

POETA FIT, NON NASCITUR

"How shall I be a poet? How shall I write in rhyme? You told me once 'the very wish Partook of the sublime.' Then tell me how! Don't put me off With your 'anothertime'!"

The old man smiled to see him, To hear his sudden sally; He liked the lad to speak his mind Enthusiastically; And thought "There's no hum-drum in him, Nor any shilly-shally."

"And would you be a poet Before you've been to school? Ah, well! I hardly thought you So absolute a fool. First learn to be spasmodic - A very simple rule.

"For first you write a sentence, And then you chop it small; Then mix the bits, and sort them out Just as they chance to fall: The order of the phrases makes No difference at all.

"Then, if you'd be impressive, Remember what I say, That abstract qualities begin With capitals alway: The True, the Good, the Beautiful - Those are the things that pay!

"Next, when you are describing A shape, or sound, or tint; Don't state the matter plainly, But put it in a hint; And learn to look at all things With a sort of mental squint."

"For instance, if I wished, Sir, Of mutton-pies to tell, Should I say 'dreams of fleecy flocks Pent in a wheaten cell?' "Why, yes," the old man said: "that phrase Would answer very well.

"Then fourthly, there are epithets That suit with any word - As well as Harvey's Reading Sauce With fish, or flesh, or bird - Of these, 'wild,' 'lonely,' 'weary,' 'strange,' Are much to be preferred."

"And will it do, O will it do To take them in a lump - As 'the wild man went

his weary way To a strange and lonely pump'?" "Nay, nay! You must not hastily To such conclusions jump.

"Such epithets, like pepper, Give zest to what you write; And, if you strew them sparsely, They whet the appetite: But if you lay them on too thick, You spoil the matter quite!

"Last, as to the arrangement: Your reader, you should show him, Must take what information he Can get, and look for no im- mature disclosure of the drift And purpose of your poem.

"Therefore, to test his patience - How much he can endure - Mention no places, names, or dates, And evermore be sure Throughout the poem to be found Consistently obscure.

"First fix upon the limit To which it shall extend: Then fill it up with 'Padding' (Beg some of any friend): Your great SENSATION-STANZA You place towards the end."

"And what is a Sensation, Grandfather, tell me, pray? I think I never heard the word So used before to-day: Be kind enough to mention one 'Exempli gratia.'"

And the old man, looking sadly Across the garden-lawn, Where here and there a dew-drop Yet glittered in the dawn, Said "Go to the Adelphi, And see the 'Colleen Bawn.'

'The word is due to Boucicault - The theory is his, Where Life becomes a Spasm, And History a Whiz: If that is not Sensation, I don't know what it is.

"Now try your hand, ere Fancy Have lost its present glow--" "And then," his grandson added, "We'll publish it, you know: Green cloth--gold-lettered at the back - In duodecimo!"

Then proudly smiled that old man To see the eager lad Rush madly for his pen and ink And for his blotting-pad - But, when he thought of PUBLISHING, His face grew stern and sad.