

# American Journalism And Its Historical Treatment

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*The president of the American Historical Association surveys the field of journalism history and concludes that the product is thin and uneven. He analyzes the causes of weak performance, states requirements for improvement and recommends establishment of an AEJ press evaluation project.*

EVERYONE WILL AGREE THAT SINCE the days of Benjamin Franklin the American press has made a more interesting, variegated and important record than that of any other nation. But how should that record be written? As a chapter in our culture? As a striking part of American business enterprise? Or in relation to the workings of democratic government? The answer is, of course, in all three lights; but there can be no question that the third is the most significant.

Early this year the International Press Institute in Zurich published a study of *The Press in Authoritarian Countries* which every journalist and historian should read. It showed how much of the world's press, from Russia to the Dominican Republic and Indonesia, is in chains. It demonstrated how fatal to healthy journalism are authoritarian controls; in Santo Domingo, for

example, the total circulation of all newspapers is below 75,000. It brought out clear evidence that in all totalitarian lands educated people feel a deep thirst for a press which can freely tell the truth. In short, the report made it plain that a vigorous democracy and a vigorous free journalism have the closest interrelationships, so that one cannot exist without the other. This interdependence is the central theme in the history of the press in any free country.

During the last century a series of memorable phrases were invented to characterize the role of the press in good government. A regent of sovereigns, a tutor of nations, said Napoleon I. Edmund Burke's remark that journalism is the Fourth Estate was given popular currency by Carlyle's *French Revolution*. Carlyle himself said that journalists had become the true kings and clergy, and that newspaper dynasties had replaced the Tudors and the Hapsburgs. Norman Angell termed newspapers the chief witnesses upon whose evidence the daily judgments of men on public affairs are based.

One of the most emphatic statements of the social and governmental importance of the press can be found in the

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defense which Italian Fascism made of its laws for controlling the press. The state manages the public schools, said the Fascists, so that they may always teach patriotism. Newspapers are "schools for character, lecture rooms for daily teaching, pulpits for preaching"; hence they also must be tightly controlled. But the Fascists forgot the truth reiterated by the International Press Institute, that a tightly controlled press is a dead press.

Journalism can be the best single instrument of democratic self-government, informing the mind, enlightening the conscience and freeing the spirit of intelligent citizens. It can also be a mortal foe of modern democracy, and that sometimes in subtle ways. Only history can place the achievements and shortcomings of the newspapers of any land in full and fair perspective. Sound historical works on the press and its leaders are as important to the United States as sound works on presidents and cabinet officers, generals and admirals, inventors and industrialists. This branch of history should be expert, incisive and candid—as sternly critical for recent periods, especially as our histories of Second World War campaigns, written by Bradley, Montgomery and Alanbrooke, as unflinching as the assessments of Munich and Pearl Harbor, as outspoken as the best estimates of Stanley Baldwin and Herbert Hoover. Of such history we have as yet the barest beginning.

We cannot take much comfort from the fact that poor as our journalistic history is, it is better than that of any other nation. No history of German journalism in the last generation for reasons which need no statement, has yet been written. For reasons quite different, no respectable history of modern French journalism has ever been

published. The greater newspapers of Paris—*Le Temps*, *Le Moniteur*, *Le Matin*, *Figaro*, and so on—are each so closely identified with specific economic or political groups, or with some compelling individual, that any historian who approached them would find himself dealing with the ruling regime, the group or a prominent leader. A history of the mid-19th century *Moniteur* is only a history of Napoleon III, and a history of *l'Homme Libre*, later *l'Homme Enchaîné*, is but a history of Clemenceau.

Even the history of British journalism has been less ably covered than ours. It is in some respects the most distinguished press record, running from Daniel Defoe to Sir William Haley, in the world. One unmatched mountain-peak of historical achievement, the five-volume study of the London *Times* by Stanley Morison and others, fittingly commemorates the work of the most powerful single newspaper. But beyond this the historians have done little, particularly for the last century. It is unfortunate that so illustrious a journal as the Manchester *Guardian* is represented in our libraries by nothing but a slight 200-page sketch, and so important a paper as the London *Telegraph and Morning Post* by nothing at all.

