

The Daily Astorian. ASTORIA, OREGON: WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 26, 1887. NEWSPAPERS.

No universal laws can be laid down in regard to the press. It resembles literature in this, that it may be turned to the best or worst purposes. The average newspaper perhaps may be compared to the average man; content to get along quietly, to make a comfortable living, to keep in accord with the respectabilities, to be faithful to the surroundings. The editorial expression of this class of journals is simply neutral. It follows the prevailing current, whatever it may be. It seeks to reproduce the dominant ideas of the locality as nearly as possible. It voices the superficialities of its surroundings. On either side of this dull but innocuous class of journalism are the extremes—the best and the worst of newspaper work. The former embrace those journals, few in number, but not too few to discourage hope in the upward growth of the profession, which are conducted on a basis of thorough-going honesty, love for truth, ripe judgement and full information. It is needless to say that such journals represent a very high standard of attainments, and that they are qualified to instruct the public on almost all the subjects which they discuss. The influence of such papers is decidedly salutary. They are in fact among the most effective agencies of social development. We cannot have too many of them, nor are we likely to.

The opposite pole in journalism is represented by those papers which are without scruple in pursuing those objects. Such newspapers display great energy in the procurement of news. They are usually managed shrewdly and in an enterprising way. They pandar to every popular lust. They utilize every scandal. They employ their editorial columns in blackmailing enterprises. They seek to acquire influence by the free use of slander and detraction. They are in turn demagogues, liars, falsifiers of history and fact, calumniators, and purveyors of whatever is immoral and popular. They make no effort to elevate public taste in any way. On the contrary, they seek only to ascertain what nastiness is most in demand, and that they forthwith set themselves to supply. To speak of the beneficent influence of the press in connection with such journals is preposterous, for all the influence they exercise is sinister and malevolent, and they make the communities which support them worse in all respects than they would otherwise have been. There are few localities which have not had experience with this kind of journals. Such papers sell readily, but they do not help those who buy them in any way. They furnish the news, it is true, but too frequently they accompany it with intellectual poison.

To understand what the press is and does it is obviously necessary to examine all these different kinds of journals, and when the analysis is completed it will be seen more clearly than before that generalization upon such a subject can only be misleading. In fact the press is subject to the drawbacks and vices and weaknesses which affect humanity in all its manifestations. There is no general definition which can be applied to all men, and neither is there any general definition which can be applied to all newspapers—the exceptions noted which we have before referred to. The tendencies in the growth of the press are precisely similar to those in the growth of the people. Individual papers, like individual persons, are somewhat ahead of their generations here and there. Others are merely abreast of it, and the second constitute the majority. For the most part the desire to make money is the controlling motive in

journalism, as it is the controlling motive in every other profession and trade and occupation whatsoever. But inasmuch as the question of money making may be quite independent of the kind of mental food furnished by a publisher, so there will always be publishers who prefer to furnish the best mental food, and other publishers who prefer to put forward the worst. So many men, so many opinions, in fact, is the true explanation of the American newspaper. It may be said to reflect broadly the existing condition of public morals and enlightenment, but even here the observer is apt to be misled, because he is always prone to forget that there are always two sides to the mental state of a community, and that one of them is bright, and the other is dark.

The press has become a necessity of civilization. It is neither better nor worse than the best and the worst of the people who sustain it. Its influence for good and evil is, of course, considerable, because it possesses the opportunity to formulate ideas continually and so to suggest lines of thought and action to those who are too busy or indifferent to decide for themselves. The tendencies of modern journalism are toward greater intellectual force in editorial writing, and a broader and more cosmopolitan spirit generally. It is an agency which must keep abreast of the civilization of the age, and which may be made very much more useful and wholesome in its effects than it has yet been.

GREAT cities are essential to the development of any important or influential national life. They gather into themselves the resources of the nation, and so organize its stores of wealth, its enterprise, and the results of its genius and culture, as to render each efficient in promoting the common good. They are the centers of power. Without the facilities which through them are afforded for commerce and manufactures, without their aggregations of capital, their business systems and institutions, and their fostering care of art, science and literature, it would seem impossible that there could be any civilization or progress.

THE editorial "we" is on the wane. The signed editorial is now common in many newspapers, and before many years it is thought all the newspaper editorials will be signed by the author. This will be rough on those who scoop indiscriminately from their exchanges.

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