

Norman Hapgood on Modern Journalism

Modern Journalism was the subject of an intensely interesting and instructive address delivered by Norman Hapgood, editor of Collier's Weekly, before an exceedingly largely attended luncheon of the Canadian Club, held in Ottawa recently. Mr. Hapgood, who is one of the best known of the modern school of journalists, proved to be a clever and witty speaker, with a thorough knowledge of his subject matter.

The advance of the great newspapers of the United States from that state known as "Yellow" was ably described by the speaker, who attributed the causes for the change to public opinion, and a demand from the financial supporters of the papers, the advertisers, for a cleaner and saner journalism which would appeal to all classes of the various communities served by them. That the big dailies of the United States had still a long way to go before they would be on a par with the British newspaper was admitted by Mr. Hapgood.

He said: "There are something like 19,000 newspapers scattered through the United States. The influence that they wield is enormous. Their differences are almost beyond exaggeration. That is a necessary thing to bear in mind when one undertakes to generalize in a short space of time, about them. I might very well give an inaccurate idea of what I meant and I am very likely to do so unless some of you gentlemen take me up afterwards and let me set myself right.

"Napoleon Bonaparte said, even in his day, that he feared three newspapers more than he feared 100,000 men. A well known American agitator, Garrison, said that before the Civil War the penny papers had more real power than the government at Washington. If that was true then, you can imagine how much truer it is now. It is extremely difficult to exaggerate—not the direct power of the newspapers; that is not so great as it is usually considered; but it is extremely difficult to exaggerate the indirect power. They are in a certain sense the very air that we all breathe. They create the atmosphere of our thoughts. They are the medium through which we get our most important information. Some of you gentlemen have opinions of a great many subjects, and some of you are able to get the sources at first hand. Some few of you are able to see the men who are doing the things, whatever the topic may be; but that is the great exception. The most of us have to take the newspapers as our starting point. They are the premises. If the premises that are given to us are not sound the conclusion cannot be sound.

"A great question, and one of the most important questions in our social life today is this: Whether the one great medium of information—the one great machine for furnishing the people the premises on which they shall decide all the important questions before them—whether this great organization is doing its work as it ought to do it. The newspapers as an institution whatever one may say for them or against them, are absolutely essential. Democratic government could not exist without them.

"Modern journalism is something very distinct from what journalism was half a century ago. The leading American editor at the time of the Civil War was Horace Greeley and Horace Greeley would not employ young people who had been to college. He said he wanted for his staff men who had grown up in the office—boys who had slept on bales of newspapers and eaten ink. Nowadays it is very hard to get the position of even cub reporter unless you have had a decidedly superior education. It is strange that improvement in the intellectual preparation of the personnel should have taken place at the very time that the newspaper has to reach a much less cultivated audience. In Greeley's time the newspaper was written for the few. It was written for what you might roughly call the stock holding class and the prosperous class.

"Now it has to deal with a civilization which is being crowded to an extent that Canadians of course do not know in their own country with an immense mass of raw material from all the old countries of Europe. The newspaper man knows it is not written now for the home, especially of a family that has been three or four generations in the United States. It is written for the family that sends for example a child to school and the teacher asks the child what the creopolis is. The child thinks a minute and says, 'The creopolis was the wolf that suckled Romeo and Juliet.' (Laughter.) In other words the child brings nothing from tradition; it brings nothing from the accumulated home atmosphere.

Yellow Journalism

"Mr. Pulitzer, and other imaginative men, conceived the idea of making a newspaper that should represent that great uneducated mass. That was the birth of yellow journalism. 'Yellow journalism,' is very often used as a term of reproach, often as a term of praise. It could almost equally be used either way. It has had enormous faults. It still has enormous faults. It fills the reader's mind with a certain murkiness of atmosphere, a certain vileness, a certain lack of truthful shading, because its object is to make a sharp sensation at any price.