But the deficiencies of other lands cannot be made an excuse for our own, for we have greater advantages and larger responsibilities than European countries. Our democracy is preeminently a newspaper-reading public. Since Jacksonian days every foreign visitor has noted our devotion to daily and weekly publications. Nor is our journalism dominated, as in Britain and France, by a few great centers, for it is spread from the Penobscot to the Pacific. Local and regional pride is en-

listed behind many of our newspapers to an extent impossible in Western Europe. Far more money is invested in and spent by our press than in and by that of any other land. Journalism in America is more highly professionalized than in any but a few other countries.

Why, then, do we have so little good history that the number of volumes which can be termed excellent can be counted on the fingers of two hands? Assuming that the history of the press is better worth writing here than elsewhere, for we have more of it and have it more powerfully; assuming also that it must be expert and objective, or it is not worth writing at all, what can we do to improve its scope and quality? Paul Lazarsfeld wrote in *JOURNALISM QUARTERLY* in 1948: "If there is one institutional disease to which the media of mass communication seem particularly subject, it is a nervous reaction to criticism." The best cure for this sensitivity is more good history of slashing honesty.

The thinness and unevenness of work in this field is largely explained by one simple fact: the fact that, as Thackeray said in *Pendennis*, "All the world is in the newspaper." The files are replete with entertaining detail on a thousand topics, from wars to women, from music to murders. How easy, the amateur says, to fill a volume with amusement and instruction. Actually, the superabundance of jumbled, disparate and mainly trivial details in the files place on the writer a burden of assortment and synthesis under which most men break down.

Compare the task of the biographer of a newspaper with that of the biographer of such a public figure as William Jennings Bryan. The author of a life of Bryan has to relate him to the history of his times—and ours; but only to the

history of politics, for apart from a few unhappy episodes like his enlistment in the battle of fundamentalism against evolution, Bryan was merely a political animal; and even in politics only a restricted number of issues, of which currency and imperialism were the chief, need be considered. But the man who writes the history of a great newspaper for the same period has to take cognizance of a thousand subjects from the poetry corner to corners in wheat. If he does not fix on the right principles of selection and synthesis he might as well throw himself into the nearest vat of printer's ink.

When we add that most histories of individual newspapers are prepared with an eye to pious commemoration, or profitable promotion; that the veteran reporter who, if well trained, would today make the best historian, usually lacks any training whatever; and that the writer is subject to covert pressures, ranging from loss of his job to threats of libel suits, and too often yields to them by evasion if not mendacity, then we can understand why such histories are in general poor.

✦ THE TASKS OF SELECTION AND SYNTHESIS, and the even greater task of finding matter of real historical novelty, are complicated by the universal failure of American newspapers to preserve any data on two subjects of cardinal importance: the method of getting news, and the facts behind the news. Practically no effort is made in our editorial offices to get and keep such material.

The unapproached distinction of Stanley Morison's five volumes on the *London Times* lies in two facts. The first is that for much more than a century the *Times* has been an integral and important part of the political structure

of Great Britain. Its news and its editorial comment have in general been carefully coordinated, and have at most times been handled with an earnest sense of responsibility. While the paper has admitted some trivia to its columns, its whole emphasis has been on important public affairs treated with an eye to the best interests of Britain. To guide this treatment, the editors have for long periods been in close touch with 10 Downing Street. Thus when Morison came to write his history, he found the task of selecting the material already largely accomplished.

The *Times* itself had selected what was most important, had lifted it to a proper plane, and had given it the right emphasis. To give one example out of many, the Berlin Conference of 1878, from which Disraeli brought back peace with honor, was covered for the *Times* by the fabulously expert Paris correspondent M. De Blowitz; he kept in close touch with the editor Thomas Chenery, who had just succeeded Delane, and with the chief owner, John Walter III; they in turn maintained close relations with the foreign office. Morison could feel sure that what the *Times* had reported, and what Chenery had said in his leaders, was history of a specially significant type.

The second reason for the distinction of Morison's volumes is that the *Times* kept an unrivaled archive of the news behind the news. De Blowitz, writing to Walter and Chenery, gave the secret history of many episodes and conversations which it was impossible to print, and they told much that now adds color and life to the narrative. Not infrequently the editors, governed by a cautious sense of high responsibility, suppressed perfectly truthful dispatches that it seemed indiscreet to print, and they went into the archives. So did sig-

nificant letters from a great number of men in public and private life. The *Times*, we may recall, scooped all other newspapers on the text of the Treaty of Berlin, which De Blowitz's assistant, Donald Mackenzie Wallace, carried from Berlin to Brussels sewed in the lining of his coat, and thence telegraphed to London. But the *Times* was quite capable of suppressing a scoop if Disraeli or Gladstone or Salisbury wished it; and then it lay undiscovered until Morison levied upon it for his history.

