

dreads to read manuscripts; *he wants to read them*. He does not want to miss a chance at new talent. This is his business—to discover and help develop new talent. To have been the first editor to publish the work of a new author who afterward became famous is, of course, the greatest pride of an editor.

John M. Siddall.

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

It has always seemed to me that the best method of selecting manuscripts for a magazine is to follow sedulously the habits of Dr. Fell's critic. If I am not interested in a manuscript, I never print it, regardless of the number of people to whom it may possibly appeal. This business of attempting to hit a popular taste which zigzags instead of progressing, shifting from day to day, and seldom recognising to-morrow the things it loved yesterday, is too hazardous a pastime for my conservative disposition. I habitually think of *The Atlantic's* contributors as representing the guests at a dinner party. I do not want them all to agree with me, but I do not care to ask anybody whose words do not seem to me worth listening to or whose manners are out of place in company.

It is a simple rule of thumb, then, by which I judge a manuscript; but it has the enormous advantage of being definite, and, though it may endanger every canon of criticism, it gives a magazine personality which, to my thinking, is its very soul.

Ellery Sedgwick.

THE BLUE BOOK, GREEN BOOK, AND RED BOOK MAGAZINES

It is impossible to give a general reason for the rejection of manuscripts. The great bulk of those which come to a magazine are returned because they are utterly impossible. For those which have possibilities, yet are rejected, the debarring factors are numerous. Instead of trying to enumerate them, I should like, if I may, to give and illustrate a suggestion to new writers—and some older writers, for that matter. Many

good stories have been lost to the public because their authors accepted the fact that the first editor—or the first several editors—to whom they were sent rejected them. No story should go to the discard until every magazine in the country has an opportunity to reject it.

Because I believe this point to be of importance, I gained the permission of Mr. Edwin Balmer to tell of one of his experiences. A story which he had written was rejected by seventeen editors, and accepted by the eighteenth at the highest price Mr. Balmer had received for a short story up to that time. In addition, it produced an order for four stories along similar lines. Mr. Balmer has absolute faith in his own work. I attribute much of his success to that factor. He is in a position now where his stories are sought in advance of the writing, but before that condition came, he spent no time trying to determine the cause for rejections. If a manuscript came back, he devoted his thought to deciding upon the next editor to whom it should be sent.

Theoretically, an ideal system would be one in which each editor wrote a personal letter to detail why each story was rejected. Mr. Balmer's story shows how badly this would work in practice. If any one of the seventeen editors had detailed why he rejected that story, and Mr. Balmer had changed it to meet the criticisms, he might have destroyed the story in the eyes of the man who finally accepted it. It is just as profitless for the writer to try to figure the reasons for himself. In most cases he will guess wrong, especially if he be a new writer. The best plan for him is simply to accept that it does not suit that particular magazine at that particular time, and proceed to seek a market elsewhere.

Most of all, the new writer should avoid assuming that his story has not received consideration. Many beginners really believe that magazines buy only "names," and that the story by the newcomer is tossed aside without reading. To prove this, any number of devices, such as pasting together two or three

pages in the manuscript, have been developed. Many stories are not read from start to finish. I read an average of fifty thousand words a day. Each of my assistants averages as much or more. Why then should we read through a story if the first three or four pages do not get our interest? Isn't it fair to assume that if these pages do not hold us, they will not hold the reader?

But we do read enough of every manuscript that comes to the office to decide in our own minds whether there is any chance of availability for our purposes. We've got to. We can't take chances on a winning story getting past us. We realise, of course, that one will get past now and then, as in the case of Mr. Balmer's story, but we spend a vast amount of time and nervous energy in reducing that chance to the minimum. Competition for readers is too keen to make any other course possible.

We buy the majority of our stories from writers who have "names." That is natural. Workmanship in story writing gains with experience just as it does in law or architecture, or surgery, or any other profession. If it were not true that the experienced writers sell the most stories at the highest prices, there would be precious little incentive to writers.

We are keen for "discoveries." So are the other editors. There is an excellent illustration of this in the issue of *The American Magazine* which appeared on the news-stands the day this was written. The story which received the greatest prominence—even to a photograph and an account of the writer and his work as a preface—was by Jack Lait, whose work is new to magazine readers. We have to have new writers in the business. There aren't enough thoroughly seasoned story-tellers to go around. And besides, even the best of the men who have won their spurs fail to do good work now and then.

With the exception of one group of publications, I don't think any magazine consciously buys for the name alone. Most editors will order stories in advance, but only in the cases where writ-

ers have maintained a certain standard long enough to warrant the belief that they will not fall below it. Often a case which seems to indicate the purchase of a "name" is nothing of the sort. In a recent issue of *The Red Book Magazine* we made a feature of a short story by Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. We rejected this story more than a year ago, and accepted it on its second visit to our office. During the intervening time Mr. Wodehouse had two serials and a number of short stories featured in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

A very good case of a manuscript being rejected without reading, the writer becoming famous, and the first magazine purchasing the old story because of that fame could be made from these facts. Instead, the explanation is simple. At the time the story first came to us for consideration, we had in hand four others of similar lightness in the telling. We had no use for another. When it came the second time, we had nothing like it in the office, and we needed something of the sort. With this story in mind, I might add to the suggestion in my first paragraph: No story should go into the discard until it has been the rounds of all the magazines—and then gone around again.

Ray Long.

THE CENTURY

The physical limitations alone of the *Century Magazine* bar out the bulk of the material offered. We receive from sixty to seventy contributions a day, including verse, and a given issue contains not two dozen items. The surprising thing is the number of writers who really know their trade; yet, perhaps because of the temper of the times, the most acceptable material comes from the man writing out of the fulness of his experience rather than through the vicarious work of the professional writer. This is especially true of papers reflecting the War. But it is also true of fiction that has in it some autobiographical material. In this latter class the women are more often successful because they