

CHAPTER IX.

LAPSES FROM GRACE.

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James Agate, the well-known literary critic of the "Daily Express", tell the story of a young man who applied for a position on a newspaper and explained that his strong point was "invective". The Editor asked: "Invective about what?". "Nothing in particular", the youth replied, "just invective". There is probably no foundation in truth for the above story but at least it serves admirably to bring out one of the chief reasons for a chapter such as this being necessary in a survey of the Press relations with the world around it. It shows a lack of appreciation of the functions, duties, and responsibilities of the Press. To this lack of appreciation can be attributed most of the lapses from grace that occur almost daily in one paper or another. Another reason for ethical lapses is over-keenness and an ambitious desire to "shine" on the part of the more youthful members of a newspaper staff.

Specific instances of betrayal of public trust, of breach of journalistic etiquette, and of breach of confidence with public bodies will be pointed out in this chapter, while attention will also be drawn to certain degenerating influences which are creeping--slowly and almost imperceptibly--into the Press. The latter influences are perhaps of more importance than the specific instances, for, whereas the instances themselves, however serious they may be are

temporary /

398. "Daily Express", November 5th, 1931.

temporary and transient, while the insidious influences, unless perceived and actively checked, give promise of having come to stay, and of lowering the general level of journalism.

This is dangerous ground on which the writer is trespassing, for certain actions of newspapers which the writer feels justified in including under this chapter head might with equal justification be included by a colleague under the Chapter dealing with the contributions of the Press to public life. The problem is essentially a subjective one and each investigator must record the results of his investigations as the facts present themselves to him. The reality of the truism that truth is relative will be forcibly brought home by the possible double construction that can be placed on some of the matters which will come under discussion in the following pages.

For instance, opinion was sharply divided in England last year on the question of the free gift schemes by which certain daily newspapers in London and the Provinces were "buying" new readers in order to maintain present circulations and to increase them as far as possible. The "Leicester Evening Mail", to choose a paper at random, announced that, for a limited period, the seal appearing on the front page of the paper, would be worth money: Let the paper tell the story in its own words:

"This Week the familiar Red Seal of the "Leicester Evening Mail" has been changed to green.

"The Green Seal is worth money.

"Each Green Seal is good value for one penny, and will be accepted as cash in exchange for goods by traders in the city and district who are co-operating with us in this novel scheme to popularise the paper. (300)

You /

299. October 13th, 1931.

300. The underlining is that of the writer.

"You simply cut out or tear out the Green Seal from any edition, and hand it over the counter for a penny article. So simple!

"You can save up the Green Seals to any number, then exchange them for goods reckoning the value at one penny for each seal.

"The traders who accept our Green Seals will in turn convert them into cash at the office of the "Leicester Evening Mail".

"As long as the Green Seal appears in the paper it will be worth a penny, but our offer will not be open indefinitely. Due notice will be given of the date after which the Seals will not be accepted as cash".

On the face of it there seems little to which objection can be taken in such a scheme, but the cost of the newspaper to the public is one penny and that penny can be converted into goods of an equivalent value by the presentation of the Green Seal to traders, who in turn redeem the seals at the office of the newspaper making the offer. So that the paper is virtually being given away. An agitation was immediately started against this practice by other newspapers who believed that circulations should be obtained by an efficient news service and a dependable expression of opinion, not by enticing offers. The "Daily Express" accordingly denounced the "stunt" in the strongest possible terms, stating that it would have "nothing whatever to do with the free gift scheme which other newspapers have chosen to follow". In an interview published in the same edition of the "Daily Express", Mr. Thomas Bell, Chairman of the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, stated :

"We feel that it is essential to fair and honest business that these free gift schemes to stimulate in many cases dwindling newspaper sales should cease. We as advertisers have been fighting a campaign against these circulation buying methods ever since our advertising convention in Birmingham in 1928. Now the latest free gift programme of certain daily newspapers has brought the question to boiling point.