Most American newspapers have some intimacy with the stream of events, even though it is on a small scale. They deal with affairs for their city or state as the London *Times* dealt with affairs on the national and international level. The difficulty is that they do not bring to them, in most instances, any high sense of responsibility; and this handicaps the historian. They could keep an archive, if they were not too careless or indolent. Any newspaper could ask its best reporters to write memoranda on significant bits of what Thomas Hart Benton in his *Thirty Years' View* called inside history—more important, he said, than external history. Any editor who spent 15 minutes a week dictating his own confidential memorandum or diary would soon have a record priceless to the future historian. An office diary identifying the author of all unsigned articles of note should be an essential part of the machinery of every daily—and comment could be added.

Why are archives not kept? Hurry, lack of space, preoccupation with crowding daily tasks, are excuses that seldom have much validity. What is needed is a sense that the newspaper is history beyond the day. My own special activities once led me to search care-

fully the offices of the New York *Evening Post*, New York *Herald* (before its merger with the *Tribune*) and New York *World* for archival material. They were practically bare. Readers of my life of Grover Cleveland will see that I did discover in the *World* morgue one paper of importance. After the dramatic battle in 1893 over the repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, which opened an irreparable breach between the President and the party majority in Congress, the Washington correspondent of the *World* wrote a confidential history of the struggle as he had seen it from the lobbies of the capitol and the offices of members. This was all.

Lunching with Arthur Sulzberger and some of the editors of the New York *Times* three years ago, I called their attention to the value of an archive preserving confidential materials. Mr. Sulzberger then and there gave instructions to have such an archive formed; but whether these directions were ever carried out I do not know.

✦ IN AN EFFORT TO ESCAPE THE DIFFICULTIES of selection and synthesis from the hodgepodge material in the ordinary newspaper file, writers have resorted to two expedients which on a casual view appear legitimate, but which too often lead to an abdication of their proper function. The first expedient is the adoption of a biographical approach, so that the record is treated in terms of a few prominent men. The New York *Sun* becomes personified in Dana, the Springfield *Republican* in Samuel Bowles, the Chicago *Tribune* in Joseph Medill. This is proper for that part of our journalistic history dominated by great editors, but for that part alone. It is this particular segment of our journalistic annals that has thus far been

most efficiently treated. The biographies of Horace Greeley by James Parton, Glyndon Van Deusen, William H. Hale and others, of Samuel Bowles by George S. Merriam, of Dana by James Grant Wilson, of Henry J. Raymond by Francis Brown, of Bryant by Parke Godwin, of Henry Watterson by Joseph Wall and of George William Curtis by Gordon Milne, taken together, provide an adequate impression of the work of the editorial thunderers. Large gaps yet exist. Greeley deserves a really thorough two-volume biography; Joseph Pulitzer merits a much better-informed and less superficial life than Don C. Seitz gave him; and Edwin L. Godkin should long ago have been rescued from the incredibly ill-organized, helter-skelter chronicle written by Rollo Ogden. Nevertheless, by and large, our great editorial personalities have been amply displayed. We can readily discover how the most powerful captains of the press applied their talents to the problems of the day, where their judgment erred, and what they accomplished. This is the simplest element in newspaper history, the most dignified and impressive, and with a proper use of quotation, the most pungent. A dehumanized page on the treatment the New York press gave the great Hungarian patriot, Kossuth, is now but pallidly interesting. But a page on the banquet to Kossuth in 1850 at which Bryant presided, Henry J. Raymond was the principal speaker and Greeley was an enthusiastic participant, cannot but be fascinating.

The other expedient used in simplifying the vast melange of material in a newspaper file is the related device of emphasizing opinion at the expense of reporting, views at the expense of news. This, too, is legitimate for the period when opinion was the chief staple of a

great newspaper, as it assuredly was for a long generation in the middle of the 19th century. But it becomes a painful distortion when we reach the modern era in which news reigns paramount over opinion. Contrast the *Tribune* of Greeley's day with the *New York Times* as Adolph S. Ochs developed it after 1896. Greeley's chief concern was with the shaping of public policy by a daily page of informed, positive and sometimes eloquent editorials, and he marshaled his news, his special articles and even the letters to the editor to support his page. To Ochs, news—full, honest, objective, clean news—was the heart and soul of the *Times*; he would have dispensed with the editorial page with a relatively minor pang, and always kept it to a minor role.

