

THE JACKAL IN JOURNALISM.

Like the beast after which he is rightly named, nothing is sacred from his foul touch. The reputation of the living and the graves of the dead are reviled and plundered; the hearthstones of home fouled and the coffin desecrated, if it can in the slightest degree tend to his advancement, create a sensation that will cause the sale of even a handful more of papers, or produce another dollar to be spent in the gratification of a debased appetite.

For truth, he cares absolutely nothing. If it chances to suit his purpose, well; if not, it will be tortured and twisted until it does, and the most pure and holy feelings of man or woman be violated, and a scandal sown broadcast that can never be fully denied—a wrong inflicted that can never be atoned for, even were any disposition shown to do so.

In no other land, in no other age, and under no other circumstances, could such monstrosity in journalism be a possibility. The great liberty in America given to the press has heretofore been unknown, and the literary beast is an outcropping thereof. But he did not arrive at his full stature and startling development of baseness at once. It took years to make him what he is, to give him the audacity he possesses, to make him a remorseless pirate of character, an insulter of fair fame, a defamer of virtue, a destroyer of credit—in a word a notorious and infamous social bandit.

Were he an open enemy it would not be one half so bad as it is. Then there might be some safeguard, now there is absolutely none. The sheet blackened by his insinuations and falsehoods dressed up as truth, possess some influence, is eagerly caught up by those of vitiated tastes, and will, of course, shut out all in a rebuttal from its columns. But others may be open. True; but they reach in only a limited measure the same class of readers. The law? Repeated efforts has proved the difficulty of obtaining redress. There are so many loop holes that escape is easy; and if there is any danger of conviction, an apology, after the fashion of Midshipman. Easy to the irate old bo'swan, takes off the edge of the judgment. Personal chastisement? Ah! that is the very thing the jackal delights in. It creates sympathy, enables him to cry martyr, and gives him the longed for opportunity to maul in damages.

A dangerous beast in the body politic is the literary jackal. He prowls unseen and in the darkness, and his poisonous bites are inflicted without warning. The rattlesnake, in this respect, is the most noble, is less treacherous, and a much fairer enemy. Often under the guise of friendship, the jackal enters a home, prys into its secrets, and then wantonly reveals them to the world. In cases like the Beecher-Tilton, he actually grows obese. A divorce with sensuous surroundings, with letters intended for one eye only and filled with words of burning love, is to him a feast; a case of *crim. con.*, a harvest.

His inventive genius is large. It needs but a hint to enable him to write a page that will blacken the type far more than any ink. Give him a starting point, and he will soon manufacture a whole; give but a handful of dollars, and he will besmirch the fairest name on the record of the world. And not alone is the head of the house attacked; wife and daughters are dragged in without sense or decency, and the mouldering bones of ancestry torn from their resting places and scattered before the eyes of a shuddering public.

But the taste that permits such revelations has grown with the caterer thereof. The one could not exist a moment without the other. They are of necessity twin-mated. The appetite has grown by what it has fed on, and is leech-like in its cries for more. And more they will have; and fouler will be the abominations produced, as long as it pays, unless, indeed, the taste becomes nauseated, and the thing works its own cure.

The defence used by the jackal, "that the public demand such things," is infamous as his career, and false upon its face. The public does nothing of the kind. But if it did, no one has any right to pander to such debasing tastes; no one has any right to sow discord, or scatter scandal, and bring shame to the

fireside. But the public, *id est*, the public that is worth cultivating, turns a deaf ear to such things, and would gladly lend a helping hand to destroy every press and type that give them permanency. And yet it is from this same public, the one from which the jackal knows he is entitled to nothing but kicks, that in many cases he gains a reward for his misdeeds. Many a man—aye, woman—has silenced his yelping by bribery. Many an honest heart, shrinking from the publication of some gross calumny, paid liberally for peace, and the jackal slunk away to seek new victims and desecrate new shrines.

Pay is the motive in a great majority of cases, and shows to what a low ebb newspaper morality has sunk in some instances. Heavens be praised! there are others who would not soil their pens with such themes. And why should it not be so with all? Is newspaperdom confined within so narrow a limit that it must pig the graves of reputation, and make light of virtue and honesty, and the purity of womanhood and the holiness of religion? Cannot the columns be filled without such degrading topics? Are papers only published in the interest of the *demi-monde*, and to be read in a brothel? Has the jackal become King of Literature? Is the foul to run riot over the fair?

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