"On the other hand, it has been a great liberating influence. The newspapers of half a century ago were class publications that had no intimate realization of how the working-man lived or what he cared for. They were very much concerned over any drop in the

stock market, or over the dropping of a 'H' for instance, at the beginning of a word, than they were over the exact amount of wages that any man earned, or the exact efficiency of the public school system or any of the other matters that come home to the man, woman and child who have really to struggle for their livelihood.

"Now these newspapers had caught the popular idea and decided to speak in a tone that ordinary people would have to listen to; and they also undertook to represent the interests of the ordinary people. For the first time in history the masses had a champion. So that the yellow press has done an incalculable good to journalism in our country. It has done an incalculable good in two ways directly and perhaps even more indirectly, because through its influence has sprung up a kind of journalism which is neither conservative nor yellow. It has made the old style conservative journalism more liberal than they were before, and through it, perhaps, through the marriage of the two, has sprung up a progressive and liberal and sympathetic journalism, which at the same time avoids the raw faults of the yellow journalism from which it was born.

A Broader Outlook

"The faults of yellow journalism are diminishing. They are diminishing for a perfectly unescapable business reason. The yellow journalism seeks first of all circulation. It gets an enormous circulation rather easily. However it has to be sold for one cent. It is found that when it is sold for one cent that the one cent does not pay for the manufacture of the paper. Therefore, the larger the circulation the more it loses except for the advertising. Now men are not going to advertise in a paper all the clientele of which is uneducated. That kind of clientele won't have purchasing power. Therefore the yellow journals realize that their advertising is going to be all of a cheap kind and limited in quantity unless they hedge a bit. So the last ten years especially has seen a diminution in the extreme of sensationalism.

"Take a Hearst paper today. Take the New York American and compare that with the Hearst paper of say ten years ago, and it will look positively Bourbon, like the extreme conservative paper, in fact, not only in its appearance but in the amount of actual news it gives. Only about a week before I came here I saw an announcement in the Hearst papers that they were going to give up their objectionable quack and patent medicine advertising. Now

anybody who knows the Hearst papers does not think they would approve of doing that for the welfare of the community. When the Hearst papers do it, it is because they realize that the drift of business is that way, and that they cannot get the best of advertising if they keep the worst.

Journals of Force

"As examples of the kind of journalism that has been brought into life by the interaction of these two forces I would like to mention about three newspapers that give specific examples in my own country of papers that are nobly carrying out the possibilities of journalism today. Perhaps the most hopeless city politically and economically in the United States until within the last year or so was Philadelphia, and yet Philadelphia was able to shake off that combination of business and politics and indifference which had brought it to the state it was in, and instituted a genuine, strong, reform government.

"Pennsylvania is doing better than most of the States in such important reforms that come into every home as the enforcement of the pure food laws. That could not have been brought about but for one thing. It would have been a long long time before that change would have taken place in Pennsylvania had it not been for the strength and courage of the Philadelphia North American. There is a paper that is making history, a paper that is as great as any old fogey paper in the United States—sound, well informed, but at the same time it knows how to talk to the people in the people's language. It gives up the old-fashioned pedantries and gets right down to hard facts on every proposition that comes before it.

"I suppose the most influential paper in the Middle West, and possibly the most influential paper in the long run in the United States is the Kansas City Star. That has been inseparable from the fact that Kansas and that part of the United States have been in some respects the leaders in social progress in our country. You cannot tell just how far the enlightenment and freedom of Kansas made the Kansas City Star what it is and to what extent the Star made Kansas what it is. For thirty years it has consistently refused to do anything that meant money at the sacrifice of integrity, and it is one of the cheerful facts in the world that while honesty alone does not go very far honesty combined with a good, substantial amount of ability is perfectly sure to be successful in journalism.