It is ironic that at the very time the far-reaching revolution which minimized opinion and exalted the news was taking place, historians of journalism busied themselves with the views of the great editor and neglected the news-gatherers. American reporting has become the most enterprising, the frankest and most courageous and the most humanly appealing, though not the best written, in the world. It is much more tough-minded and skeptical than British reporting, much more objective than French. Yet where can we find a narrative which tells just when and why the change took place? In general terms, it is well treated in the admirable histories of journalism by Frank Luther Mott, and by Edwin Emery and Henry Ladd Smith, but they have no space for explanatory detail and telling examples. It is in relation to this change that we most need a thorough analytical biography of Ochs. The task of writing one was first entrusted to Claude G. Bowers, who, working in faroff Chile, failed so completely that the family never

used his book; it was then undertaken by Gerald W. Johnson, whose readable volume is deficient in research—especially that kind of research which drains the memories of all surviving associates. It is chiefly with reference to influence on news-gathering that we need a better biography of Pulitzer than that of Don C. Seitz, whose main interest lay in the counting-room. No one can run through the sheafs of telegrams and memoranda in Pulitzer's papers at Columbia without discerning that he was a true genius both in ferreting out news, and in creating it.

If historians must use the biographical approach, it is effective managing editors rather than brilliant editorial writers who since 1900 most deserve their attention. Lord Bryce in *Modern Democracy* remarks that civic opinion is better instructed in America than in Continental Europe because of better news: "the publicity given by the newspapers to all that passes in the political field." Walter Lippmann has said that the greatest successes of present-day journalism lie in "the objective, orderly, and comprehensive presentation of the news." But I know of only one incisive study of an eminent managing editor, James W. Markham's *Bovard of the Post-Dispatch*. This paints a living portrait of an arrogant man who made his newspaper a force for the betterment of St. Louis and Missouri; who taught his best reporters, including Raymond P. Brandt, Paul Y. Anderson and Marquis Childs, to get not only the facts but the truth behind the facts.

We lack an adequate book about an even more distinguished managing editor, Carr Van Anda. More than Bovard, Van Anda saw how complex the truth is, and realized that to discover it a great newspaper must have not simply a slick skill in reporting surface news,

but a patient, scientific-minded exploration, by well educated specialists, of intricate situations. An event is a force momentarily made visible. The good news specialist must look for the force behind the event, as something to be explored, measured and analyzed.

It is through the news pages, special features and the exploratory work of labor specialists, educational specialists, sports specialists, economic specialists and others that the best newspapers today exercise leadership. But where is the historical record of this change? A reader may go through a long shelfful of books searching for light on news-gathering and news-analysis, and end in despair. Sam Acheson's history of the *Dallas News*, for example, entitled *35,000 Days in Texas*, is primarily concerned with editorial positions on local, national and international issues since 1842. We learn of the newspaper's attitudes toward Texas banking laws and Ma Ferguson, the Grover Cleveland and Woodrow Wilson campaigns, and the Spanish War; but we find no discussion of news-gathering in connection with these or other subjects. Archer Shaw's *The Plain Dealer* offers two 10-page sections on news, one of which sketches wartime reporting, but the record of the *Plain Dealer's* valiant fight for Tom L. Johnson's crusades, which earned Johnson's special thanks, is written in editorial terms. Joseph E. Chamberlain's *The Boston Transcript: A History of Its First Hundred Years*, is similarly disappointing. He tells well such stories as that of the skinflint manager William Durant, the most picturesque of the *Transcript's* heads, who consistently opposed raising the wages of employees on the ground that more money would demoralize them. The one memorable item on news policy in the *Transcript* history records that in the

excited days of Jackson and Nullification, the editors invited the public to visit the office and read the news they had not printed. Thomas E. Dabney's book on the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, *One Hundred Great Years*, is a waterless Sahara so far as the treatment of news-gathering goes.

