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How They Became Penmen -No. 5

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In casting about for an answer to the question, "How I Became a Penman," will say two reasons seem to loom up most conspicuous, or seem to have played a very important part, at any rate, in my decision to engage in the penmanship and commercial work.

In the first place, I always had a great liking for the work, especially for penmanship, and which I have found to be a very necessary requisite, in fact, in any business or profession where any great degree of skill or proficiency is desired. I am not a very firm believer in the idea that one grows into this work, or that John or Mary has a natural aptitude for it, as we often hear people say. The natural aptitude is acquired by hard work, diligent study and faithful practice. Many pupils and professed admirers of the work have said to me, "Mr. Hoffman, I'd give anything if I could write as you do." Now, they do not mean what-they say, skill or proficiency, while it is the one who has to depend on hard work and close application who "gets there." I had to work early and late to acquire what little skill I possess, and so have the great majority of penmen. So don't be discouraged, boys, because you don't acquire the skill of a Madarasz or a Courtney in a few weeks or months of earnest effort, but stick to it with the tenacity of the proverbial bull pup and success will crown your efforts.

A disappointment in not being appointed principal of my home school is possibly reason number two for my selecting commercial work. Disappointments, though not pleasant, are sometimes beneficial, as they often spur the more ambitious greater efforts, and whether my decision to leave the public school work and engage in commercial work was a wise one or not has always been a question with me; but, at any rate, in the spring of '84 I entered the Spencerian Business College, Cleveland, O. I took a three months' course in the bookkeeping department, and during that time had one hour drill in penmanship each day under the superior instruction.

In the first place, perhaps not one of them would be willing to do as I did-write all day, many days remaining at my desk while others went out to luncheon, mainly because I did not have the price to do likewise, and possibly sit up half the night and practice, PRACTICE. I honestly believe that nine out of every ten that expresses a desire to be an excellent writer could acquire a style far superior to mine if they were but willing to give the time and attention to the subject that I have done.

In my experience in teaching for nearly a quarter of a century I have learned that the student with the "natural" (?) ability is the one that fails to secure the highest degree of that grand old master, Mr. P. R. Spencer, Jr. At the expiration of the three months I found myself out of funds, out at the togs, too, perhaps, but not without friends, however, as Mr. Spencer, who had been watching my progress, came to the rescue. I entered the special penmanship department, and after a month's practice began to assist in teaching to pay

my tuition, later did the correspondence work in the office, also, for my board and room rent. But, I'll tell you, boys, all GREAT MEN who ever amounted to a "hill of beans" started that self-same way (and some who didn't). I taught in the Spencerian at different times for several years, and have been connected with the largest and most influential business colleges in the country, and for the last nine years nearly I have been with the Valparaiso University, where I have taught 18,000 young men and women to write, many of whom are occupying responsible and lucrative positions, penmen and teachers, or who have secured their positions mainly because of their superior style of penmanship.

While some seem to deplore the fact that they ever were teachers of penmanship, or have outgrown the profession, as for me, the following quotation from a speech made by the late Mr. S. S. Packard, of New York, seems to fit my case:

"If in all coming time I shall have no higher designation than schoolmaster, and if it shall be known that in this calling I have not wholly failed, my highest personal ambition will be met. It is of 'this title I am most proud."