

The American Newspaper,

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One of the most important principles enunciated by the Constitution of these United States was that there should be freedom of speech and freedom of the press. What does this "freedom of the press" mean? One thing it most assuredly does mean, and that is, censorship, such as the Russian Government practices, shall never be allowed. That "liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely, according to conscience," which Milton prized above all liberties, most certainly belongs to the conquests of modern mind. This does not mean, however, that the press shall have unlicensed freedom in malicious attacks upon persons or institutions. Such restrictions must be practiced as are necessary for the preservation of society.

Everywhere you may happen to go in this whole country, you will find the church, the free-reading room, the school, and the newspaper as the great civilizing influences. In contrast to these are the degrading low theatres, gambling hells, and the saloon.

America stands first, as to enterprise, in the gathering of news, and other

countries have to follow. During the Civil War, the greatest incentive was given to work in this line, such that time and money were counted as nothing when reports of the maneuvers of the Northern army were needed from the South. The Special Correspondent was in all his glory then. He could always be found in the van of the march, amid the whizzing of the bullets, or the booming of the cannon, writing on and on in feverish haste, picturing the different and ever-varying scenes in all their glory or horror, then hastening to the nearest telegraph station and speeding the tidings Northward, telling of victory or defeat. "Get there" was his guiding star and get there he did.

During the infancy of the telegraph, news travelled comparatively slow. Since that time changes, astonishing changes have been made. Extraordinary development in telegraphic communication has been made, the result of which places America first and above all as the news-center of the world. The wilderness of telegraph wires

that string across the face of this continent have a special and important use. It has caused the establishment of those most necessary aids to the editor of every paper — the Newspaper Agencies, which by their systematic distribution of daily happenings, enable a paper in Los Angeles to publish events as quickly as one in New York or Boston.

Notwithstanding the fact that we have schools and colleges by the hundred in this broad land of ours, the journal of to-day is the guide, philosopher, and friend of the people. It teaches them to think, as well as thinks for them. If this be not so, where does the great mass of people get its floating opinions whereby it judges on all social and political problems, for do they read anything else?

Time used to be that the clergy were the sole directors of the people's minds; but in the course of evolution, this function came to be performed by the journalist. Truly, the press has supplanted the pulpit in the instruction in all secular

affairs. The preacher advises one day in seven, while the paper inflicts moral censure, gives moral encouragement, and admonishes the people the other six.

It cannot be expected that the journal will reform the world in a day, either in the moral or social sphere, or necessarily mould public opinion, but at all hazards, an audience must be obtained. Thus papers that follow certain religious or political lines will have religious or political audiences.

As the circulation of a paper increases, advertising increases, and as advertising increases, its value and influence is spread over a larger area. Therefore, the basis of all true newspaper prosperity rests primarily upon its circulation. It furnishes a constant medium for argument, explanation, exhortation, criticism, and debate.

Any ordinary city of America supports several line daily papers. As the size of the place increases, the papers grow apace. They keep moving from

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American journal is published, purchased, and perused.

When we stop to consider the size of some dailies, we despair of ever being able to digest their contents. To cope with the problem of even comprehending all its peculiar characteristics cannot be done single handed.

The pages of this volume are inordinate when we note that the total number of newspapers published in the United States is near twenty thousand.

A sort of a newspaper cyclone is what the people of this great commonwealth live in. Put your foot on the soil of this continent, and the moment you do so, you feel the effects of the gale. Pass up the street early any morning of a large city and the most curious sights meet your eyes. In the ground-floor offices, a spectacle, invariably the same — men, seated in fantastically twisted chairs, with feet high above the level of their heads, coats off, and a comfortable cigar in their mouths, are buried face-

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deep in the columns of the morning "News," "Mail," "Post," "Dispatch," "Journal," or what not. Outside, amid the ceaseless rush of the elbowing crowd, every second man holds in his hand this precious package of condensed information. Go into a "Down town" restaurant, later in the day, and the tables and floor are literally covered with copies of the latest edition, left there by the restless man of business, who eats with one hand, while in the other is this medium of published events of present interest. In the evening, the ebb of humanity is toward home. This is the time of harvest for the newsboy. His shrill voice is heard above the confusion of the crowd, proclaiming, "Evening papers! Evening papers! Star! Times! Journal! Post! Dispatch! Evening papers!!!!" till his voice dies away in the distance, as he rushes from one vantage point to another.

