

NEWSPAPER CONTROVERSIES.

SOME PRUDENT COUNSEL BY AN OLD EDITOR ON PRESS SQUABBLES.

THE wisdom of to-day is largely commercial. Confront a business man with a proposition, and the first question is: "What is in it for me?" Still lingering in the mind of the newspaperman is a vague idea that his vocation should be made an exception to the rule. He puts his hand to the plow and turns back to ask if his mission, like that of the pulpit, is reformatory.

The matter of controversies, says R. W. Mitchell, in a paper read before The Missouri Press Association, like many other problems which we must solve in the interest of our business, must be determined by the object in view. Most journalists with gray hairs learn the difficulty of forcing men to be good.

In the ordinary acceptance, a newspaper controversy is a running debate between two newspapermen. Each man says the other is in the wrong and attempts to convert or silence him. The attempt has never been successful in Missouri.

There are times when a dignified, even though an impassioned, argument becomes a duty. In behalf of a principle, a championship now and then devolves upon an editor, and he would be less than a man if he declined it. Such contingencies give rise to controversies wise at least upon one side, but they do not arise as often as some of us are disposed to believe.

We do not cultivate the fighting spirit as assiduously as the writers of former generations, but we are still too apt to rush into battle without sleeping upon the propriety of it. The proper policy will be reached when we avoid war until peace threatens evil.

Personal controversy is a disease largely incident to editorial infancy. During the days when the young man is burning incense to himself, he rides in full armor with visor down, and when dun cows and dragons grow scarce, he charges the windmills with knight-like ardor. Fondled and fostered, his personality becomes an abnormal growth, and more than one man jostles it without being conscious of its existence. With age, the supersensitive bump becomes a callous excrescence. Absorbed in his real work, the matured journalist scarcely remembers that he has a life apart from his paper.

Wise controversies of a personal nature are as rare as good men in Sodom. People who read controversies generally smile in much the same way that they do when Grocer Smith says Grocer Brown sands his sugar.

You cannot prevent a man from attacking you in print, but it is seldom that you are called upon to reply in the same vein. One time in 100, it may be best to make a statement of facts, to relieve the public error. In the other 99 cases, your silence becomes intensely eloquent. The most blighting treatment of a malapert assailant is that which contempt should dictate. It minimizes the aggressor and dignifies the assailed, as no other course could. In over 20 years of newspaper work, I have often repented a hasty retort, but have never regretted ignoring a personal attack.

Imagine yourself called upon to select a man to step into your place and maintain the prosperity of your paper. Would you seek a good financier among the ready fighters, or would you prefer a cool, dispassionate man, with sense enough to sacrifice his self-importance to the welfare of the business?

The petulant, fault-finding spirit which gives rise to many

controversies is certainly as disagreeable to the patrons of a newspaper as to those of a merchant.

In politics, the party paper must be the party champion, but the respect which the journalist owes to himself and to his profession should be an effectual bar to all vituperation. At all times beware of the man who would incite controversies. Analyze his character and, if possible, discover his motive. If it is not good, leave him to breed trouble in some other direction.

If competing newspapermen could be brought into more intimate relations, there would be fewer unwise controversies. Most of us have been surprised at the way our prejudices have vanished after a better acquaintance with our business rivals. We have found them broadminded where we thought them narrow, generous instead of selfish, and more than willing to reciprocate every evidence of fraternal feeling.

We need to know each other better. It would, from many an error, free us, and from unwise controversy. Next to yourself, the man on whom the welfare of your paper depends is your competitor. Make him feel that you do not regret his success or exult at his failure, and you have laid a substantial foundation for a thriving and pleasant business.

My ideal of the newspaperman is not a fighter. Forbearance does not imply fear or servility. The highest type of courage is passive. My model is a man above the petty prejudices of rivalry. He speaks of the good in his competitor and leaves the bad unsaid. Socially and in the way of business you meet him without constraint. He visits you in your office, and his company adds pleasure to your hours of recreation. He opposes no good movement because it was instituted by his rival. He maintains fair rates. He makes capital by his own good work and not by depreciating the productions of others. He considers competition no bar to friendship, and loves peace for the blessings it brings to others as well as to himself. With him an unwise controversy would be impossible. He is not more than human, but is such a man as you would wish to hold your hand when you are dying.

WHY JOB PRINTING PAYS THE BEST.

"No, we are not going to start a paper; we are going after the business that pays." This was the answer received to a query propounded to a couple of hustling young printers who were buying an outfit at a supply-house lately. The "business that pays," in the printing line, is tacitly admitted, by all printers, to be the job printing branch of the business. To go into an analysis of the question as to why job printing is more certainly remunerative than the publishing of a country paper, one would have to concede, to start with, a number of important advantages to the job printer. On the other hand, however, the advantage claimed for the job printer is not so much a question of actual profit on the outlay, as it is one of getting in promptly, and without loss, what the business has earned. A printer who will indignantly scorn every proposal for barter where job printing is the basis of exchange, insisting upon and readily obtaining the cash for every job that goes out, will allow himself to be inveigled into "swapping space" for almost any worthless thing that is offered, on the mistaken theory that space doesn't cost anything, anyhow. When the newspaper manager becomes as careful of his deals as the job printer, and so watchful and persistent a collector, the discrepancy in profits between the two departments will be no longer discernible.