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The New School of Journalism

IF our colleges were what they should be and if our newspapers were what they should be, there might be then no need of a School of Journalism. As things are, there is a place for the Joseph Pulitzer Foundation at Columbia University, and the best evidence thereof is the attitude of the educator on the one hand and the journalist on the other toward this enterprise. The newspapers have been on the whole very courteous in comment on Mr. Pulitzer's gift, but also very empty of suggestions for its application. They do not see what a college can teach journalism. The professors and presidents have been very polite also, and also very barren of ideas. They can't see what further their colleges can do.

If the Pulitzer School shall instil a little more humility into both these professions, it will have been worth the million dollars Mr. Pulitzer has laid down in cash. And if in its operation it substitutes for this self-satisfaction some dynamic unhappiness it will have justified the second million which the editor of the *New York World* promises. His spirit is the right spirit. Mr. Pulitzer is a self-made journalist, and he founded his newspaper fortune in yellow journalism, the yellowest known in his day. But he has grown and he has learned. He has improved the *New York World* till now it is almost as accurate and more truthful than many a "better paper," and, in editorial expression, free, sane, simple, forcible, and earnest. But Mr. Pulitzer knows he never succeeded in making "the" paper for the masses; he knows his yellow journalists never knew what yellow journalism might be; and he knows that nobody he can get knows how to make the newspaper he can now imagine. He must know this since he has run a life career throughout the business, has "succeeded" so far that he can give away two millions of dollars and yet, standing, many of his contemporaries say, at the head of his profession, he gives this money into the hands of others, men with the learning he did hot have, men of the kind that have found fault with his journalism and then he asks to do what he could not do: teach journalism and, perhaps, make journalists. "Make journalism a profession" is his phrase.

A business it is, and business it must always be. All this talk we hear of a subsidized newspaper is essentially wrong. The idealists, even more than the moneymakers, should insist that the good newspaper be so made that it will pay; since it is not the paper but the readers they are after and the profits are the proof of the reading. But a business man cannot make a great newspaper. That takes an editor, a man, a personality; all the best paying papers have either been produced by an editor or have produced one. Journalism, a business, is a profession too, like law and medicine, and just as the best lawyer or the best physician, in the long run, makes the best collections, so the best journalist gets in the end the best "ads." The "newspaper man" with one eye on the circulation and the other on the ads, does not see how his trade can be elevated into a profession, and he scoffs and sneers, like the business man at the college graduate, like the old doctors at all the first schools. And they challenge, these apprentices, this veteran, who does not see how himself. His correspondence contains no plan for his school. He knows only that he does

not know; but, bowed by the failure perceived from the vantage point of success, he thinks others may know. The veteran is a humble journalist.

And he may well be humble. The commodity of journalism is all knowledge and all wisdom and the market is all ignorance and all folly. The world is full of these things, full of knowledge and full of ignorance too, and ignorance is curious. The business of journalism is to sell in the form of books, periodicals or newspapers, all the world's knowledge to all the world's ignorance. "All," I say, and this is no "literary" statement of an "academic" idea. It is a "journalistic" observation made in the day's work at the news desk of a daily newspaper. There is no knowledge that is not general which cannot be printed as news if it can be put into "news form." And this phrase is only a technical expression of the requirement that the information be offered in a shape comprehensible to "all the world's ignorance." In other words, the news editor has to have the new facts presented in their relation to the old facts, the news in its bearing on what his readers already know. He can sell a scientific fact just as well as he can a fact of local politics, but he usually will give politics "preferred position" because both his reporters and his readers will be more interested in it; and they are more interested because they have the history of politics in mind and will see just how the new alters the old. The reporter will write it intelligently and the reader will read it intelligently. If the news editor could have a scientific discovery stated as well, then, if it is really as significant, he can "hit it up" as just as "big news." The scientific report of Darwin's theory of acquired variations was news only to the scientific world; the statement that man may have been evolved from the ape was news to the great world.

The lack of journalism is the lack of understanding. The editors cannot know all things, nor the reporter, nor the scientist. None of these is seeking knowledge. All alike are "after the news," and the keenest on the scent is the ordinary scientist. He is the most absorbed and of the least understanding. He does not pursue his researches with a sense of the bearing of his hypothesis on our knowledge or even upon his own philosophy of life. He is doing the world's work like all the rest of us, each in his separate sphere, and is elated at the discovery of a new variety of his particular plant. That is news in his world. To the world where the stars shine, it may be no more news than the discovery that the Bowery lodging houses are filling up with bums. If the bums turn a Republican majority into a Democratic majority and if this may carry New York and decide a presidential election, it is news that may interest the botanist. And if the botanist's new variety should complete a chain and show the genesis of animal life from plant life, then his discovery, if reported as intelligently as the reporter would report the discovery of the bums, would be offered as news in the lodging houses and it might interest the bums.

