THESIS
ON
THE POWER AND GROWTH OF THE AMERICAN PRESS
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The Power and Growth of the American Press.

Before discussing the American press of the day, with its freedom and power, a brief historical review of the development of journalism in its several functions seems in place.

Ancient Rome gave birth to the newspaper of the western world, where in the "Acta Diurna" we have a remote ancestor of our newspaper. This little daily bulletin recorded the acts and speeches of prominent Romans; gave accounts of the progress of the imperial arms; it told of trials, judgments of the courts, and acts of the Senate. The papers were posted in some public place, a market or square, so that the people might read them.

But China was the first field in which journalism proper was attempted, the attempts being made before the Christian era. Very little is known of these early attempts. The first real newspaper, in the modern sense of the term, was the Pekin Gazette, which is still published and which is now the official organ of the Chinese government. The paper is considered the oldest daily in the world, having been first issued about 1340 A.D.

Shortly after the invention of printing, small sheets in epistolary form began to appear in Germany. These sheets, named either Relationen or Neue Zeitungen,
gave accounts of travels, discoveries and similar important events. Not until 1615, however, one hundred years after the invention of printing by means of metal type, did regular collection and publication of news begin. "Das Frankfurter Journal" was published then and is now considered the oldest European weekly.

The growth of the newspaper in the United States is a remarkable one, the development has been greater then anywhere else. The chief reason for this is the "freedom of the press", which has always existed.

In Boston, in 1690, appeared the colonial press. In 1704 the "News-Letter", the first periodical of the New World, was published in Boston and before the close of the French and Indian War in 1763, ten other newspapers had made their appearance in various colonies. The "New Hampshire Gazette" founded in 1756, is the oldest newspaper of this country. There is a striking contest between the papers of that time and ours of to-day in that they confine themselves to the barest mention of the news of the day; they did nor give a column to a piece of news that only needed a paragraph. If opinions were expressed, they were on the whole subservient to the opinions of those in authority. A new type of journalism appeared after the year 1745, in which the editions boldly abused the home government and lauded the colonists.

During the first year of the Revolution there were
eight papers started in Philadelphia. In 1789, when the Constitution went into effect and the freedom of the press became well assured, there were printed every week over 76,436 copies of newspapers. With the establishment of the government, newspapers sprang up throughout the Thirteen Colonies. They dealt mostly with political and patriotic subjects; there were but few editorials, but those they did contain were usually written by men of marked ability, such as Madison, Hamilton, Jefferson or Washington; and topics of the day were debated over signed names.

The mechanical evolution has been from the simplest to the most complex. With the invention of modern machinery and the typewriter, the use of electricity, the use of the telegraph and telephone, it would be impossible for journalism to be other than on the advance. Prior to the discovery of these modern inventions, newspapers were insignificant and unimportant.

Type was set by hand; in fact typesetting had made little progress from the days of Caxton to the dawn of the twentieth century when the wonderful Mergenthaler linotype or typesetting machine was invented. Compare the Washington press which was in vogue sixty years ago, having a capacity of 1,000 little quarto sheets per day, to the octuple printing machine with a capacity of 40,000 sixteen-page papers per hour, pasted, folded and counted, and some conception is conveyed of the
progress made within the memory of men yet in active life.

It will be of interest to note the business management of a large newspaper. It is organized as a banking institution with cashiers, auditors, bookkeepers, clerks, collectors, besides an elaborate organization of checking clerks, whereby intricate records are kept of every line of advertising that appears in their paper each day, together with comparative tables of all the lines of advertising in classification in all the other newspapers, both morning and afternoon, that are regarded as competitors.

Strict record are kept of all print paper received: it is reweighed and an account is made of the consumption, the production per pound, the waste and the tare. Records are kept of the ink, its quality, the oil, waste, fuel, the renewal and betterment of machinery.

A large newspaper requires from 30 to 50 linotype machines, each costing from $3,000 to $3,500. One American office has installed as many as seventy machines. Each machine does the work of six typesetters, composing in a period of eight hours from 40,000 to 50,000 ems of type.

