

# INTEREST IN A METROPOLITAN NEWS-PAPER'S SHORT STORY CONTEST ENCIRCLED THE GLOBE

The New York Herald Received 5,000 Manuscripts Representing Not Only Every State in the Union but Every Country in the World Where English Speaking People Reside

the story in each competition receiving the second largest vote, \$300, and for the story in each competition receiving the third largest vote, \$250. Provision was made to republish the five stories in each competition which stood highest, for the final consideration of readers, and provision was also made for the division of the prizes equally in case of a tie in the popular vote between those who were tied.

Readers of the Herald Decided by Ballot Which Stories Should Receive the \$10,700 Prizes, and Such Enthusiasm Was Aroused That No Less Than Two Million Were Voted for the Partisans' Various Favorites

The number of votes cast for the various contests for the grand prizes was kept secret, but each day a list was printed showing the relative positions of the leaders.

The progress of the contest was reported in the Herald every day and, in addition, letters from readers commenting on the stories and criticizing them were also printed. The criticisms became one of the most popular features of the competition and scores of letters were received every day from enthusiastic followers of the contest, praising their favorite stories, pointing out what they considered defects in other stories and expressing their likes, dislikes and general views on everything connected with the competition.

Another feature which met with approval was the publication of the photographs of contestants and of short biographical sketches each Sunday of the authors of the stories that were printed that day. These sketches were obtained in investigating the eligibility of the contestants, no story being printed in the school teachers' competition until it had been established beyond the peradventure of a doubt that the contestant was a school teacher, and no story in the other competition until it had been conclusively ascertained that the writer was an American, this division of the contest being restricted to Americans. Incidentally, it may be stated that the Herald received a number of letters from Europeans expressing regret that they were ineligible—so eager were amateur writers everywhere to avail themselves of the opportunity to get their work before the public.

Newspapers throughout the country soon after the competition was inaugurated took cognizance of the attention which it was attracting and of the value from a purely news standpoint of the various developments in it, and printed many columns of articles regarding it. The publication of a story from any particular community was treated as an important news item by the press of that community and attention was prominently called to the matter. Frequently there would be keen rivalry between neighboring communities which were represented in the contest, and the newspapers did yeoman service in trying to carry their favorites to victory, some of them even publishing editorial appeals to local pride.

Shortly after the preliminary announcement made by the Herald the manuscripts began to flow in. Long before January 3, when the lists were opened by the publication of the four initial stories, an aggregate of several hundred stories of both classes had been received in the office and had been placed in the hands of the committee appointed to select the contestants for the fray. The best of the manuscripts

through the eyes of outsiders, that eventually won for him the splendid serenity in which he worked out his masterpieces. The time came when nobody, including himself, could doubt that in the more important competitions in the larger world he was indeed supreme. Is there not here a lesson for all beginners in literature?

The manuscripts presented a variegated appearance. It had been stipulated in the published conditions of the contest that all contributions should be typewritten. Disregard of this condition was considered a handicap against a manuscript, but not an absolute disqualification. Many of the competitors pleaded inability to secure competent typewriters in their particular localities. Others urged poverty as a reason why they could not employ outside services. Over-strictness might lose a valuable story. It was deemed best to follow a liberal policy. But, other things be-

on this last day. Besides the ordinary express and the ordinary mail many manuscripts arrived by special delivery; others were handed in personally by the authors or their representatives; others, again, were forwarded through district messengers. The glut for the moment was appalling. But many hands and many heads soon brought order out of chaos, and the entire number were tabulated, classified, read and reread in time for the final selections.

In order to reach this result, however, it was absolutely necessary to stick to the letter of the conditions. It had been announced that no manuscript received after six o'clock on June 7 would be considered. That rule had to be enforced. Simultaneously the department of the Herald where the votes were received and counted was threatened with temporary submersion. Ballots arrived in letters by post, in parcels by hand, in packages by express. Here again fresh relays of recruits established and maintained order. These ballots covered both the awards of weekly prizes now concluded and the grand prizes to be awarded after all the victors in the separate duels were crowned, as they have now been crowned.

Of the 104 participants the majority were women—seventy-seven amazons and twenty-seven knights bore the brunt of the fray. It was only natural that a large majority of these came from the Atlantic and Middle States. Inevitably it was this region that captured the largest number of prizes. But the Far West and Pacific Coast States also had answered to no mean numbers to the trumpet calls of the Herald. This is shown in the list of competitors selected. Jacksonville, N. D.; Portland, Baker City and Oregon City, in Oregon; Tucuman, N. M.; Los Angeles and Palo Alto, Cal.; Butte, Mont., and other outposts in the Far West furnished competitors to one or the other of the contests, together with more inland cities like Denver, Col.; Chicago, Ill., and Alexandria, Miss.

