

ENGLISH AND AMERICAN JOURNALISM.

BY HENRY WATTERSON.

THE VETERAN EDITOR OF THE LOUISVILLE COURIER-JOURNAL
PRONOUNCES AN EXPERT OPINION UPON THE NEWSPAPERS AND
THE NEWSPAPER-MAKING OF BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES.

"Of us! Who are we?" asked Pen. "Of what profession is Mr. Archer?"

"Of the Corporation of the Goosequill—of the Press, my boy," said Warrington; "of the fourth estate."

"Are you, too, of the craft, then?" Pendennis asked.

"We will talk about that another time," answered the other. They were passing through the Strand as they talked, and by a newspaper office, which was all lighted up and bright. Reporters were coming out of the place, or rushing up to it in cabs; there were lamps burning in the editors' rooms; and above, where the compositors were at work, the windows of the building were in a blaze of gas.

"Look at that, Pen," Warrington said. "There she is—the great engine—she never sleeps. She has her ambassadors in every quarter of the world—her couriers upon every road. Her officers march along with armies and her envoys walk into statesmen's cabinets. They are ubiquitous. Yonder journal has an agent, at this minute, giving bribes at Madrid; and another inspecting the price of potatoes in Covent Garden. Look! Here comes the Foreign Express galloping in. They will be able to give news to Downing Street to-morrow; funds will rise or fall, fortunes be made or lost; Lord B. will get up, and, holding the paper in his hand, and seeing the noble marquis in his place, will make a great speech; and—and Mr. Doolan will be called away from his supper at the Back Kitchen; for he is foreign sub-editor, and sees the mail on the newspaper sheet before he goes to his own."—*Pendennis*.

I.

EVEN more than the player of Shakespeare's day is the journalist of modern times the "abstract and brief chronicle" of the life and thought of the people. The essential difference, therefore, between English and American journalism must be looked for in the varying construction of English and American society and in the temperamental characteristics, respectively, of the men and women of England and America. The discrepancy is not only as wide as the ocean which separates the two countries, but is further augmented by the magnitude of a continent

as contrasted with the limitations of an island, or, rather, of a metropolis; for, in speaking of English journalism, we begin and end with London, whereas American journalism cannot be fully or fairly measured unless we include ten or a dozen cities lying between the Atlantic and the Pacific.

Primarily, the daily newspaper, equally in England and in America, is the history of yesterday. If it should fulfil this function simply, having no other end in view, its value to the commonalty would be priceless. Intelligent readers, intrusted with the facts and unhindered by pressure, could reach their own conclusions. But, as a rule, the daily newspaper accepts no such abridgment. It sets up for a teacher as well as a historian. It would influence—"mold," I believe, is the word—public opinion; yet it is not always the public—too often it is some private—interest which colors its narrative and shapes its oracles, fitting the one into the other, without that sense of accountability which is the very soul of honest journalism.

In spite of this shortcoming, at once more obvious and more general in the United States than in England, the newspaper has come to exercise a decisive influence upon the conduct and the ideas of the people; though the nature of this is often misunderstood. As has been exemplified, time and again, in Chicago and New York, and other American centers of population, the combined influence of all the newspapers will not suffice to elect a mayor. The reason may be found in the circumstance that the newspaper acts by indirection, not directly. There is a tendency among the voters to resent its

dictation, real or fancied. As to matters within his reach and competency, the average voter thinks he knows as much, and is as capable a judge, as the average editor. The candidate has generally the popular sympathy in his exclamation against what he calls the persecution of the press. Thus newspaper support is sometimes more hurtful than helpful.

The conductors of the English newspapers understand this restriction more clearly than do their American contemporaries, and where they proceed against it they use better tact and judgment.

It is in the domain of morals that the newspaper most affects the life of the people. Here its pressure is constant and noiseless. It both leads and follows a community from the cradle of one generation to the grave of another. If it be good and clean, it is as sunshine; if sinister and foul, it is as a blight. "All the news that's fit to print," says one. "If it's new and true," says another, "you'll find it in the *Morning Glory*." Thus, each, according to his humor, seeks to advertise his wares.