Print paper has been very considerably reduced in price. Instead of costing twenty-five to thirty-five cents per pound, and made of old rags, as was the case seventy years ago, it is now manufactured from spruce
wood and delivered on spindles in the press room at a cost averaging two cents per pound. The white newsprint paper of the average metropolitan newspaper costs one-half cent and sells for one cent printed. It is readily understood that the profits from newspapers of this class are not derived from circulation income, on the contrary, the receipts very rarely equal the cost of the white paper plus the transporation charges.

The newspaper has a two-fold purpose; first to give the news, and second to express public opinion. In the early days the stress fell chiefly on news-giving. The small papers sold in the streets of Italy were devoted for the most part to the collection of the gossip of the markets and to the distribution of this news to the public. Later the government realized that the newspaper might be used effectively to further the interests of those in power. Parallel with the growth of this second principle of the press, there grew a third idea as to the province of the newspaper, that was, that the daily papers should not only gather news and express public opinion, but that they should create public opinion. A few American journalists have not been content to use the editorial columns in order to mold public opinion, but occasionally to alter and color news.

The changes which take place in the business of producing a newspaper are due to a number of causes.
For example, the invention of the cylinder press, years ago, effected a change in the process of making a newspaper. Prior to that time the circulation of a paper was largely determined by the number of pulls one pair of arms could give the old-style press within the two hours allowed for the publication. At that time, a circulation of five hundred was considered large. The growth of railroads throughout all sections of the country caused the circulation of the newspaper to grow and its area was increased a hundred-fold. With all these changes the sphere of the Daily was broadened; and with the rapid increase in circulation, there was a steady demand for more room, for more money, and for more men of ability.

This brings another problem, the ownership of papers. With the need of large capital, newspapers ceased to be owned and edited by one man. As a result, newspaper syndicates with trust methods have sprung into existence every where in our midst.

According to the United States census for 1900 we find that 107,000 persons are employed on the American newspaper and about 1,000,000 are supported directly or indirectly by the newspaper industry. The receipts of the newspaper publishers are given at $175,000,000 for 1900. $95,000,000 of which came from advertising and $80,000,000 from subscriptions. At the beginning of 1800, there was one paper for every 26,450 inhabitants;
at the present time, there is one for every 3,500 inhabitants. The total number of copies of newspapers and other periodicals issued each year in this country exceeds 60,000,000,000 or over 1000 copies for each man, woman, and child. This shows to some degree the extent of the progress of the newspaper.

There are in general three classes of papers, the conservative press, sensational press, and the yellow press. The conservative newspaper is considered the paper of the past, while the sensational and yellow papers represent those of the present. As a rule, the conservative papers belong to the country while the other two are of the city, though many of our great metropolitan papers are most excellent publications that are neither old-time conservative nor yet sensational, but should be classed under the head of sanely progressive. This is not surprising, for the city has long been the seat of radicalism, while the country tends to be conservative.

Although statistics show that the country papers far outnumber the city papers, still statistics do not tell much, but often rather belie the real state of things. The city papers have the advantage over the country papers because the latter do not have the scope and field of the ordinary city journal, or the rapid growth of our cities. The city papers can reach more people for the reason that nearly half of the populat-
tion of America at the present time live in cities of over eight thousand inhabitants; also the city papers have a large and extensive circulation in the neighboring country among the farmers.

It is absurd to assert that a small four-page country paper with a subscription list of from eight hundred to eighteen thousand in any way compare with the twenty-four and forty-eight page daily with over a hundred and fifty thousand subscribers.

The country paper may be compared to the small grocery store in the suburban town, that is at the mercy of the large city department store. It is able to supply the purely local needs and no more.

Around a metropolis, within a radius of a hundred miles, towns, ranging in population from fifty to one hundred thousand persons will grow up. They mingle with the metropolitan life. Although not part of the city, their interests tend to center there. It is these people, the city papers come in contact with and influence.

The United States may be divided into four newspaper divisions, represented by New York in the East, Chicago in the Middle West, New Orleans, the South, and San Francisco, the far West. It is the newspapers of these four cities that give us American journalism, representing the characteristics, the sentiments, the desires, and the hopes of the country.
In order to study the nature of the American newspapers to the best advantage, it is well to do it in three main divisions: (1) The nature of the American journalism, (2) the influence of this journalism on morals and (3) the results of this influence.