✦ IT IS REFRESHING TO LIST A FEW shining exceptions to this category of failure. The general histories by Mott, and by Emery and Smith, give excellent running accounts of progress in news-gathering, and such books as Leo Rosten's *The Washington Correspondents* and Douglass Cater's recent *The Fourth Branch of Government*, while not history, contain many historical preceptions and episodes. The best of all our newspaper chronicles, Meyer Berger's volume on the *New York Times*, is the work of a skilled reporter. It deals thoroughly and expertly with the method, development and outstanding achievements of news-gathering, especially during the last half-century. With an important story to tell, Berger relates it so brilliantly, in fact, that we hesitate to add one critical reservation: his book is written in pure journalesque, undiluted by a touch of stylistic elegance. It had an able preceding volume to surpass, Elmer Davis's; but that, while in better English, is more largely concerned with the editorial conduct of the *Times*. Erwin D. Canham's history of the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Commitment to Freedom*, has the balance that we would anticipate from its author. John P. Young's *Journalism in California*, a volume concerned generally with San Francisco and specifically with the *Chronicle*, is spasmodically strong in its analysis of reporting, and in relating the *Chronicle* to the social milieu. Young analyzes the news in its historical and

social context, discusses such topics as the effect of high telegraph charges on conciseness, and investigates the truth of the *Morning Call's* statement that San Francisco reporting in the early decades was "beneath contempt," concluding that this was because newspapermen were untrained in observation.

The sparkling volume by Gerald Johnson, H. L. Mencken and others on the *Sunpapers of Baltimore* does partial justice to news, almost equating it with opinion. Across the continent Dana Marshall's *Newspaper Story: Fifty Years of the Oregon Journal*, the work of a reporter and special writer who became head of the editorial page, carefully relates the development of news to the growth of Portland. Here the paper and community appear inseparably wedded, serving each other, and all the crusades in which the *Journal* played a part, from campaigns for better mayors to campaigns for better milk, can be found in some detail. We may find material of value on news-gathering in such dissimilar books as James Weber Linn's life of James Keeley, the greatest of Chicago managing editors, who found zest in a hundred exploits, from his personal chase of a murderer through the swamps of Arkansas to his chase of Senator William Lorimer through the swamps of Chicago politics; Ralph E. Dyer's *News for an Empire*, revolving about the Spokane *Spokesman-Review*; and J. Cutler Andrews's study of the Pittsburg *Post-Gazette*, which discusses reporters and illustrators along with editors and circulation managers.

Of course it can be said that the greatest reporters tell their own stories most entertainingly, as they have done from the time George Wilkins Kendall of the New Orleans *Picayune* penned his narrative of the *Texas Santa Fe Ex-*

*pedition* in 1844 to Herbert L. Matthews's *Education of a Correspondent* more than a century later. What newspaperman cannot learn a hundred lessons from the second book of Lincoln Steffens's *Autobiography*, with two hundred pages on a newspaper reporter's work in the days of Boss Croker, Jacob Riis and Police Commissioner Roosevelt?

But systematic history holds a larger usefulness. The reporting of the Civil War by American correspondents has at last been comprehensively analyzed by trained historians, Louis Starr of Columbia University, Bernard A. Weisberger of Antioch College, Emmet Crozier, and J. Cutler Andrews of the Pennsylvania College for Women. Mr. Andrews is a product of Arthur M. Schlesinger's Harvard seminar. So is J. Eugene Smith, whose *One Hundred Years of the Hartford Courant* is the most skilfully planned of all newspaper histories. Similarly, Harry Baehr's capable book on *The New York Tribune since the Civil War*, with a sound account of the way in which the line was held against sensational news in yellow-press days, Candace Stone's treatment of *Dana and the Sun* and Joseph Wall's life of Watterson, three exceptionally good books, were products of a Columbia graduate seminar.

❖ IF NEWSPAPER HISTORY IS MARRED by thinness and spottiness, and over-emphasis on editorial personalities and opinion as distinguished from reporters and news, it has one still more glaring fault. Taken as a whole, it is deplorably uncritical and some of it is dishonest. With too few exceptions, the authors wrote like kept hacks. In their silences they imitate some present-day attitudes of the press itself. Newspapers have long been accused by such observers as

Oswald Garrison Villard and Walter Lippmann of refusing to criticize themselves, or each other, or journalism in general. An excessive regard for press comity estops each journal from speaking ill of others, or from noting even egregious blunders and offenses. Many newspapers are unwilling to print intelligence about libel suits against their contemporaries. Most offices have sacred cows stabled somewhere, but the greatest sacred cow is journalism itself. Yet bad as newspaper practice is, some press historians go further; they gloss over blunders, defend misinterpretations and injustices, and sweep glaring omissions and lost opportunities under the bed.