There are at least two ways of printing the news. Certain essential facts may not be ignored. Neither does suppression always suppress. There is a duty to truth and there is a duty to decency. Behind, and above all, there is a duty to the public welfare quite apart from questions of mere decency and indecency. The "tone" of a newspaper, like "the look of a gentleman," is easier to feel than to describe. Upright purpose, warmed by good feeling, a regard for the ignorant and the immature, discrimination in knowing what to say and how to say it, the sense of responsibility, embraced by a proper sense of professional self-respect—these make the difference between the newspaper exercising a benign influence, and, by contrast, the newspaper exercising a baneful influence in a community, and so marking the distinction between a blessing and a curse.

These ethical principles are better understood and oftener applied in England than in the United States.

It is only true to say that in both countries there are more good newspapers than bad newspapers, just as

there are more good people than bad people. There are, however, many newspapers which may be described as neither the one nor the other, neutral alike in their tints and prints, the Almighty Dollar their sole sign visual, their one objective point, having no concern either for appearance or morality, taking no account of to-day or to-morrow beyond the fiscal returns. There are not many of these in London, but they exist there, and might be readily named.

We live in a commercial age. The reflection of the time will bring grist to the mill. But, whilst every newspaper should be self-sustaining, and may grow as rich as it can, there is a difference between a bundle of papers and a bale of goods.

A newspaper may prosper without being unclean. Nor need it preach or scold, in order to vindicate its rights of opinion. As the good deeds of a good man are mostly hidden, the good deeds of a good newspaper are more palpable to the sense than to the eye. Whether it has been faithful to truth, as it sees it, and upright and unselfish in the discharge of its duty, may be told well enough as the years go by, and after the passions which separated the public into parties and factions have subsided. Among thinking people much goes to the credit of fidelity. Errors of judgment can be and often are forgiven. One may be nobly wrong as well as nobly right, the nobility referable to the intention. In a word, it is the sum totals that count; and, in the world of newspaperdom, and in the long run, integrity is worth more than genius.

II.

THE modern newspaper, which is but little more than a hundred years old—the broadsides which preceded it being scarcely entitled to be described as newspapers—has witnessed quite as many vicissitudes as the engineerings producing it. In the proportion, however, that it has gained as a vehicle of news it seems to have lost as a conveyer of ideas, and this holds true of the London no less than the American newspapers. Indeed, the London dailies are not much better as newspapers than they were

thirty years ago, while they are something worse written upon what is called "the editorial page." That may be an accident of the time. First-rate writers come in groups. There are with them, as with the crops, seasons of famine and seasons of plenty. In London, at least, this seems a season of famine.

A feature of English newspaper writing a generation ago, which provoked not a little satire, was a certain air of omniscience. Sir Oracle was always at the fore. By turns a statesman and a philosopher, his self-confidence, hardly less than his versatility, aroused the distrust of the initiated. The writing would have been stronger if it had been more genuine and less assured. Sincerity is akin to genius, good leader-writing being at once a gift and an art. The "leading article," which must in a limited space have a beginning, a middle, and an end, should avoid elaboration and bombast. The leader-writer who poses as a statesman gives proof of short-sightedness, if not of a perverted sense of duty. The functions of the statesman and the journalist are wide apart.

The statesman is never in a hurry. He has his facts before him, usually well in hand. He is required to speak only when he is ready. The journalist has to deal with the incompleting. He must write at the end of a wire. Not only is there often uncertainty touching the facts, but never is there time for adequate reflection and revision. Whatever else he is, he must be prepared at a moment's notice and at all hours of the day and night. Equivocation is fatal. Here, more than on any other stage, foresight and hindsight must be hitched to insight, the amplest general knowledge, the fullest special instruction, presiding over all. The one saving clause is that the scene is ever changing, and one day's issue, hidden by another, is quickly forgot. But impressions are not so fleeting, and it is the character for steadiness and integrity that finally prevails.