In studying the subject matter of any newspaper, for the purpose of a brief analysis of the nature of the press, we find that it may be divided into five general parts: News, illustrations, literature, opinion, and advertisement. By news we mean every item that is a report of some current event; illustrations comprehend pictorial matter outside of advertisements; literature has a somewhat broader scope: it covers the serial stories, special articles, poetry and jokes; letters, exchanges and editorials come under the head of opinions; while advertisement is obviously that large department wherein are published paid statements of what is to be had in the way of service, commodities, and the like.

In most of the papers of today, war, politics, business, sports, crime and vice occupy by far the greater portion of the average newspaper space. Opinion and advertisement are always present in all papers, but literature and illustrations and sometimes wanting and always held in abeyance. The following table shows the different percents of the divisions.
a) War news, 17.9
b) General News, 21.8

c) Special News, 18.6

II. Illustrations 3.1

III. Literature 2.4

Editorials 3.9

IV. Opinion 7.1

Letters and exchange 3.2

A careful survey of the columns of different papers will show that a conservative journal will devote only a few paragraphs to a certain murder or fight, while a sensational paper will give three or four columns to the same thing and accompany the account with many pictures.

The three main types of Journalism may be illustrated by the Boston Post, New York Herald, and Chicago American.

The Post is a type of a good conservative paper. The news which is contained within its columns is the truth unvarnished and without much comment as far as that is possible. The editorials are straightforward and unbiased, the news columns do not give undue balance to the unusual, the morbid, or the vulgar. The
aim is to give nothing more or less than an unprejudiced agent of the happenings of the day. The editors do not seek primarily to catch subscribers but to educate and develop sound public opinion. Such papers are the lineal descendants of the colonial press.

The New York Herald may be regarded as a fair example of the sensational journal. This class of papers go a step further than the conservative journals; they not only give the news as they find it, but they color it. It is here that the habit begins of giving greater space to crime, sports and society news, than is necessary. The editorials swing more and more with the shifting of public opinion or at the dictation of the editors. One is made conscious of a definite editorial policy which follows rather than leads; of an age to expediency and a frank hunt for subscribers. While the conservative paper writes for its readers, the sensational journal writes to them.

The third class is the yellow journalism. These are usually distinguished by a flaring make-up, such as striking headlines in glaring type and many illustrations to give as vivid a description as possible of crime, sport, divorce, and in general the dramatic situation of life. Editors manufacture news when there is none. Men with vivid imaginations and clever with the pen are paid large salaries to compose fictitious write-ups. Statistics show that the city of St. Louis
has more of the yellow tinge in its papers than any other city in the country. The St. Louis Globe is a fair example. When the first yellow journal appeared, it took the public by surprise, and at once became a big financial success. The public wanted to be amused and entertained and the yellow journalism was invented to cater to this taste. It has been found that papers of this kind are a menace to our national life. Mr. Rogers says, "the newspapers seem to consider themselves immune from the law, and as a consequence freedom of the press has come to mean license and a public nuisance!"

The newspaper reporter gathers the news. This is a well paying business. It is the same in this business as in any other: the ones who succeed the best in gathering the most attractive news are the ones who receive the best wages. The average reporter acts on the dangerous principle that false news is better than no news. He often goes a step farther and says that false news is even better than true news if the former is of more interest to the general public.

Nowhere is the world has the press found a larger and more receptive audience than in our country. Here every one reads; everyone, even the poorest, is wealthy enough to buy the daily papers. It is here that the great power of the press lies, its power to suggest to a whole community what it should think and do. It becomes a powerful influence on the body politic for
good or for evil.

Many of our newspapers tend directly to affect the moral of the community along the lines of its vices rather than of its virtues. In short, they appeal to the worst instincts in man: to his brutal passions and morbid imagination. This statement should not seem at all surprising after reading the daily papers, that is the kind other than the conservative sheet.

It has been wisely said, "Tell me what you read and I will tell you what you are." This proves true, for if a man's reading is confined to the ugly and tasteless, he loses his sense of beauty and his taste. A bad newspaper is as insidious as the dance hall or the musical farce. It yields a great power through suggestion; it suggests lines of thought and conduct, and through the medium of suggestion it affects the moral of the community.