One of the surprises of the contest might be called



Deluge of Short Stories.

(From Our Special Correspondent.)

NEW YORK, Saturday.

WHEN an American newspaper conducts a contest which attracts entries from every State in the Union, which arouses intense enthusiasm among clergymen and actresses, financiers and artisans, octogenarians and school children, there will be none to gainsay the statement that the paper has accomplished a notable success. But the New York Herald has not only succeeded in doing all this with its \$10,700 short story competition, but a great deal more.

Interest in the Herald's remarkable undertaking was not confined to the United States; it was world wide in its scope, and the assertion is made advisedly, from the torrid jungles of Yucatan, whose denizens are for the most part the descendants of the aboriginal Caribs, and from the snowy fastnesses of the Canadian wilderness, from ancient Cairo and Peking, and from pioneer camps in South America; from the West Indies and the Isles of the South Sea; from half a dozen countries in Europe and from the Philippines—in short, from every part of the globe where English speaking people are to be found—manuscripts kept pouring in to the Herald office while the entries were being received. Five thousand short stories were turned over to the committee which had the reading of the manuscripts in charge.

When a newspaper publishes 104 short stories and calls upon its readers to decide by voting on a ballot printed in the paper which stories are most worthy of prizes, and when two million such ballots are cast, it may be said without fear of contradiction that the result obtained is phenomenal. But that is precisely what took place in the Herald's competition, readers of the stories, with nothing to gain themselves and no personal interest to serve, recording their opinions only in the United States, but in other countries.

When stories of such calibre are entered in the contest that immediately following their publication their obscure authors, whose first attempts at literary work they were, are besought by publishers and high class magazines for contributions, the paper, it will be agreed, has performed a notable achievement. But that is exactly what happened in the Herald's competition.

From this preamble will be gained some idea of what occurred in one of the most novel and entertaining projects ever undertaken by a metropolitan or any other newspaper.

Such widespread and deep public interest was excited by the New York Herald's Anglo-American competition between Mr. Max Pemberton, of England, and Mrs. Mary Wilkins Freeman, of America, that on October 25, 1908, the Herald announced that it had decided to conduct two other competitions, "open to all American writers, but especially designed to encourage the school teachers of the country and amateur writers generally to show their strength as story tellers." It was hoped in this way, the Herald said, to help men and women, particularly young men and women, to demonstrate their ability to tell striking tales of romance and adventure who

otherwise would remain mute and inglorious as writers for the public.

The announcement also said:—"It is very probable that more than one genius with the pen will thus be brought to light, to the delight of the reading world and their own great profit. Under present conditions in the magazine and newspaper field it is very difficult for an unknown writer to get a hearing."

From the stories sent in by school teachers two were chosen each week by a committee composed, not of professional manuscript readers, who might even unconsciously have favorites, but of competent literary critics. This committee also chose two stories for publication each week from the stories sent in by amateurs and other American writers.

The first stories were published Sunday, January 3, and there were in all twenty-six instalments, fifty-two stories being printed in each competition, the last appearing Sunday, June 27.

The readers of the stories determined each week which of the two stories in each competition was the better, and the weekly winner was paid \$75 and the writer of the other story was paid \$25. Thus \$200 was distributed each week as weekly prizes for twenty-six weeks, making a total of \$5,200 which was so disbursed.

Keen interest was shown in the weekly prizes and thousands of ballots were cast each week. The voting for the weekly prizes continued for seventeen days after the stories were printed, sufficient time being given to allow ballots to come from the Pacific coast. Some of the weekly winners had majorities as high as five thousand votes, but there was one which won by the narrow margin of ten votes.

Besides the weekly prizes totalling \$5,200 there were grand prizes amounting to \$5,500, divided as follows:—For the story in each competition receiving the greatest number of grand prize votes, \$2,600; for

went through two readings. First the wheat was separated from the chaff. Next the wheat was sifted for the purpose of securing the more promising grains. This final test was based on the opinion of the majority of the committee as to which grains would prove most appealing to the general public, and therefore most likely to enlist its interest in the contest.

Of course there were heartburnings and bickerings. It would have been a delightful outcome of the experiment if all the five thousand competitors could have been gratified by the selections made by the committee. That under human conditions was impossible. Perhaps it was even impossible that the final selections should be ideally perfect. Judges themselves are human, and therefore fallible. A unanimous decision in the case of any manuscript was rarely reached. One reader might have a special preference for this, another for that contribution. The final selection could only be the result of mutual compromise. But it should be evident that such a compromise is a nearer approach to exact justice than the triumph of any individual over the opposition of the majority. Legal as well as lay tribunals have found by long experience that compromise is the only human means of attaining approximate certainty in cases of this sort.