Why? Theoretically, the veteran newspaperman is a hardboiled, tough-minded writer, ready in pursuit of truth to cut his own mother's throat. Actually, in historical vein, he often writes like a mawkish sentimentalist, or a party wheelhorse at convention time recalling the greatness of James G. Blaine. We have mentioned one reason, the promotional origin of many histories. Another reason is that employees fall in love with their paper; they awaken every morning saying to themselves (to paraphrase H. J. Massingham), "I wonder how the dear old slut is this morning? Damn the hussy! I must do something for her." Knowing her sins, they love her too much to expose them. A third reason is that all ephemeral media, like the stage, the ballet, the motion pictures or the circus, become invested with a romantic aura and encrusted with legends. As a result, the typical newspaper historian is a *laudator temporis acti*, who hangs nothing but spotless linen on the line.

This is easy, because the newspaper reflects light from so many facets; it so often gets on both sides of important

issues—and if a third side existed, would get on that; and it can so easily be quoted out of context. The America-First attitudes of the *Chicago Tribune* just before Pearl Harbor, and the defense of Joseph McCarthy by the Hearst press, were foolish and immoral, but any agile newspaper historian could find quotations to prove that they embodied a profound patriotism. Of course most historical dishonesties are on a minor scale, and can be labelled simply special pleading; still, they are dishonesties. It was dishonest of me in the *Evening Post* history to suppress the bitter quarrel between the owner, Villard, and the editor, Rollo Ogden, both then living and both hypersensitive. It was dishonest of Elmer Davis to treat Charles R. Miller's *Times* editorial of September 16, 1918, urging unconditional acceptance of the Austro-Hungarian proposal for a non-binding discussion of peace terms, as shrewd and judicious, though Woodrow Wilson's wiser treatment of the proposal showed that Miller was guilty of a deplorable *gaffe*. We can read Frank M. O'Brien's book on the New York *Sun* without the slightest realization of the harm wrought by Dana's cynical defense of Tammany, hatred of civil service reform, spasms of jingoism and constant demands for the annexation of Cuba and Canada. Henry Adams tells us that he could have found a place on Dana's staff, but he knew that he could never please himself and Dana too, for "with the best intentions he must always fail as a blackguard, and a strong dash of blackguardism was life to the *Sun*." To grasp the blackguardism, a reader must drop O'Brien and read Candace Stone's book.

The history of the London *Times* by Morison and others is in general unflinchingly honest. It tells everything,

for example, about the libelous *Times* accusations against Charles Stewart Parnell, based on forged letters, and about the ruinous penalty; for the ensuing suit cost the *Times* almost £200,000. But even this admirable history has been accused by no less a person than Lord Beaverbrook of flinching at the full truth when it deals with the abdication of Edward VIII. This story is told in an appendix to the final volume.

Morison makes it plain that the *Times* was one of the principal agents in compelling the abdication. Indeed, its editor, Geoffrey Dawson, a man of formidable intellectual and personal force, stood next to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin in the unseating of Edward VIII. Dawson was one of the first men in Britain to learn of the King's love affair. Horrified, he set out on what Beaverbrook calls a "propaganda canvass" of public men. The king offered Baldwin a plan for amorganatic marriage, by which he would take a wife but not a queen. The prime minister notified Geoffrey Dawson of this before he consulted the Cabinet, or the heads of the great dominions, and the puritanical editor was again horrified. He at once began a tremendous campaign in the *Times* upon the importance of keeping the Crown completely free from any taint of personal scandal; and according to Beaverbrook, he published one article which was innocent on its surface, but which carried "wounding and malicious innuendo." At the outset public opinion in Britain had been heavily on the side of the king and his proposal. Dawson and the *Times* swayed it in the opposite direction, until on a foggy December night the Duke of Windsor boarded the destroyer *Fury* for a French port. No reader of Morison's pages can doubt that he has told the story with general

accuracy, making plain the vital part played by the *Times*. But according to Lord Beaverbrook, he did not make it plain that Dawson had used unfair weapons.

✦ OUR NEWSPAPER HISTORIANS HAVE not told the truth about the external pressures which have so often colored news and opinion. Murat Halstead remarked to the Wisconsin Press Association in 1889 that he saw no objection if readers should "find out that the advertiser occasionally dictates the editorials." "No objection at all to that," rejoined E. L. Godkin; "the objection is when they don't find it out." Direct advertiser-dictation has largely disappeared; but the treatment of news is still prostituted, all over the map, to the acquisition of larger and more vulgar bodies of readers, so that circulation managers may go to advertisers and boast of the clientele which their paper reaches. Historians have failed to emphasize properly the stupid conservatism of most of the press, its blind attachment to the status quo, and especially the economic status quo. Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1938 remarked on this reactionary hostility to change, saying of the papers using the Associated Press or United Press services that he estimated "85 percent of them have been inculcating fear in this country during the past year." He was quite right; the newspapers, themselves business enterprises, have repeatedly been too responsive to business in opposition to needed change.