So enormous is the consumption of printed paper that the sidewalks

and streets are soon literally covered with them, as they carelessly fall from the hands that had so eagerly snatched them up a few minutes before. Enter the crowded "L" road, and again we see the eager looks of those seeking intelligence. Even though they have to stand up and hold on by a strap, one hand must surely contain a newspaper, and it so continues till they have to get off, leaving the desiccated sheets behind them. At a late hour, when theatre is out, another newspaper rush takes place. Ah, leisure! leisure! where art thou - that peace comes not to thy door.

The country over sees the furious burning of the paper fever, for who has ever boarded a train for some city, without being tormented by the incessant proclamations of the train-boy with his "Daily news! have a copy, sir?" You leave the train, hoping to escape the creatures which infest it, and

old quarters to new quarters as the demand calls for a better production, till the state is reached in which the largest building in the city is theirs. Think of the sky-scraping structures which the Chicago "Inter-Ocean," the San Francisco "Chronicle," or the New York "World" occupy. They are veritable beehives of industry from the ground floor to the attic, filled with the hum of busy workmen, who are putting forth the tidings of the world in the shape of neat, cut-and-folded journals. These are "grabbed up" by the newsboy, or put aboard an express train, and scattered abroad, to satisfy for a moment the ever-ceaseless demands of Nineteenth Century Progress.

The American newspaper is a social necessity. In the energetic village of the North, in the balmy Southern town, where laziness reigns supreme, in the "down East" hamlet of satisfactory ease, in the bustling, booming township of the center, or the rough mining camp of the West — everywhere, everywhere, the

glad to be once more free; but it is like stepping from the frying pan into the fire. At once you are in the thick of a new and fiercer newspaper whirl. Everybody is wild. The imp of a newsboy thrusts his huge bundle into your very face and shouts till you, too, reach the same state as the rest of the crowd as to mental equilibrium.

The paper rage of our great cities is catching. Competition for this line is as great, if not greater than any other business. The scheming editor, striving night and main to get ahead of his competitor, who publishes further down the street, uses tactics that are worthy of any general on a field of battle.

Many people judge the prosperity of a paper by its size. Because it becomes massive in weight, it must have attained its greatness through successive stages of progress by making each succeeding edition

larger. This is mere public sentiment. Everywhere the American has spread over this continent he has carried the heavy, indigestible pack of perishable literature with him. It is the burdensome appetite he has fostered for material show of prosperity in such lines as the tallest Masonic Temple, the largest Ferris Wheel, or the greatest-numbered page daily that has given him the contempt for the real basis of all progress in true art.

The printing-press of to-day is the most admirable invention ever placed before the public whereby human sentiment is propagated. With this fact in view, moral responsibility upon the communicator of thought is just as great as his actions in private life. Think of its terrific power as a moral-engine when it starts a thought echoing on its journey around the world. It verberates and reverberates in

the vast cave of human reflection. Liberty means action within the sphere of morality, not emancipation from it.

The newspaper is the product of the hour. It is read and cast aside, to be picked up and read no more. It attacks bad institutions, praises the good, or panders to the lowest of tastes. To keep the approval of conscientious readers demands the maintenance within the narrow paths of morality, which ever makes the moral greatness of a nation.

The modern journal is the greatest bulwark of liberty. It is a terror to evil-doers; tyranny seeks to hide from it; publicity of their acts in a perpetual warfare assures their downfall. On the other hand it is the most effective co-operator of truth and justice, because its force and mobility lie in the moral consciousness of men.

An examination of the conditions

of a professional career will show how unprofessional the work of a newspaper man must always be. Take a person who is studying to practice law. He is told that if he gains a certain amount of technical knowledge, he will be able to advise clients and argue cases. Fair success is assured him if he follows the iron-clad rules of careful preparation, connected with a fair education. Then as an officer of court, responsible duties are thrust upon him. No such career is held out by journalism. To obtain success requires a curious combination of faculties. Good literary taste and the knack of making use of other people's thoughts, connected with an acute sense of what the world is interested in, study and imitation will not acquire. To be an able editor does not necessarily consist in brilliant descriptions, although a few secure

the consideration and flattery of their fellows to a degree seldom acquired in other professions. Few attain to such high positions, but remain all their lives collecting news, or giving the sparkling description of what the hour brings forth.