It is not only the reading matter proper that lowers the standard, but the comic supplement has a share in the degrading influence. The New York Herald maintains that "the comic supplement has ceased to be comic; it has become as vulgar in design as it is tawdry in color. There is no longer any semblance of art in it, and if there are any ideals, they are low and are descending lower."

The result of the influence of these papers can be
only too plainly seen; first, time and energy are wasted in reading unimportant news, premature, untrue, and imperfect accounts of important matters and prejudicial editorials of uninteresting subjects. Secondly, because of the commercial greed and partisan bias of newspaper managers, class prejudices are kindled. In the third place, the mind is filled with cheap literature and becomes prone to an aversion for good books and sustained thought. Summing up these various forms of the influence, we find that the influence of the press is full of danger for the general reader, particularly upon the uneducated and upon the young.

After studying these influences, the question confronts us shall democracy succumb at the hands of these enemies of the Republic or shall the sober common sense of an enlightened people successfully resist their insidious assaults? The answer can alone rest with the sane journalists of the future. The press has a grave responsible, and our future editors are charged with a solemn mission. If our nation is to be preserved, if our institutions are to be perpetuated, if our constitutional rights shall be safe-guarded, and if we shall uphold those eternal truths which sustain a healthful, independent, contented, God-fearing and righteous democracy, we must have an upright, sane and honest press.

The papers of this country have much larger cir-
culations than similar publications in parts of the world. It is not the same in the United States as in other countries of the world; here it is not only the higher classes of people that read the papers, but all classes. The poorer classes are never too poor but that they are able to buy a paper.

It is because of all classes reading the papers that the press really becomes an educational agency. The great mass of the people confine their reading solely to the newspapers. The kind of education is the important factor in the shaping of efficient democracy; the American press tends to give a kind where good and bad are mingled but where the bad is the more accessible and attractive. The modern American newspaper is our national educator of the plain people, both young and old. Almost all phases of literature are offered. Often prizes are given for correct answers to puzzles for the best letter on a given subject, or for the wittiest joke. The women have special pages which deal with the latest fashions, care of the health and beauty, and care of children. Housekeepers are schooled in the art of cooking, and physical exercises are discussed, illustrated and explained. The one aim would seem to be to tell the people everything that will make their lives more healthy, comfortable, and intelligent.

Technical subjects are offered by university professors. It is often the custom of the papers to distribute almanacs free, which take the form of a con-
densed yearly encyclopedia. Thus we find that the modern, improved American journal aims to be the national storehouse of useful and scientific learning.

It is plainly seen that the press almost entirely controls the politics of the country, and within recent years the question of economics has been receiving almost as much space and attention as the question of politics. There are very few papers that do not publish daily accounts of the money and labor markets. It is impossible to lay too much stress upon the influence of the citizen's opinion; as to whether a strike or boycott is justifiable or not, depends largely upon what he reads in the newspapers about the dispute. The average man's knowledge of the trusts, the money markets, economic movements and policies of different states can only be formed by what the newspapers give in the way of reliable facts.

Men of different states write articles on the ways and means of their particular states, discussing problems of the day and giving their opinions on them. The mass of people read these articles, and it is in this way that the press acts as a agent of assimilation. It draws people together as no other means could. James E. Rogers says, "to a much greater extent than the school, the newspaper is the agent of assimilation; it is the press that makes Americans out of the vast army of foreign immigrants. Thus we have the American
newspaper not only as the giant molder of public opinion but the monster mechanic that shapes and re-shapes the mental makeup of the plain people."

It is estimated that 5,000,000,000 copies of new s-papers of all kinds are published annually in the United States. In 1896, there were 20,630 newspapers published annually in this country and it is safe to say that today there are over 25,000. This probably is more than double the number published in any other country. As a rule, in Europe, it is only the upper and middle classes of people that read the papers. The great masses of people are either too ignorant or too indifferent to read the events which are taking place throughout the world.

Italy was the first country to give the newspaper prominence, during the seventh and eighteenth centuries. Their aim was to give the news. England was second, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, their aim was to express public opinion. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the American newspapers are leading the world, their aim is to create public opinion.