The New Journalism

"There is one other effect of this new journalism that I want to speak of. I think it will be clear in Canada, though the circumstances will necessarily be somewhat different from those in the United States. The United States has been behind the leading countries of Europe. It has been far behind Australia; it is very very far behind where England has been brought under Lloyd George in social legislation, in an understanding of the needs of industry and especially of the laboring classes in industry. We were not able to get for a decade following the Civil War, our politics on a real basis of grappling with these questions of absolute human welfare. There were the old fashioned reciprocal insults of politics.

"Now the whole situation in no small degree is due to the fact that this new species of journalism that has grown up is entirely different. We deal with realities now. We discuss such things as employers' liability, the rate of wages and the number of hours for people to work in certain industries, the proper relation of the bench to the legislature, the question of whether some of the restrictions of our constitutions have not been outgrown and so on.

"The questions that are interesting the American people today more than any others are two kinds: they are either industrial conditions or they are direct government questions. Direct government questions interest the western part of our country beyond the understanding of anybody who lives along the Atlantic seaboard. They feel that the constitution as it has been interpreted by the States has become a material obstacle to the expression of the popular will.

"Therefore they introduced such things as the Initiative, which means that the people, if they are not satisfied with the laws their representatives make, can make them themselves the Referendum, which means that the people can unmake laws by their representatives; the Recall, which they apply even to judges, and which means that if they get somebody in a situation which he is not filling satisfactorily they can haul him back again. And now they are fighting particularly to choose their own presidents. Of course they do not choose them now. They choose between two but one party puts up some man who is not necessarily the people's choice, and the other party puts up a man who may not be the people's choice. He is the party choice. So

all the people have to do is to say which they will prefer of two men, neither of whom they may want at all. The fact that the popular newspapers have been very largely the creators of this new political independence is one of the biggest things to their credit. The magazines lead the newspapers in this respect as they have led in independence. That does not mean that the men connected with the magazines are any more honest or of a higher type than the men connected with the newspapers. It merely means that they having a national field it is a great deal easier for them to free themselves from the evils which still threatens them.

Dictating Influences

"My general attitude is entirely optimistic but I do not want to leave out of account the fact that there are very great evils still to be overcome in the newspaper world. There have not all been put before the public yet, but a great many of them have. The connections between certain obvious forces and the newspapers is generally understood. We spoke here this afternoon about the patent medicine influence. That was the strongest and most direct that existed. The patent medicine people spent a million dollars a year in advertising. The consequence was that they told editors all over the United States what to do. They went further than that; they sent telegrams to Washington, telling representatives in Washington whether to vote for or against a bill.

"There was in Massachusetts probably as free a state and certainly as intelligent a state as there is in our country—and yet a terrifically interesting story that happened in the legislature a few years ago was entirely killed with the exception of one newspaper. The remarks that various members made to one another on the floor of the house, the charges of corruption and bad faith in the state. If there had been no hidden power at work, that story would have started on the first page and run on to the back pages in every newspaper but as a matter of fact there was just one newspaper in all Massachusetts that told the story. That was because the story was connected with the patent medicine interest.

"Now that has been very largely changed. The grosser forms of abuse and control have been lessened, but the subtler ones remain. We know on Collier's—we are not prepared yet to publish it, because we have not got the kind of evidence that can be relied upon, that we could bring into court, though it is absolutely conclusive—that there are contracts between New York papers and their advertisers called for immunity 'written contracts.' These contracts read that in return for a certain kind of advertising the newspapers promises three things usually. It promises a certain amount of editorial support. It promises in addition to this definite editorial support, news notices, that is, what we call sometimes 'tainted' news—that it shall fix the news up to look like disinterested dispatches, but it is really furnished by the advertiser in question to promote his own interests. The third is that if a newspaper takes any position on any public question contrary to the interests of this particular concern, the advertising contract shall become null and void. Card indexes are kept by a good many agencies throughout the United States giving the affiliations of different editors, whether they are on a certain political side or on the side of wanting to make money and so on.