"Advertisers /

- "Advertisers will no longer pay advertising charges on circulation bought by free gifts.
"We intend to pay only for legitimate circulation: what we call 'reader interest circulation'.
"Newspaper circulation which is secured by free gifts is of no value whatever to the advertiser, for the simple reason that we believe readers obtained by this means take no interest in the newspaper they buy. They buy the paper for the free gift; after that their interest ends.
"To charge advertisers for circulation which is purchased by these free gifts is frankly not good enough.
"We mean to kill these free gift and other schemes for securing what we regard as a fictitious and therefore valueless circulations".

Mr. W. Buchanan-Taylor, publicity and advertisement Manager of J. Lyons and Co.Ltd., in an address to
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the Croydon Chamber of Commerce dealt in forcible language with what he described as the false economics of newspaper coupon competitions. He stated that if the entire population of England were to be steered into a life of coupon collecting, naming the first five in the Derby and the rest, there would be no need to go to Monte Carlo for a hollow-eyed community.

"To induce the whole of the population of this country to send in threepences on the prospect of bringing off a million-to-one chance does not seem to me to be good journalism",

he proceeded.

"A man who buys a dozen copies of one newspaper does not read each copy. He may not read even one copy if he is buying the paper for the coupon.

"The advertiser spends his money in newspapers in the hope that his advertisements will be read. If they are not read, he is throwing his money into the gutter.

"If a million and a half copies are sold and any considerable proportion of that number is bought for the purpose of filling in competition coupons, the advertising value

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of that paper's circulation is being misrepresented.

"I believe in newspaper advertising as a necessary adjunct to trading, but, as far as lies in my power, I shall agitate against the dubious methods of circulation-production and ambiguous advertisement costing".

Articulate public opinion was actively opposed to newspapers employing these "catch-penny methods" of stimulating their own particular line of business, and the agitation against the continuance of the free gift system was not confined to England alone. In Switzerland a special organisation was formed during 1930 for the elimination of this system,³⁰² and similar opposition to the system was raised in Germany, France, and Belgium, according to a report issued by the International Co-Operative Alliance.

Similar opposition is not, however, raised to the gigantic insurance schemes which have popularised some of the leading newspapers overseas, and it must therefore be surmised that reference to this topic must not fall under this Chapter but under "contributions of the Press to Public Welfare".

Mr. Burgess Johnson, Director of Public Relations at the Syracuse University stated that "If finding and verifying the news is a first duty, the reporter becomes the most important person in the whole human structure of the Press. If his standing breaks down, the Press breaks down". It will be the object of the writer to refer to a few instances where the reporter's "standing" has broken down. In many cases the details have come to the ear of the writer, and, as they form part of the unwritten literature of journalism, no authorities or references can be quoted. The

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302. See "World's Press News", December 4th, 1930.

303. Quoted in the "Bloemfontein Friend", 1931.

writer can vouch for their authenticity and beyond his word no guarantee of good faith can be given.

The determination of a junior reporter "never again to mention a certain Advocate's name in cases conducted by him" followed upon a remonstrance by the latter of the former at a private picnic party. As members of the Bar may not advertise and are dependent upon the goodwill of the Press for publicity in Court proceedings, it will be seen that the reporter's decision wrought swift and certain vengeance. The perusal of letters lying open on the table in a Government Office during the absence of the Public servant occupying that office, the publication of information vouchsafed in private conversation and not intended to become public property, and the use of the cloak of anonymity to gain entrance to a Conference to which the Press were not admitted, are among lapses from grace which have resulted in first-class "scoops" being attained at the cost of the lowering of the ethics of journalism. For some journalists the price would have been too much to pay; for others no price is too high!

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On this point the views of Mr. J. K. Winkler are illuminating :

"Journalists responsibly engaged in the production of newspapers have to make up their minds whether the validity of Mr. Hearst's first principle--'Get Circulation'--is absolute or relative".

Mr. Winkler wrote - The best of them think it is relative, that is to say, subject to an unwritten code of journalistic honour and to their own sense of stewardship for the moral health of the public. Some of the less good have thought

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304. Biographer of William Randolph Hearst, the American newspaper magnate.

it absolute, at least until they had got enough circulation for their purposes. The worst have applied it unconditionally. In method, getters of circulation as a means to power by way of wealth can hardly be distinguished from getters of circulation for mere profit. These are their joint commandments: "Be first with the news. Go out and get it. In case of need, make it".