One great difficulty in journalism, one reason why it is thrown back upon crime, scandal, and gossip, is that the scientist cannot report his own results. Sought in the abstract, they are seized in the abstract and the abstraction is passed on in the dead slang of science. Now and then a mind comes along, takes the materials piled up by the day laborers of science, perceives the possibilities in them, prosecutes an intelligent search for the missing links, then conceives the whole and "builds him a structure brave." Since he is an intelligent being, he probably speaks a living language and tells the world what has been going on in the laboratories. This is understanding. Also it is journalism. The news may go out in book form, but bookmaking today is largely journalism, and books are a rich source of newspaper news. Think of the "news" in the books, old and new, which the newspapers could get out if their reviewers had understanding!

For the understanding I am talking about is that which understands not only what is known but what is not known. The editor cannot, he does not have to know everything. He needs only to understand, and to know what he and we do not know. That is part of what used to be

called culture till the uncultivated got hold of the word and emptied it of its contents. The editor, whether of a book publishing house, a magazine, or a newspaper, should be in touch with the men who know, but he must not, like them, draw back from those who do not know. He has to have human sympathy. The pupil of the learned, he is the teacher of the ignorant.

The objection to the school of journalism that it will have to prepare such men, not specialists, but men of broad culture, and that that is what the universities are supposed to do, is sound enough as far as it goes. But that is my point. Perhaps the Pulitzer School will do what the universities are supposed to do. Having a special purpose, and that purpose as broad as life, maybe it will teach what it teaches in its relation to life. Maybe it will teach what it teaches, and teach men to tell it. There is the niche for the School of Journalism: knowledge so understood by men so intelligent that they can tell it so that all men may read as they run. Let the students of journalism learn—what you please; there is a choice, but no matter. The point is, having learned, let them write it, write it, write it. They cannot write without understanding it, so writing is not the one thing to learn. That will come, or not, with the trying. But having the habit of seeing and learning, they can go, such students, where they will—to the North Pole, into business, into politics, into literature, into journalism; they will be journalists all. They will be able to tell what they know.

Teach Latin and Greek in the School of Journalism. Teach them for the great "stories" in those languages, but also to teach the future reporter to tell these great stories and deliver these great orations in good English. They can't do that without conning correctly and feeling truly the classics, and that will teach them, as it teaches the educated Englishman, English.

Teach philosophy. Teach it for its own sake, for the sake of the great news assignments its ultimate queries contain for man, for the relationship which it develops of knowledge to knowledge and of knowledge to life. But tell the student how the best paid editorial writer in New York is selling his penny paper to thousands on thousands of men, some with brokers' orders in their pockets, some with dinner pails in their hands, by simply writing simply the ideas of the metaphysicians. Journalism has run mad (like science and like art) after facts, and my penny journalist almost alone is selling ideas. The college-bred editor has so far lost his humanity that he forgets the intellectual pleasure he had when as a junior he saw the whole world as Hegel saw it. Schopenhauer speaks bitterly of the unsatisfied "metaphysicial needs of the human mind." Christian Scientists are building marble churches and Dowie is founding a city upon the recognition and satisfaction of this demand of the ignorant. The supply is bad and my metaphysician journalist may offer bad philosophy, but he can write it and why should not some other think sound thought and write that as simply for the journals, yellow and pink. The world wonders, like a child, at the world and the sophisticated keep back its secrets. By all means teach metaphysics and philosophy in the School of Journalism, but teach it so that Hegel will not have become old before he was news.

Teach literature; not only for the English of it, but also that the journalist may be able to see that a murder is not merely a sensation but a tragedy; so that the yellow journalist who means well will not begin his crime news with the announcement that "Patrick Healey shot and killed Mary Healey, his wife, in their apartment on the fifth floor of the tenement at No. 7032 Ridge Street, today," but at the beginning of their story, "how Patrick Healey met Mary McCormick on the emigrant ship seven years ago." If we can't have science and must have crime, let us have the human story, not as Shakespeare gave Othello's, but with some sense of the growth of love through jealousy into hate and despair. There is some mighty good reporting in literature, and that I would see taught as reporting, not literature. Let us have more of the mere telling, less of

the literature; if the young writers would learn to report, the literature might be left to the Lord. My experience of the college graduates on newspapers was that they were so full of inspiration from literature that they had no eye left for the inspiration of life, and thus, bent on the literary career, they missed both that and the news.

Teach English, of course, the spelling of it, the punctuation, the grammar, rhetoric, and etymology. But teach it, somehow, as it is not often taught in colleges now. Why not begin with the use of it? The fact first, cold and hard, but the student's very own, and simply stated in the student's own way; then the humor or the pity of it genuinely felt and imagined; then the idea, perceived and put true. Never mind the style. Like murder, that will out, if it is in the man. Hammer out of the student only clearness; the rest leave to him and the facts, and—to the brutal copy desk where "fine writers" are killed and only fine men who write escape.