On a Higher Plane

"All these things have to be mentioned in a review of the field, merely for the purposes of honesty and completeness. The general emphasis could be put altogether on progress because there is no doubt whatever that the public, and in the wake of the public the newspapers are becoming very very much higher in their standards of truthfulness and completeness every day.

Questions and Answers

At the conclusion of his address Mr. Hapgood declared himself open for questions.

"Would you take any university man on your staff?" he was asked.

"Certainly not. About 99 out of 100 we would have nothing to do with," he replied, and to another question as to the training necessary he answered, "Simply that the qualities most necessary are honesty, general intelligence and the ability to use the English language."

To a further query, Mr. Hapgood stated that the third paper he had in mind and might not have mentioned at the time he was speaking was the Springfield Republican. "Not only was the Springfield Republican the only paper in Massachusetts that spoke out on the patent medicine story," he said, "but it was the only paper outside of Boston that was not bought up by the public utility companies at the time that the argument was going on between citizens' organizations and these companies about what contracts ought to be made."

To a question regarding the three great New York papers, the Herald, World, and American, the speaker said that they had recently become more respectable, but would not go further along this line than they were forced by their patrons.

Again referring to the employment of university graduates, he qualified his statement by saying that while only about one out of a hundred of them would make satisfactory newspapermen, only about one out of a thousand others would fill the bill.

THE CRUELTY OF FATE

At this moment Thomas Hardy, who will celebrate his 72nd birthday in June next, is the most famous and the least personally known man in English letters. He is at once one of the wealthiest, and perhaps the most humble living of all well known writers. He has lately emerged from his retreat so far as to direct the production at Dorchester of his Sussex dramas, says the Montreal Herald.

"Max Gate," his home, stands outside Dorchester, where the town has been left behind and wooded hills and naked coombs begin to stretch away into the distance. It is a little red brick house, covered over with vines and creepers, and only two stories high, if one does not count the square towers which rise on each side of the building. There are white gates on the road and a cunningly-twisted little "drive" with a clump of tall shrubbery in the middle making the place practically invisible to one who travels thus far to see a great man's house.

The house is comparatively modern—Mr. Hardy built it not very many years ago—and though it has no resemblance whatever to the farmstead homes that its owner has loved to write about, and nothing of the proportions of a mansion, yet it presents the maximum degree of refinement with the minimum degree of size. A little white hall is just within the door, and one turns from that to a larger hall. Then, right and left, are two almost spacious rooms—the dining-room and the drawing-room. Upstairs, Mr. Hardy has his study, and into that sanctum few of even his most personal friends have ever entered.

Yet Mr. Hardy is not exactly the recluse that some might imagine. He is rather the man who is so modest, so utterly retiring, and lives buried, as it were, in so remote a spot, that few people ever attempt to beard him in his den. It is well known, however, that many a young American lady has marched boldly through the white gates of "Max Gate," pulled the bell chain at the front door, asked to see Mr. Hardy and has been rewarded with a brief but altogether delightful interview. Many other people have handed a "Hardy book" to the servant at the door and asked if the author would be so kind as to sign it. They never have been refused.

The fact remains that Mr. Hardy cannot be termed sociable. Even his oldest friends need some excuse when they call upon him, and quit his presence as soon as the excuse is exhausted. He has not, in fact, many personal friends, although his unknown ones must be numbered in tens of thousands.

This was a writer's own experience when he first ventured to wait in person upon the great man.

I wrote a bold letter, said that I was cycling through Dorsetshire and would give much for the honor personally of meeting one

who had been my constant friend, although a stranger. A small letter card came back, "I shall be at home if you care to call at three o'clock on the afternoon of Friday." I took train from London to Salisbury with my bicycle, and Friday morning found me pedaling through the hilly, narrow, leafy lanes which divide the good old town of Salisbury from the better old town of Dorchester. And what a sight is the approach by the highway to any one of these fine old cities!

