

"DOING JUSTICE TO OURSELVES."

Portion of a paper by Sir Edward Russell, of The Liverpool Post.

AT the Cardiff meeting of the British Institute of Journalists, referred to elsewhere, the president-elect, Sir Edward Russell, editor of The Liverpool Daily Post, read a paper entitled "On Doing Justice to Ourselves," from which the following is taken. It is called forth by the recent references of Mr. Birrell, M.P., to the press, which were produced in PRINTER AND PUBLISHER last month in condensed form.

"The only really responsible person in a newspaper office is the editor. Even the manager's invaluable and indispensable assistance in the conduct of a paper still leaves the editor solely responsible for its conduct. But what is an editor's experience in actual practice? He does his best to get associated with himself men of like spirit and like intentions. He does his best to induce them to work with him constantly in a sympathetic and harmonious manner. His ideal is that, from his first lieutenant or assistant editor down through the ranks of sub-editors, commercial editors, leader writers, book reviewers, dramatic critics, sporting writers, and all sorts of reporters, there should be prevalent at all times such a conscientious correspondence of the mind with truth and right, and with his own ways of looking at things, as well as such a competent acquaintance with the requirements which law and prudence impose, that practically his own superintendence will, to a very large extent, find little to correct or even to modify. Unless each member of the staff of a paper from highest to lowest were to exercise as far as he could editorial functions in the preparation of his own part of the work, the duties of an editor would be overwhelming, and, indeed, impossible to be performed with sufficiency. As it is, an editor, apart from the duty of inspiring his staff, only has in the way of supervision to correct and bring into proper shape the comparatively few performances in which there has been mistake or misfortune. That editor is the happiest, and I will not shrink from saying that he is amongst the ablest, who finds in directing the journal of which he is the head, that almost all his wishes are anticipated, and that down to the youngest police reporter there is a constant and present exercise of the intellect, and a just and vivid regard for the public interests.

"I need scarcely invite those who are present here to consider what the life of an editor would be or what the success of a newspaper would be likely to be in which there was not from top to bottom this sense of the duties and proprieties of a journalist. The one main principle of a newspaper office is that, as far as he can, and as far as he knows how, every person who officially contributes to its columns is as careful from every point of view as the editor should be in supervising his work. The police reporter must know what it is for the interest of the public to have recorded; what it is safe in point of law to give; how to bring out the points of argument, the purport and humor of testimony, and the tenor of magisterial comment. When his work comes before the editor he may or may not be found to have managed his report exactly as the editor upon his responsibility wishes it to appear. But no reporter of a newspaper who is worthy of his work wilfully leaves anything on risk upon which he himself can exercise, as it were, a sound editorial judgment. It is a matter of pride with a good journalist that what he produces shall pass without material correction. It is recorded of Edmund Kean that he

once said to an actor, with whom he was rehearsing, 'See here, this is how you ought to do it.' Upon which the poor actor replied, 'Yes, Mr. Kean, if I were in your position and getting your salary that is how I should do it.' A good journalist, even in the humblest rank, would not indulge in such a repartee. From his earliest beginnings in his profession he of set purpose imbibes the principles upon which journalism ought to be carried on, and makes it his aim to spare his chief all the trouble he can and to render his chief all the assistance he can, by making every bit of his work such as the most efficient and high-minded editor would wish it to be. What I have said of the police reporter is true of every member of the staff. This editorial perception, though it may seem to be latent, is the real backbone of efficiency in a newspaper office, and the man, however humble, who is conscious of doing his duties—even the most mechanical duties—in this conscientious way is entitled to regard himself, wherever he goes and at any stage of his career, as morally worthy to rank with the greatest editors, and substantially entitled to that public gratitude upon which the press at large has such indefeasible claims.

"There are those who recklessly impute that small and personal motives step in and color the action of journalists. To deny that such a thing ever occurred would be absurd. But to testify that one has scarcely ever met with it among one's fellow journalists is the bounden duty of anyone who is in a position to bear such testimony, and it should be received by the public with the respect due to experience and to conscientious conviction.

"A more plausible demur will be raised by many on the ground that party preferences and organised support of party vitiate the impartiality of the press. But this statement, though plausible, I boldly deny. One of the old cynicisms that wit has given long life to is the saying of Dr. Johnson when he was reporting speeches from memory in the House of Commons before the reporters' gallery was permitted, that he never let the Whig dogs get the best of it. But anyone who knows Dr. Johnson or his reports must be well aware that these were not deficient in fairness or in efficiency; and certainly since the reporting of debates and meetings has taken the form in which we know it, it has been conspicuously just and adequate not merely in copiousness, but in the sufficient arraying of opposite arguments. A man who deliberately, as a matter of bias, leaves out a good point on either side when he is reporting a debate ought to be regarded by his fellow journalists as a dastard. As to the articles which are written in the press on political affairs, it is natural and necessary that they should vary with the party to which, in the main, each newspaper is attached. But these articles are neither insincere nor unfair as a rule, although all debating, whether by speech or writing, is apt to have occasional disingenuousness. The political observations of a public writer must depend partly on his point of view, and partly upon his trained capacity. It used to be a foolish notion of Mr. Cobden and Mr. Bright that the less comments there were the better, and that the public were competent to form their opinions upon mere facts and news and occurrences. This is not so. The very people who most sneer at the ready pronouncements of the press continually profit by them in the formation of those opinions which either settle them or disturb them in their party action, and in their special ideas. And the production of the comments by which these effects are produced upon the mind