The last commandment "Make It!" is an ominous one. The reporters involved in what became known as "The Louw" were accused by the Commissioner of Police at the subsequent inquiry of having "manufactured" their story. One of the journalists replied that stories were not manufactured but written. Instances of how stories have been "made" are fortunately rare but authentic cases have nevertheless been revealed. ³⁰⁶ Winkler tells the story of how one of Hearst's men, in search of sensational news, grappled with a grizzly bear, escaped with his life, and obtained the story of the day! A Johannesburg Bandmaster once told the writer how the Editor of a small district newspaper once telephoned to ask whether he had any news. "I'm desparately hard up for a good story", the Editor said. "Well, I haven't anything to tell you, but, if you like, I'll write a slashing attack on myself as a Bandmaster; - you publish the letter under a nom-de-plume, and see if you can't get public opinion aroused into a controversy". The plot was carried out as arranged, and the idea took on. For some days afterwards the harassed editor received letters both in defence of the Bandmaster and in support of the slashing attack on him. News had
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been made!

The attitude of the Press towards women and children cannot escape criticism under this chapter head. While there is much to be said in favour of the introduction of features appealing specially to women and children, the swing of the pendulum from the strictly impersonal news-sheets of the early days to the highly personal columns of the present day demonstrates once again the evils of extremes. It may be a fitting reward for years of social work for the Matron of a Hospital or other Institution to have her photograph, together with an appreciative article, on the "Woman's Page" of a daily paper, and it may be convenient for her friends to know that "Mrs. B. has left Pretoria for Durban and will not be back until the end of the month", and it is probably of interest to learn that an "interesting event is being expected" in a society family, but this sort of thing can be-- and frequently is-- overdone, with the result that, in the words of St. John Ervine, the Press has become "Womanised". His views were very lucidly expressed in an article in the "Spectator":

"Newspapers", he wrote, "were formerly published for men; they are now increasingly being published for women. The most casual observer of the "national" newspaper cannot fail to notice how womanised the popular press has become. It is not only that "women are news", and that everything they do is lavishly announced and advertised, even when the same thing, though better done by men, is ignored or briefly mentioned, but that the tone of the paper is being set by women. Whatever is interesting to them is "displayed": whatever is interesting to men is suppressed or put into an obscure corner...

"Articles by, and about, women prevail in these papers, and editors, without any appearance of embarrassment, will print "Powerful articles" by young ladies not long emerged from school on the reform of

Marriage /

Marriage or the reorganization of Sex or the overhaul of Religion. There seem to be many young ladies who will rearrange the entire universe in eight hundred words for a fee of twenty guineas!

"Circulation has gone to the heads of these newspaper proprietors, who sincerely believe that their "stunts" are influencing the public mind.

Mr. St. John Irvine went on to state that the realisation that it was possible to have a two-million-a-day circulation and no authority had caused a temporary pause and a reaction. Advertisers no longer asked the size of the circulation but its nature, for they realised that the womanised papers not only repelled men readers but ended by repelling women as well.

"Already demands, not yet very loud, are being made for a man's popular newspaper, and there are many women who openly express contempt for the stuff that is sold to them as "women's interest" in the contemporary press".

Before leaving the question of the women to go over to the "Children's Corner", one further comment will be made, dealing with the unfavourable psychological effect of publicity on womankind who become addicts to a disease not found in any medical journal, namely that of "suffering from an exaggerated sense of their own importance".

That well-known writer, Mr. Philip O'Farrell, whose "London Letter" appears weekly on the front page of the "Sunday Times" wrote that :

"The publicity that is now given to these young women (Debutantes) is something new and remarkable. To take but one example, Miss Margaret Whigham, who has just become engaged to the Earl of Warwick (The engagement has since been broken off, according to a recent news cable) has for some months past had a press that any film star might envy. You can hardly read a gossip column without coming upon her name at

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least once, and her portrait appears almost daily in one or other of the dailies, and with the utmost regularity in all the social or semi-social weeklies. Lady Pamela Smith, Miss Eileen Brougham, Lady Bridgett Poulett, Miss Penelope Dudley Ward, Miss Averil Streetfield, and perhaps half a dozen others are as well known to the London Public, in print, as any star of stage or screen. The young married woman is left out in the cold, and the matron, who in Victorian days was thought to be at the height of her beauty at any age from 35 to 70, has to remain permanently 25 to-day in order to get a look in at all. Whether so much publicity and adulation is at all good for young females whose role in life is to settle down as wives and mothers is open to doubt. (308) Some of them (I refer, of course, to none who have been mentioned by name) take the liveliest interest in their Press cuttings, and are most indignant if the number is not up to average or a rival seems to be getting a better show".