I had been looking anxiously out for a true Dorset peasant and now I met one—a withered old man cutting the hedge—and I asked him, what was the monument that I could see. "That?" he said. "Oh, that be the Hardy Tower, master."

"The Hardy Tower?" I echoed, for I had heard that the world-famed novelist was scarcely appreciated, like all prophets, in his own country. "What Hardy?"

"I don't know, master, but the writing on it says, 'Thomas Hardy.' I've been up'n, but I only knows that much."

"I was amazed and questioned him further. 'Was it the Thomas Hardy who wrote books and lived at Dorchester?' But the old man didn't know. 'Very likely it was,' he said, 'but he'd never heard of no such gentleman.'

I was anxious to settle the mystery of that tower on the downs, and made enquiries accordingly.

The stationery shop-keeper laughed at the question. "It's a monument," he told me, "erected nearly a hundred years ago to the Captain Thomas Hardy in whose arms Nelson died on board the Victory; a distant relative, it's supposed, of our Thomas Hardy. I'm often asked the question, and it's safe to make this prediction, that in another hundred years no one will believe that it's anybody's monument but the novelist's. It will be useless to argue to the contrary."

The door was opened by a young servant girl who seemed the very embodiment of Mr. Hardy's peasant heroines; a short, well-formed young woman with the freshest of color and the pleasantest of smiles, who said that Mr. Hardy was expecting me and took me into a bright room where I had time enough to look about me. I saw that the furniture was all the handiwork of old English and that the few pictures on the walls were by the younger modern artists, such as exhibit at the famous New English Art Club. It did not at all seem an old man's room. On a polished table under the window was spread a copy of an illustrated weekly magazine, and the sun touched and emblazoned a bowl of wild poppies.

"I'm very pleased to see you," he said nervously, offering me his hand. "Won't you sit down."

Mr. Hardy did not sit down himself, but had stood by the fireplace with his white hands

holding the lapels of his old-fashioned and even ill-fitting tweed coat.

We were on better terms in a moment, as Mr. Hardy replied, his voice curiously halting, but not as if he was in any doubt of his sentiments. It seemed a mixture of irony and diffidence.

"You are a young man," he said. "The cruelty of fate becomes apparent to people as they grow older. At first one may perhaps escape contact with it, but if one lives long enough one realizes that happiness is very ephemeral."

"But is not optimism a useful and sane philosophy?" I asked him.

"There's too much sham optimism, humbugging and even cruel optimism," Mr. Hardy retorted. "Sham optimism is really a more heartless doctrine to preach than even an exaggerated pessimism—the latter leaves one at least on the safe side. There is too much sentiment in most fiction. It is necessary for somebody to write a little mercilessly—although, of course, it's painful to have to do it."

We talked for a long while on very many subjects, but I do not think Mr. Hardy revealed himself more thoroughly than he did in his answer to my question.

I had the tenderness of his nature best, perhaps, when he spoke of the passion that we call "love." "Love is tragic," he said, "but it is very beautiful." And few writers have ever made it seem a thing more beautiful than he has.

Justice in England—G. K. Chesterton lately avowed that if the English were logical, if a man were stung by a wasp on Brown's land he should prosecute Brown under the game laws for keeping a dangerous wasp at large.

The English laws are not quite so logical as that, but are logical enough for a court lately to allow compensation under the workmen's compensation act to the widow of a waiter who had died from the sting of a wasp on the tip of his tongue while setting the table in a tent for dinner given to the villagers on the occasion of a great wedding.

It needs a long sentence to get in all these unusual details, but nothing can be unusual enough to perturb the orderly course of British justice. The sting was an accident it occurred in the course of the waiter's employment—let justice be done.—Springfield Republican.

"You don't meet any more bunco steers of gold-briek men."

"No," replied Farmer Cornatossle; "when a man is after your money now, he doesn't take the trouble to be sociable an' show you a good time. He jes' addresses a few circulars an' expects you to send him the money by mail."—Washington Star.

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