Teach ethics, not alone the ethics of journalism. Teach ethics and teach it so that it will stick. The School of Journalism cannot make good men any more than it can make good journalists. You cannot teach sincerity and humor, but you can teach the poverty of cynicism and the meanness of lying and "faking," and you can make men who cannot be bad and be happy. Now we have editors who "roast" with a serene conscience public men who submit to "pulls," the while they and their own newspapers are "pulled" all to pieces. Tell the future journalist what his special temptations are going to be, how the advertiser, as well as the party leader, asks to have reading notices inserted and proper news suppressed—and tell him this so that, though he may surrender, his surrender will be with all the discomfort of guilty knowledge. In brief teach him special ethics with the special morals of his craft. This for himself. For his newspaper he will need, moreover, ethics, plain everyday ethics, and this also should be backed with morals; and so also he has need of the ethics of other professions and businesses, and their morals, which differ most surprisingly, those of the merchant from those of the politician, those of the promoter from those of the banker and the lawyer and the physician. The journalist has to understand other men, how they differ and how very like they are, and often he has to judge them. He could judge the harder for a sympathetic knowledge of their customs, temptations, and the atmosphere in which they live. The way to reach a politician is to reach his politics—the sins of his craft which he knows are sins.

Teach the sciences. Here is a great unexploited field for journalism and there is room in it (as the Sunday newspapers show) for specialization almost as various as science itself. Suppose a man should study botany with the purpose of reporting it all his life. He would ground himself in this science as thoroughly as the man bent on original research; he would learn the "lingo," the methods, master the "literature," and open his mind to its lesser and greater queries. But if he were a student in the School of Journalism, he should be translating all he learned into English through a mind kept open to the interests of other men. Adding to accuracy imagination, he would spend a useful life (and make money) telling us plant "stories," their lives and habits; the pursuits and triumphs of the botanist and the philosophy of botany. If we had had such a man in chemistry, we should not have had to wait so long to find out what Professor and Madame Curie know about radium. Oh, I know I am asking for John Burroughs. But that is not asking too much. Why should not more of the half-educated, wholely wholesome and beautiful men we all know, be such as he? Not so wonderful, yet true, gentle, understanding reporters.

Teach law, but teach it for a man's use, not a lawyer's, so that the reporter can report trials and interpret opinions correctly and intelligently, and so that editors, secure in the ethics of the profession and in the principles and traditions of the law, may feel safe in holding the bench and bar up to their duty. We need right now a man who can call the courts back to their duty, but

who but a lawyer can do it with authority? and how many lawyers can do it with plain, human force?

Teach history, but teach it with an eye on today, and teach the history of today with an eye on the history of the past. Give special courses on the history of the East and the Far East for correspondents and editorial writers. And why should not students ambitious to become correspondents have the rudiments of war; the history of diplomacy; international law, etc., etc.? I remember well the time when I wished that my college course had included finance in its relation to Wall Street and the Treasury Department, to railroads in operation, and trusts in their up-building. But I can remember many courses which I wish I had known when I took them were good not in themselves alone.

Any university has the beginnings of a School of Journalism. A professor of journalism who was man enough to judge by the instructor as well as the subject could probably designate several courses fit for the future journalist to take. So he might find others which, unintelligently taught, but necessary, might be supplemented by the professor of journalism himself; he to point out the human significance of the subject matter of the course. Add to these courses in subjects like geography, practical politics, the ethics of journalism, modern industrial problems (like labor studied by a man in the field and taught for field work)—these, if all made writing courses, would come pretty near rounding out the school for general purposes. But this scheme would not furnish what is very much needed, courses, possibly postgraduate, for what is sure to come, the specialist in journalism of whom I have spoken. The business in nearly all its branches, books, magazines, and journals is in need of trained historians, geographers, economists, experts in finance, and politics—and government—who can write. And there is dire need of writers who know the arts, music, painting, and literature; and can interpret the works thereof. The United States with all its book reviewers, has not one such critic of literature as Russia has two or three of, a guide to both writer and reader.

Something has been said about teaching the business and mechanism of newspapers. This is not very important. It is not true that we all learn it all in the course of business. The newspaper man in a small place may “pick up” knowledge of all branches of the business, but he does not do it in the great cities. It might be worth while to run a newspaper in connection with the school, and it might be well worthwhile if it printed, besides the gossip of the campus, the news of the colleges; if it reported the laboratories as well as the training table. But one very serious service of the School of Journalism might be rendered by a study of journalism. A self-made business journalist is full of crass theories and blind cocksureness. One man who is a successful manager will tell you that the thing to do to succeed is to print local news—detailed; petty neighborhood news; and he can point to examples to prove his theories. Another will say you have to have but very little news, only interesting reading, and he can point to examples of success along those lines. None of them knows the whole business, nor just why he succeeds or why he fails. Each knows something well, and they all know a great deal. If a trained man could go to all of them, get from each his best knowledge of experience, and were big enough to apply it all or the substance of it all, he certainly could teach them all something, and he might make a great newspaper. Someone should gather the experimental knowledge, analyze it and sum it up. Then there are the foreign journalists; we Americans despise them, but they know something. Let the College of Journalism find out what it is and teach it to us. In a word, teach journalism, yes, but learn it first, somebody.