

How They Became Penmen

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You have asked me to give the boys some idea of how I got started in my special line of work, I assure you it is not with the least bit of egotism that I rake up a few facts regarding my experience; but still, if I can help the younger ones by pointing out some of my mistakes, I readily comply with your request. So here goes:

When quite a little shaver I was guilty of filling up a few copy books with boyish attempts at fancy lettering and scroll work. Of course, then I had no idea that I would ever follow it as a business, but did it just for the fun of it. A little later, when I got hold of "Gaskell's Compendium" and gazed with wonder at the strikingly beautiful specimens contained therein, I was seized with a sudden desire to learn to execute those wonderful things, then go forth into the world and make a colossal fortune at once-not only for myself, but sufficient to put on Easy Street all my friends and distant relatives.

It beats all what crazy notions get into a young fellow's -head and make him a sort of temporary lunatic, but such is life. Well, after I had shed quarts of ink on birds, swans and other funny things, I finally landed at Gaskell's Business College, Manchester, N. H., where I was bent on becoming initiated into the mysteries of flourished stags, spread eagles, etc. I had such unbounded faith in this wonderful art (?) that I thought when I was ready to strike out I would only have to walk into some business house and show a few swans and fancy flourished capitals; then if I wanted the book keeper's job he would at once be fired out and I would step into his place with double his salary. But somehow things didn't go that way.

I did at last hook on to a job in an insurance office at the immense salary of \$3 per week, where my clerical duties were to be rather light-simply to hold the place down when the boss was out. The boss did go out finally for several days, much to my relief, and when he returned he found me working up a couple of flourished stags on a sheet of Whatman's drawing paper five feet long. I well remember the look of astonishment, mingled with profound disgust, that spread over his usually immobile features, but I simply thought he didn't know a good, thing when he saw it. I even had the unmitigated nerve to ask him for a few days off that I might finish up the bounding stags. He told me I could have the whole Summer off, and the coming Fall, Winter and Spring. Thus you see I was "bounced."

Manchester being too small a place to hold me, I lit out and went on a "wild goose chase" (flourished geese of course) until I struck Boston-the Hub, and the city of education and culture-just the place where a young giant who could flourish birds and swans would soon roll in wealth. But the market for flourished geese, birds, swans, eagles, etc., was away down, and I began to wonder what in the world had caused such a panic. However, I wasn't destined to starve exactly, and thereupon secured a fine job in a large bookstore at the large salary Of \$3 per week to make myself generally -useful. Seeing that I was handy with the pen, they set me to writing circular letters-a kind of work which soon grew monotonous, so I began to sprinkle in a few flourished birds, etc., with the regular work assigned me. Being hardheaded, practical businessmen, they of course didn't stand it long, and accordingly I was suddenly and unceremoniously "bounced."

My next step towards fame and fortune was a job in a Mercantile Agency-copying, at the usual boys' salary of \$3 per week, but there was a ray of hope, as it was hinted that I might get a raise soon by becoming familiar with the work. Copying soon grew dull and my interest lagged. Pens, ink and paper were handy, so I began a series of birds, scrolls, swans, etc., which I felt sure would raise me to a higher pinnacle in this big business institution than that of a mere copying machine. And, sure enough, they did make an impression, for, after covering my desk with what I thought was something dazzling in the flourish line, I was informed that the manager wanted to see me. Thinking he was going. to give me a shower bath of compliments and double my salary, I went with great alacrity to his desk, and there I was simply told to gather up my flourished birds and quietly vanish. "Bounced" again!

After that I believe I should have withered up and blown away if good fortune hadn't thrown me in the path of old A. R. Dunton, 'author and teacher of the Duntonian System of Writing, used all over the entire country,' as he always proudly announced himself. Dunton was filling out the Boston diplomas and getting tip sets of copy books. He showed me how copies were prepared for the engraver and soon had me in harness doing practical work, for at that time copy book work was quite a big thing, and what I learned in this particular branch was something that was afterwards the means of bringing me considerable money. Here was work for which there was a market, and it may be well to say to the young penmen that there is yet a demand for good commercial script for reproduction; and the young fellow who combines good sensible script work with a facility for practical lettering and designing will not go long without employment.