Now, if human tribunals are at the best fumble, what shall be said of the fallibility of authors themselves? "We brew and we like our own tap, amen," says Thackeray. Goethe in his youth went through a notable experience. In his school days, he tells us, he frankly thought that his own essays were the best. He noticed, however, that each of his fellow students thought the same of his own. Somebody, say all but one, must be mistaken. He took the lesson to heart. Was he, too, one of the self-deceived?

It was this self-criticism and self-analysis, this eagerness to look at himself from the outside and

Filing the Short Stories.



More Than Two Million Ballots Displayed in the Broadway Window of the New York Herald Building



Counting Ballots Received in the Morning Mail.

ing equal, the preference was necessarily given to typewritten over handwritten contributions, even when the non-typists had gone to the trouble, as they frequently had, of writing their manuscripts in print-like characters. Some of the contributions, typewritten and otherwise, were beautifully illuminated after the manner of the mediæval missals and were really remarkable works of art. These received their proper meed of unofficial admiration.

Again, one of the stipulations had been that no contribution should exceed 2,500 words. Once more a liberal policy was allowed to prevail. And once more the liberality had its necessary boundaries. An excess over the authorized limit of 2,500 words was considered a handicap, but not an absolute disqualification when such excess was not over-excessive. It was impossible, of course, to stretch this liberality too far. In some cases the manuscripts could not even be considered. Not only would over-liberality be an injustice to authors who had complied with the exact conditions of the contest, but it would interfere with the proposed mechanical arrangement of publishing two stories on one page.

Another difficulty that faced the committee was the enormous number of manuscripts received. There were 4,878 in all, divided as follows:—School teachers, 2,717; amateurs and other writers, 4,631. They came from all parts of the country and of the world at large. The contributions increased in volume as the competition advanced.

On the very last day appointed for the receipt of manuscripts (Monday, June 7) nearly four hundred arrived. They began coming in early in the morning with the first mail and the first express deliveries. They rolled along in a steady stream until midnight, and not a few slopped over into the morning and the evening of June 8 and came dribbling in all through the week. Every method of conveyance was utilized

the Kelly sisters' episode. On May 9 there was published in the Amateur and Other American Writers' Contest a story called "The Mystery Lady," by Maryel Vance Abbott, of Oregon City, Ore. Investigation proved that Maryel Vance Abbott was a pseudonym used by Miss Elinora Kelly, a typewriter in Oregon City. The fact was duly announced to Herald readers. On May 23 there came out in the school teachers' contest a story called "The Boiling Point," which was frankly signed Miss Elizabeth Kelly. Similar investigation proved that she was a sister of Miss Elinora Kelly and a school teacher in Oregon City. Hard upon this discovery the committee learned that a story which was published in the school teachers' contest on May 30, "Her Brave Buckaroo," was written by still another sister, Miss May Kelly, of Portland, Ore., a teacher in the first grade in a school situated in the foreign quarter in that city. Thus this remarkably talented family had produced three successful candidates, whose work had been selected for the final competition by the committee on short stories. No one could have been more surprised than the committee themselves at the outcome of their decisions.

There were some less pleasant incidents. A few would be contributors were detected in plagiarisms. Stories translated from the French, and badly translated at that, were traced to their origin and summarily rejected. Worse remains behind. Some of the "frivolous" competitors actually pilfered old magazines for stories, which they submitted for examination. One of these people had been so awkward of choice as to fall upon a story by Nathaniel Hawthorne, which had first appeared anonymously in a magazine and was later included in his "Twice Told Tales." Immediate detection followed and all the stories submitted by this "author," every one of which had excited suspicion by reason of their old-fashioned style, were promptly returned with a justifiable rebuke.

And as all sections were represented, so also were all ages and conditions of life. There were sexagenarians at one end, and, as an extreme instance, on the other there were two girls of seventeen, who furnished stories that were examples of astonishing precision. There were a few professional writers, but the vast majority, including, of course, the school teachers, were engaged in earning their livelihoods in various avocations not directly or even indirectly connected with literature. There were lawyers, doctors, typewriters, clerks, salesmen and saleswomen. Many of these have never before attempted fiction. One and all are to be congratulated on the success of their endeavors. If a classification could be made of all the 4,878 writers who sent in manuscripts for examination it would be found that nearly every field of human activity had been covered, so far reaching and so broadly inclusive was the interest aroused by the competition.

Following the publication of the final instalment of stories in the competition the Herald was overwhelmed with requests that the stories be gathered together and republished in book form, and also that another contest be started as speedily as possible.