Press historians rightly make much of Paul Y. Anderson's part in remorselessly following the oil scandals under Harding to the doors of the Republican National Committee, but they say little of the general inertia and complacency of newspapers in Harding's day.

They say even less about the callous indifference of most metropolitan newspapers to depressed economic groups, such as the farmers, miners and textile workers, during the boom of the 1920s. Mr. Dyar in *News for an Empire* quotes the statement which President Truman made in Spokane in 1948 about the *Spokesman-Review*: "This paper and the *Chicago Tribune* are the worst in the United States." But he does not explain the sins of omission and commission which led to this outburst.

Long ago Dr. Johnson spoke of the debasing effects of great conflicts upon press ethics: "In wartime a people only want to hear two things—good of themselves, and evil of the enemy. And I know not what is more to be feared after a war, streets full of soldiers who have learned to rob, or garrets full of scribblers who have learned to lie." But we still lack a full *exposé* of the effects of the First and Second World Wars on the hysterical and irresponsible parts of the American press.

We have numerous accounts of the more blatant indecencies of yellow journalism, with special attention to such episodes as the Spanish War. As Matthew Arnold said long ago, sensational papers offer "the best means to efface and kill in a whole nation the discipline of respect, the feeling for what is elevated." The blatant indecencies, however, often do less harm than those of a subtle, insidious kind. A recent book by Judge Irwin D. Davidson and Richard Gehman, entitled *The Jury Is Still Out*, explores at length the murder of a crippled New York boy, Michael Farmer, by a street gang. Not the least important part of the book analyzes the contribution to social disorder steadily made by the gutter press. Honest depiction of the immense but hidden harm long done by sensational

journalism is much needed in every section of the country. The extent to which lurid reporting under slanted headlines has interfered with the administration of justice in the courts offers another problem which the historian could profitably explore.

Much could also be said of various requirements, as yet badly met, in the history of newspapers as business institutions, for their financial record bears on their stability and their independence. Most newspaper histories neglect even a partial account of circulation revenue, advertising revenue, profits and losses, because records are wanting, or secrecy is desired, or such matters seem dull. It is curious, for example, that after Ochs's original purchase, the financial history of the *New York Times* is almost entirely omitted from Meyer Berger's otherwise complete narrative. When I wrote the history of the *Evening Post* I found no financial records anterior to 1900, and few later; the Villard family had some, which were not open to me.

Far more important than this, however, is a proper treatment of the public service function of newspapers. It is of the first importance, now that so many cities have but one newspaper, that historians study the question whether a correlation can be traced between a good newspaper and a well-governed community, a bad paper and a badly managed community. Was the Boston of James Curley what it was partly because Boston newspapers (the *Monitor* excluded) were so wretched? Was Louisville a specially healthy city because of the public spirit of the *Courier-Journal*? Mayors come and go, but a newspaper is a continuing institution.

No subject is of more importance than this to the political scientist, the

sociologist, the general historian—and the aspiring young newspaperman. The best young men and women enter the profession because they hope to make not only better newspapers, but better towns and cities. Many evidences point to the fact disclosed by Columbia University's examination of the young people who attend its Scholastic Press Convention each year. They state that they know that journalism seems less attractive than law, medicine, engineering, science or even university teaching; as a profession it is low in pay, low in amenities, low in social prestige. But they believe they can play a more direct and fruitful part in community improvement through newspaper work than through any other calling. Their first task, of course, is to improve the newspapers, and it is discouraging to see how little our fast-multiplying schools of journalism have thus far done for such betterment. The theory of Dean Luxon of North Carolina that 50 years is too short a time to measure their effect is rather cold comfort. But ambitious young entrants have their eyes fixed on the greater goal of service to town, or city, or state; and every history which can tell a story of such service will give them inspiration.

✦ WHAT, THEN, ARE THE PRINCIPAL requirements to be satisfied if we are to have the adequate histories of journalistic effort that we now lack? They are implied in what I have already said, and may be summarized under a few headings.