Occasionally, in England, the writer for the press gets into politics and makes a career. The newspaper is admittedly a good school for public men. In America, the rule has been otherwise. Perhaps it was the difference between per-

sonal and impersonal journalism. Men of the Greeley stamp possessed too many marked characteristics and made too much of what the politicians call "record." The journalist must exercise a certain independence. The candidate for office must stoop to conquer. The journalist is as a vedette upon an outpost. The politician must be a solicitor. The newspaper is as a glass house whose occupant rarely heeds the adage against throwing stones. The journalist can, in the nature of his calling, have few reserves and no concealments. In the character of a self-seeker he is at a great disadvantage. Courage, disinterestedness, the genius for quick assimilation, are his crowning virtues, and they should suffice him. Office he should not look to hold.

The more a man sees of government, indeed, the less opinion is he likely to have of statesmen, or, rather, of the men who call themselves statesmen, and pass for such. Under the old feudal system the favor of the king, who ruled by right divine, was the objective point; under our system of public opinion, it is the favor of the majority. In both, the rule has been to

Crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
Where thrift may follow fawning.

Consistency in this at least has shone a jewel, and has marked the politician in all times and all countries.

There is practical politics and there is theoretical politics—the law of doctrine affecting convictions of right and wrong, and the law of "get there," involving only success, the end justifying the means. Too much of either is to be shunned by those who would impress themselves on affairs current and actual. Conviction may be carried to sublimation and opportunism to scandal. The really strong men split the difference and keep in the middle of the road.

Journalism may be philosophy, but it is not statesmanship. It is the current chronicle, among other things, of statesmanship, real or spurious. It may be narrative, or it may be doctrinal. In England it aspires to be both. Too often with us it is neither. Yet, if it be enlightened, if it be upright, if it seek the good of the many, it cannot blindly

follow the politicians, and, both in England and in America, it is doing this less and less. So much is a distinct gain, and equally a gain to the public service and to the newspapers.

Looking back over a long life, I think I can truly claim that I have been most abused when I have been nearest the right and least deserving of censure, while I have often been highly extolled for work which, if not meretricious, was yet easy sailing before the winds of prevailing sentiment. I will not say that the "ideal newspaper" would prove either the most popular or the most money-making newspaper—although even that view will bear discussion; but I do say that, all other things being equal, the newspaper written with most steadiness and disinterestedness will in the end prove itself the most valuable property.

If I were asked to indicate the points of discrepancy between English and American journalism, I should particularize two that relate to the working method and the ethical spirit wherein the English journalist surpasses the American journalist—his zeal for accuracy, and his sense of professional respect. The one quality belongs to the other. The English journalist is more highly considered than the American journalist, because he holds himself at a higher account, while the effort at perfect workmanship helps on this relation between himself and his public. Inaccuracy, slovenly workmanship, is the nightmare of the American newspaper, a lack of *esprit de corps* the crying sin of the American journalist. He does not give himself the time, he does not take the trouble, to be exact. He does not sufficiently honor his cloth.

Not long ago *Harper's Weekly*, conducted by a gentleman—Colonel George Harvey—who got his education upon a daily newspaper, called attention to a class of persons who insist that they are not "journalists," but "newspaper men." They are both, of course; but the distinction, while indicating a lowering standard, is an affectation. The "newspaper man" is to journalism what the house-carpenter is to architecture. The "journalist" is the educated and completed "newspaper man." The poor lad who, having sold papers for a living, and

having had little schooling, graduates into the full-fledged, all-around man of all work out of the city editor's room, has my heartiest, warmest sympathy and regard. He may rise, and he deserves to rise, to the highest pinnacle of place and fame. He may possess genius and acquire learning. But he will not do so if he seeks to level all things to the point from which he started. He will not do so if he does not rise with his fortune.