As far as children are concerned, the last few years has seen a remarkable improvement in the attitude of the Press towards its younger readers, upon whom it will have to rely for patronage and support in the future has taken place. From ignoring them entirely, the newspapers have gradually changed their policy to one of taking a kindly interest in the children, and, through the medium of "Aunt Margaret" or "Uncle Eric" invite correspondence and reply to letters through the special daily column or weekly page reserved for the children. At the outset the "Uncle" or "Aunt" who was merely a reporter in disguise, with other and more important duties to perform and who probably disliked his or her special feature work, thought that "any old thing" would do for the children, but, as a writer on

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"The Free-Lance Journalist" has stated, it has come to be appreciated that "children are not only voracious readers but are also intelligent readers". More attention is consequently now being given to this feature and appropriate fiction and

suitable /

308. The underlining is that of the writer.

309. "World's Press News".

suitable facts are now being served up for the edification of the children of to-day and the men and women of to-morrow.

Whether the "Comic Cuts" or "coloured supplement" feature, which has been taken over from the American Sunday papers is a desirable feature is open to doubt, but it is a known fact that there are some parents who steadfastly refuse their children to have access to this portion of the newspaper. That it cannot be wholly bad, however, is clear from the fact that it must inevitably enliven the imagination of the younger readers and enable them not to lose touch altogether with the phantasy of their childhood days. In the words of that great and provocative writer, Mr. Aldous Huxley, "Nonsense is the nearest approach to a proof of that unprovable article of faith, whose truth we must all assume or perish miserably; that life is worth living".

For the Press to remain impartial to all parties to a dispute is well-nigh impossible, and, no matter what stand it takes up, it is sure to cause dissatisfaction somewhere. Thus "The Tribune" the official organ of the South African Temperance Alliance, last year wrote:

"Neither the Cape Times nor the Cape Argus can be congratulated on their reports of this year's proceedings. (310) Any impartial person present at the Board meetings and reading afterwards the accounts in these papers could not avoid coming to the conclusion that while the liquor side was emphasised, the Temperance case was slurred over or ignored altogether. To take but a single instance; the masterly general address of the Rev. Charles Garratt, which extorted the admiration of all who heard it, was not only not given a line, it was not even mentioned. This lop-sided method of reporting has been the subject of caustic comment by many citizens".

There are, of course, two sides to every question, and it is quite clear that the organ which accused

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both the Cape newspapers of partiality is not itself an impartial organ. While not defending the papers concerned (they are well able to do that for themselves) the writer would like to point out that, while the Rev. Charles Garratt's speech was subsequently published in the Temperance Alliance organ, no dispassionate report was given in that journal of the arguments advanced on behalf of the liquor trade.

The "Cape Argus" was similarly the subject of an attack by "The Cape", (an independent weekly journal published in Capetown). On March 13th, 1931, "The Cape" stated:

"Having some pride in the profession to which we belong, we cannot refrain from commenting on the glaring example of the recklessness of sensational journalism which was furnished by the Cape Argus this week. The paper published in a prominent position a sob-story about an 18-year-old girl who had for some nights been sleeping in the open at Claremont, keeping guard over her family's furniture while her parents tramped the streets by day to find a suitable house to shelter the furniture and themselves. In an interview the girl said :

"Our house across the road is empty. The landlord wants to sell the place, and he declined this month's rent when it was offered to him. We pleaded to be allowed to stay in the house until someone else wanted it".

