he does not possess. But let those editors who have so courteously and generously contributed to this symposium in the hope that it may help to bring about a better understanding, speak for themselves.*

### AINSLEE'S MAGAZINE

FIRST of all let me say that well written stories are not rejected by *Ainslee's* because of their failure to meet any fixed requirements of theme or subject. At one time *Ainslee's* thought it preferred fiction possessing a "society" interest. Along came O. Henry and Joseph C. Lincoln. Their names were unknown, so it was the stories themselves that disproved this idea. Our next fallacy was based upon the old *Sun* theory that we all are provincials at heart; that a dog

fight on Fifth Avenue is of greater interest to New Yorkers than a war in Europe. We decided that a good *Ainslee* story must have an American setting, or at least a strong American interest. Along came decidedly English stories by Leonard Merrick, Provost - Battersby, Jeffery Farnol, and William J. Locke, none of whom then possessed a "name" in this country. And so it went, one little pet requirement after another, bowled over almost as soon as we had set it up.

The rejection of a well written story

by *Ainslee's* is in most cases due to its lack of what in people we call "personality." Often a poorer story in point of writing and construction finds acceptance because of this quality, just as in every day life we are sometimes strongly drawn to the man of many faults, while his irreproachable neighbour, upright and respected, makes not the slightest appeal to us. It is this intangible something that draws us alike to people and stories even though they respectively eat peas with a knife and split their infinitives. If they lack this personality, however well-bred and law-abiding they may be, whether flesh-and-blood people or ink-and-paper ones, we politely reject their companionship.

*Robert Rudd Whiting.*

#### THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE

Manuscripts are often rejected because the editor makes a mistake. The editor is like other people—fortunate if he maintains a decent batting average of good judgment.

I cannot understand, however, why any writer should have the idea that an editor, with intention, will do things which will help destroy his magazine. Manuscript readers are to the magazine what the receiving teller is to the bank. The banker will lose money and prestige if he is careless with the commodity on which his business is based. So will the editor. One deals in money; the other in reading matter. Of course, the truth is—as every editor knows—that an editorial office is particularly keen to get hold of new writers. The best reading matter is as frequently obtained from absolutely new writers as it is from famous writers. In fact, an editor is particularly anxious for an author's first work, because what it lacks in craftsmanship, it frequently makes up in freshness.

There is another point that authors ought to understand. No matter what his stock may be—no matter how much material he may have on hand—the editor, if he has a passion for making the best magazine that he can, will keep on

working over his product until the presses start. Which means, from the point of view of the author, that the editor is forever in the market for the new and superior thing. The editor may say that he is overstocked, he may believe it, but if he is a real editor, he will forget that fact in the presence of a fresh and wonderful manuscript.

New writers should not overlook the importance of carefully reading those magazines to which they want to contribute. One of the most foolish things in the world is to write with no knowledge of what the world about you is reading. It is my belief that really great writers are almost invariably tremendous readers. But, in any event, new writers who want to sell their manuscripts to magazines ought to read those magazines. There is nothing like knowing the market, and how can one know the market without studying it? Also, the market is a good place to go for definite practical suggestions. Read the magazines for what you can write for them—is a good rule.

This brings us to the point about policy. A magazine usually has a definite aim. Perfectly good stuff may be turned down by an editor which he would take if he were editing a periodical with a different policy. A magazine is not a hodgepodge. It is not a place where an editor publishes miscellaneous stuff that he thinks is good and interesting. It is a place where particular kinds of information and inspiration are provided for a particular set of readers. Authors who are accessible to the editor—those who live near the place of publication—get an idea of this policy from personal conferences with the editor, as well as from the magazine itself. Other contributors have to use the mails. This is good business procedure, and there is no possible excuse for the author feeling aggrieved if the editor decides against his manuscript. Decisions against manuscripts time and time again have not the slightest relation to the quality of the stuff submitted.

Always remember this—no real editor