First, it is of cardinal importance that the newspaper have a history worth honest research and honest writing. That, alas, can not be said of most dailies in the United States. Mere size and power are not proper criteria. We can say of a number of prominent dai-

lies that they should not have histories because a really veracious record would be impossible, and even a counterfeit record would be repellent or painful. But every good journal is worth a history, which will benefit the paper, the community and the nation.

Second, every newspaper which deems its record worthy of commemoration should keep an archive. This means that some member of its staff should learn the rudiments of archival method; that an elementary office diary should be kept; that editors and reporters should be encouraged to make memoranda, save significant in-letters, and keep carbons of important out-letters; and that in general, some record be made both of the methods of news-gathering, and of the untold truth behind the news. The problem of room for an archive can sometimes be solved by the cooperation of the nearest historical society or library.

In the third place, the choice of a writer should not be left to chance or impulse. It will of course depend on circumstances. A history written as promotion is better than no history at all, but the promotional motive should be secondary. A writer selected within the office, and particularly in the news-room, will be more expert than an outsider; an outsider will be more objective. Any writer should make the fullest use of oral reminiscences. The advice of a good college or university department of history can be obtained more readily than most newspapermen suppose, and will be more valuable than they generally believe. University teachers write badly, but they have a sense of organization, and they will see aspects of the subject that newspapermen may miss.

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WAGENFUEHR, KURT. *Rundfunkanstalten gehen ins Privatgeschaefit*. FR 1959:8 pp 350-357 Aug.—This summer two significant contracts were signed by several German broadcasting corporations and private firms to form a Commercial Television Association which will produce tv film and entire programs.

#### Research Methods

FROEHNER, ROLF. *Marktforschung und Meinungsforschung*. WW 13:17 pp622-623 Sept. 1.—Market research and opinion research—different objectives, similar methods.

STROTHMANN, K. H. *Methodische Erfahrungen der Produktionsgueter-Marktforschung*. A 35:9 pp646-649 Sept.—Recent experiments and refinements of methods give a practical approach to market research for industrial goods.

#### Typography and Graphic Arts

BRETAG, WILHELM. *Das bunte Bild in der Zeitung, technisch gesehen*. ZV 56:18 pp922-929, 937 Sept. 15.—Technical problems of color pictures in German newspapers.

KOHLHAMMER, KURT. *Die drucktechnische Situation der farbigen Tageszeitung*

*in Westdeutschland*. DS 14:9 pp408-416 Sept.—Third part of a survey by mail of color advertising in the German daily press with statistical material, including a 40-page supplement with color-printing samples.

KRUEGER, R. *Erfahrungen im deutschen Zeitungsrotations-Farbdruck*. DS 14:9 pp 437-444 Sept.—Recent experiences in newspaper color printing in Germany—a technical description.

MUENSTER, HANS A. *Farbige Anzeigen in der Tagespresse*. DS 14:9 pp398-408 Sept.—Results of a survey by mail on color advertising in the German daily press. In part I business firms were interviewed; in part II, advertisers.

SCHMIDT, KLAUS F. *Der mehrfarbige Zeitungsdruck in den USA*. DS 14:9 pp 389-398 Sept.—The U.S. correspondent of *Der Druckspiegel* reports on multi-color printing in the American daily press.

SCHROETER, PAUL. *Mehr Schwung bei der typographischen Gestaltung der Tageszeitung*. ZV 56:18 pp1004-1006 Sept. 15.—Modern makeup needs better relations between editors and typographers. Weekend editions will be a good test ground for newspaper design.

## Historical Treatment of U.S. Journalism

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In the fourth place, this association, it seems to me, could make one important contribution to the systematic cultivation of press history in the United States. It might do something to improve current newspaper practice, and a great deal to guide future historians, if every five years it published a critical review, by regions, of the attitudes and activities of the principal newspapers. One committee in each region—that is, in say 10 areas of the country—could be made responsible for the critical evaluations. The members of this association, holding close relations with the principal newspapermen of their states, regularly reading the important journals, and possessing a keen critical sense of what is good and bad in jour-

nalism, could provide this review more easily and expertly than anyone else. Such a quinquennial volume, written with verve and penetration, would be accepted by any publisher, and would be sure of a large sale. Money needed to support the research and pay the essayists could readily be obtained from one of several foundations. As these volumes grew across the shelf, their impact on journalism, and their value to historians, sociologists, economists and students of government would grow too.

Finally, the historian should hang over his desk an amended version of the motto with which Joseph Pulitzer adorned his newsrooms: Honesty, Accuracy, Honesty.