

HOW TO BE A HUMORIST

Some Advice, Serious and Otherwise,
by S. E. Kiser of Chicago.

S. E. Kiser of the Chicago Record-Herald tells in The Writer's Magazine for September "How to Be a Humorist." Mr. Kiser is remembered in Columbia as one of the most entertaining speakers of the last Journalism Week. His article follows:

The public has two dominant desires. One is to get rich and the other is to be amused. Hence there are stock exchanges and picture shows. It would not be fair to say that all people who are rich got their money in the stock exchanges, and it is equally certain that the picture shows do not furnish all the amusement that may be gained. Many of the people of the present day depend upon the newspapers and the magazines to amuse them, and this accounts for the fact that the country is full of humorous writers and becoming fuller every day. It has become almost impossible for any one to succeed as a writer without being humorous. Even the essayist has found that he must sweeten his philosophy with humor. The sermon he preaches or the truth he has to teach will be heeded if he can hand out a laugh with it. Otherwise his effort is likely to be wasted.

It is this general demand for amusement that has made it necessary for nearly every newspaper to maintain a humorous column. The production of newspaper humor has become one of our most important industries. Never before in the history of the world were there as many working humorists as there are at this time. If all the jokes that are written in a single day could be pasted upon one strip it would be long enough to encircle the earth at the equator and there would be enough left to tie a loop around the state of Texas.

May I be permitted here to say a word in reply to those superior critics who insist that newspaper humor is not humorous? There are self-styled academicians who insist that the newspaper humorist is a pitiful clown or a shameless impostor who is drawing his salary on false pretenses. The truth is that the newspaper humorist has no reason whatever to be ashamed of his calling. It has been graced by almost all of the successful humorists of our country. The list includes Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Bill Nye, Eugene Field, Petroleum V. Nasby, Bob Burdette, Josh Billings, Mr. Dooley and George Ade.

A curious thing about the humorous column is that it owes its development not to the great newspapers in the large cities, but has, in a way, been forced upon them. Such papers as the Burlington Hawkeye, the Danbury News, the Toledo Blade and the Detroit Free Press were furnishing humor for the masses long before the metropolitan journals began to be interested in it. The humorist column, like the cat upon the roof of the shed, has worked its way up. Cleveland was a small town when Artemus Ward began his work there; Denver was little more than a village when Eugene Field began to gain public attention through his contributions to one of its newspapers; Bill Nye had to get his reputation at Laramie; Burlington had only a few thousand inhabitants when Burdette made the Hawkeye famous, and Mark Twain's career as a humorist was begun at Virginia City, which is represented by a small dot upon the map of Nevada.

Gradually the big newspapers have been compelled to yield to the demand for humor. In New York there is one prominent daily that continues to exclude humor from its columns, but it is not improbable that the owner of it will be hurrying home from Europe before long to engage in a frantic effort to secure the services of a humorist.

For the benefit of those who are inclined to engage in the business of conducting humorous columns it may be said that the work is very easy and simple—much more so than painting flag-poles or deep-sea diving. It is nothing more than conscientious reporting. The world is so full of funny things and people are so comical in their habits and their aspirations that the humorist has only to describe what he beholds and write down what he hears, adding the touches that are necessary to give such humorous effects as may be desired. There is nothing difficult about it, you see.

But there is one thing that must be guarded against always. If you intend to be a writer of humor never on any account let yourself be persuaded to use a funny story that is imparted to you by a friend. As soon as it be-

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