The profession of divinity, of law, or of medicine exacts not more of its votaries than is exacted by the profession of journalism. Nor has the divine, the lawyer, or the doctor greater opportunity for usefulness and power. No higher calling exists on earth than that of the true journalist, who has prepared himself by faithful study and conscientious apprenticeship, and is suited to his work by natural affection and aptitude. He should be proud of it. He should permit it to be ranked second to none. Not by vainglorious self-assertion, not by individual exploitation and bravado, should he maintain and defend it, but by constant, painstaking handicraft, resting upon a modesty which knows its place and a dignity which will not brook the slights either of familiarity or patronage.

Assuredly George Harvey is right. There are not enough "journalists" and too many "newspaper men"—men who seem thankful to be admitted on sufferance—and, indeed, many of them deserve not to be admitted at all, having neither the gift of fidelity nor the trick of seeming. To be sure, there are fake lawyers, humbug preachers, and quack doctors. But in the "learned professions," as they are called, there are higher standards and deeper reverence than in the profession of journalism, and as a consequence far greater respect by the world at large.

III.

ENGLISH type-setting and English presswork and English paper-making—better than with us—give the London newspapers considerable advantage over the American newspapers in appearance, while their make-up excels ours in sys-

tem and order. None of the great dailies of London use display type as it is used in America. They affect book-work in their typography as well as in their composition. The big, black letter appears only on rare occasions and under the provocation of very startling news.

Another point of difference much to the credit of London as against New York is the reduction of the day's news into some proportion, and the abridgment of each detail within its proper space. There is less "featuring;" no needless superfluity. London compresses into a paragraph what New York would amplify into a column. New York covers the field more fully; but it does this at a cost of a vast amount of the immaterial. Too much elaboration is the sin of New York; sometimes too little, though not often, is that of London. When one has read any one of the five leading London dailies, he is tolerably sure of being in possession of the history of yesterday.

The *Times*, the *Telegraph*, and the *Daily News* rarely "scoop" one another. The *Mail* is a world apart—a little but a very perfect world of its own—quite distinct in its methods. Having time for only one newspaper, the busy man will take the *Mail*, and need not fear being left in the dark. The Harmsworth idea, vindicated by enormous success, is *multum in parvo*; the *Mail* being the best illustration of the concise to be found either in England or America.

The cleanliness of the London newspapers is delightful. Much of their interest and value is found in their court reports, wherein the story is set down with great particularity, but without surplusage. There are no exaggerations in the text, and no headlining to distort the text. The divorce court furnishes a constant stream of matter which, under American treatment, would be most salacious and unsightly. It is less so as rendered in England. The same may be said of the police reports. Indeed, in all points of decency the London newspapers far surpass us.

In England, as in America, the leading article is beginning to play second fiddle. Whether this is the decline of strong writing, or whether it implies that the public has discovered the Thun-

derer and knows where the thunder comes from, it would be hard to say. There is no reason why good editorial writing should not have the charm, if not the power, it once possessed. But good editorial writing, like good butter, must be genuine and fresh. Leading articles kept in cold storage and served, like chickens in a restaurant, on demand, deceive no one who can tell the difference between poultry and potatoes.

The leading editorial should be the rationale of the day's doing. It should expound the news, aiding the reader to digest it and, of course, giving precedence to the most important. The reader should instinctively turn to it after he has run through the news despatches. Long or short, it should be relevant. While there is nothing more meritless and grotesque than a bit of wood with a nib of lead at one end and a fool at the other—or, yet worse, a knave—still it is true that the clumsiest illustrations of good sense and good feeling, hot from the hearts and brains of truthful men, responsive to the wires, are priceless. Sometimes they have about them a surprising ring and rhythm, the offsprings of a kind of unconscious musical cerebration as well as a rough and ready logic and a captivating air of conviction.