Leisure in writing for the daily paper is a thing unknown. The work is usually done in hot haste, and though the write-up may be most brilliant, it is forgotten about as quickly. Envious oblivion seizes and banishes it. Its impression is instantaneous. A veritable note of music, struck and gone forever. The successful journalist is he who skillfully avails himself of this passing moment. Most assuredly his writing is in water. "Extemporaneous" is the word that tells his work. The result of a passing study is how to put ideas before the public in the shortest time possible, and comment upon

them by drawing correct conclusions, or pointing out their natural consequences. He trains himself that way, and the readers have a right to demand as much from him.

The journalist's career is ideal. Although a few regard the truth in all its severity, many, in giving a description for publication cannot resist the temptation to fluently stretch the facts. Therein lies the harm that has caused the people to declare again and again "You can't believe what the newspaper says." But once a paper gets the reputation for truthfulness and holds it, it becomes a power in the hearts of men. Then it is regarded as a prophet and a leader, and looked up to with veneration and respect by its readers. Such is the case of the Philadelphia "Ledger," which George William Curtis successfully edited for so many years. He would never publish anything but the truth

and his word thus became as good as gold.

An examination of the dailies of all the great cities will show the invariable sameness of manner in which they are gotten up, for as sure as one paper discovers a new idea in regard to the arrangement of the printable matter, the others imitate. Startling headlines, and a vivid relating of events all strive after

Notice these figure heads: "Murder," "Robbed a Soda-water Fountain," "She always carries Her Money," "Winds on a High Old Jag," "The Pistol Was Not Loaded," "Blessed Jury and Lawyer in Court," "And now the Tenderloin Club," "The Senator Hesitates," "Blew up the Saloon," "Church with a Swelled Head," "Jerked to Jesus," "His Wife's Collar Hit Him," "Caught a Funeral Thief," and so on and so forth. Isn't it edifying to read such literature. How refined! Yet these are only fair samples of what the average

news-sheets have and do put forth. Certainly there are exceptions, and worthy ones too, as there is to any rule; but all contain a superabundance of mere reporting, while good, live editorials are minus quantity. Nearly all hasten to dump the greatest mass of rubbish, in the hugest doses that can be gathered in the shortest time upon the long-suffering public. The mixture is simply nauseous when we consider the quantity and the lack of quality of the material. Reports of political events, the deaths of noted public characters or the latest sporting news, are thrown into the rankest profusion and confusion. Literary reflection and the true sequence of thought — where are they? Each paper tries to outdo the other in triviality and ignorance.

Let us examine the opposition to these extreme views.

In this present age, a newspaper must suit the times. Some censors of the press seem to think that the whole tone of the American press is debasing, and that we should change their tone by having them contain irreproachable matter, be exalted, illustrated, etc. If such was the case, the journal would find itself in such incongruous surroundings that the editor would be miserable, the publisher in continual pain, and the cashier in continual idleness. But the critic sets up a wrong standard. Because a few papers are low in tone, he argues all must be so. He does not discriminate in the comparison. True, some seek only the sensational happenings to spread before their readers, but do all? The critic would have the press what a vast majority of its readers would not want it to be. He does not represent the opinions of the great body of intelligent men and women. Until

society changes the press will stay in its present position, and when it does change for the better, as modern progress shows it to be doing, then the evils, which the critic points out, will be cured.

The standard of quality in newspapers is rising. Better education is demanded of the editor, the reporter and the newspaper worker, for to make the production fascinating and command wider interest must require a better telling of the story, better brains to tell it, and greater skill in putting it in that convenient and attractive form of brevity and crispness that will delight the reader.

As the taste of the world grows for classic literary style, the newspaper will drop vulgarity and become classic, too, even in the description of a murder or a prize fight. Although prophecies have been made for the downfall of journalism, still it lives, and as long as the world moves the progress of the newspaper will be

upward, becoming more powerful and
better suited to the age in which it
lives.

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