Time was when each of the London newspapers maintained a staff of editorial writers whose daily writing answered this description, spontaneous, irradiating, hitting the nail squarely on the head. Many of these men attained distinction in literature and public life. None of them wrote under his own proper name and accountability. Some of them were the merest free lances. But their writing was inspired by a presiding deity, who rigidly supervised it and fitted it to its place. In "Pendennis" Thackeray has given us a glimpse of the men and the methods beneath whose spell English journalism rose to consideration and power. In a measure this consideration and this power have still an existence; not so much reduced, perhaps, as divided. The London *Times* is no longer an isolated dignitary. With us the exit of the personal journalists, who established the leading newspapers, seems to have left the editorial page

something of a waste, and, in many cases, a rather barren waste.

Ownership has not a little to do with this. More and more does "the counting-room" encroach upon "the editorial room." The business head of the newspaper sees less and less commercial value in editorial writing, which, consigned to employees having no proprietary interest, and therefore possessing neither jurisdiction nor initiative, naturally becomes commonplace and slipshod, wanting equally in originality and authority. Thus the "leading article," editorial writing in general, is becoming, if it has not already become, a rather useless appendage—not even ornamental—reminding one of those clusters of artificial flowers which at the more pretentious railway eating-houses are supposed to decorate the tables and deceive the wayfarer.

Yet ought the editorial page, after the exhilaration—the distractions and excitements—of the news pages, to be as a raised dais in the center of a great hall, a seat of rest and charm, an elevation from which to survey the passing show. The editorial page thus conceived and executed, thus inspired and partitioned, could not fail to impress itself upon the thought of the time at once a power and a feature, an arm of the service and a valuable asset. Under adequate supervision, it would soon rival the news departments in point of popular consideration and interest. One single editorial, embodying the qualities outlined,

and appearing each day of the year, would come to be sought by intelligent readers as an essential part of their morning paper; how much more a page covering the entire range of the day's doings, dealing with each topic according to its quantum and its kind, "from grave to gay, from lively to severe."

Except it be thus delivered, the editorial page were best extinguished. To set apart a certain number of columns for the equivocal dignity of large type; to fill these columns with perfunctory matter—with matter as lifeless as dolls stuffed with sawdust; wholly wanting the elements of conviction and continuity; one thing to-day, another to-morrow; unirradiated by any gleam of light, undiversified, even by a trick of fancy, uniform only in dullness, is to disfigure the page, to degrade the editorial. But directed and made up by a man of intelligence, not necessarily what is called an able or a brilliant man—merely a man of sound understanding, constant and conscientious in his work, upright and elevated in his purpose, having a sufficient knowledge of affairs, an honest heart and a level head—the good of such an adjunct of the daily news, such an index to the history of yesterday, would be incalculable; and, though it lead to a personal journalism so much discredited of late, it would at least embody a responsible journalism; greatly to be preferred to prevailing tendencies, which were better honored in the breach than the observance.

FELLOW WEAVERS.

FOND worker, thy completed job
Fills well this corner of my room;
One nail, that picture-cord, a knob,
Have served thy purpose for a loom.

The crafty net thus deftly spread
Bespeaks the trained artificer;
From thine own self is drawn each thread
That forms the filmy gossamer.

Comrade, with thee, in tenuous thought,
Some toilsome threads I've stretched; I strove
To claim—as warp and woof I brought—
A corner for the thing I wove.

But here some dusting-maid ere long
Will come, regardless of thy care,
To spoil thy web—and soon my song,
Alas, an equal fate will share!

John Troland.



THE DRY-POINT PORTRAIT OF MRS. LYDIG BY THE CLEVER PARISIAN ETCHER, PAUL HELLEU, EXECUTED IN 1904.

MRS. PHILIP M. LYDIG.

BY RALPH DONALDSON.

FOUR PORTRAITS OF A BEAUTIFUL TYPE OF AMERICAN WOMANHOOD—THEIR COMPLETE DISSIMILARITY THROWS AN INTERESTING LIGHT ON THE QUESTION OF LIKENESS IN PORTRAITURE.

THE four portraits of Mrs. Lydig, which we present herewith, are so very unlike that, grouped, they have a special interest. In them we see the work of the camera and that of three different artists.