That story was calculated to arouse in every decent reader of it feelings of the deepest indignation against this hardhearted landlord. But on Wednesday evening in a similar position there appeared the sequel to the sob-story. It was that for months the family had been in arrears with their rent, and had agreed to leave as long ago as last December, and it was not until Saturday, March 7, that he took legal steps to have them ejected. It was stated in this second report that the landlord, following complaints by the neighbours, had been warned by the Health Department that unless he ejected his tenants action might be taken against him.

After the publication of the second story there remained only one statement appearing in the first story which could be strictly described as fact. That was that the family had been ejected, and that the daughter was sleeping in the street beside the furniture. Yet the second story contained not one word of regret that the

readers/

readers of the 'Cape Argus' had been allowed to remain for 24 hours under the impression that this unfortunate family were the victims of a landlord's rapacity".

Considerable space was devoted in "The Cape" to this incident, because "we were taught in our apprenticeship that accuracy was the first essential in reputable and responsible journalism... This story appearing as it did in two instalments, can only be described as the poorest of poor journalism".

"We have dealt with the incident at some length because we are jealous of the honour and reputation of the journalistic profession, and secondly because the hearts of the public are readily touched by a story of human misfortune, and it has been our experience that they respond instantly and generously to such a recital. But if in an unthinking search for the sensational the heart-strings of the public are to be played upon wantonly, the public confidence will be shaken in all newspaper "sob stories", and its heart hardened even against deserving cases."

A few more specific instances of "Lapses from Grace" will be quoted before a survey is made of what has been termed "the decline of the fourth estate". Dr. Hans Merensky, famous as the geological discoverer of both the Lydenburg platinum and of the Namaqualand Diamond fields, was during 1931 the subject of a series of mis-statements, amusing to the public, but annoying to Dr. Merensky himself. A German Magazine, "Das Leben" (Life) published at Leipzig, dealt under the heading of "Lords of the World", with the romantic story of the wealthy geologist, publishing, incidentally, a photograph which the "Sunday Times" caustically referred to as "The Continental version of Dr. Merensky", while publishing an authentic photograph in the same column for purposes of comparison. In an exceedingly racy style, the "Sunday Times" tore down in the following words the "story" which "Das Leben" published for the edification of

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its readers :

"The finest instance of a very wealthy man who came to the fore with extreme speed is probably Dr. Merensky, a German. Dr. Merensky was a geologist. To-day he lives in Johannesburg quietly and in retirement". (The truth is that the worthy doctor, apart from being a universally-known figure in business circles, spends most of his time out of town and on his farm Westphalia, Northern Transvaal.)

The writer proceeds: "His bank balance, however amounts to 150,000,000 marks (£7,500,000) in cash". (This is rubbish).

Describing how Dr. Merensky discovered the Namaqualand diamonds, Mr. Zischka says he trekked along the coast for years! He didn't. At that time Dr. Merensky was one of the Rand's busiest geologists. After more of the same sort the writer proceeds:

"He suddenly reported his discoveries. A panic arose. (!) If Merensky's finds had been exploited the price would have sunk to nothing. So the Diamond Syndicate (sic) had only one course open: to acquire Merensky's fields for a fantastic sum, to settle with him, and to leave the fields unexploited". (This refers to Namaqualand).

With the vast fortune so acquired, Dr. Merensky, we are informed, sails through the world on his own yacht. At the head of the page in "Das Leben" is a "portrait" of Dr. Merensky, who is described as looking like a student or an artist.

Incidentally, the picture is of somebody else! Here follows a reference to a non-existent family of Dr. Merensky (who happens to be a bachelor). A rather vague photograph shows "his son John, in the light-coloured sweater", playing polo!

The third illustration is in honour of Merensky, junior, who also does not exist. "He has", "one great hobby; tennis. On his estate near Capetown he has the accompanying fairy-like tennis courts laid out".

So now we know! "

An outspoken criticism of modern journalism

was contributed by "A Working Journalist" to the "World's Press News", and the points which he emphasised are worthy of consideration. Some of his more challenging statements are contained in the following paragraphs:

"Many newspapers thrive on their insurance schemes, competitions, and gift schemes, and not on their merits as purveyors of news.

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"The circulation managers of many dailies and weeklies send salesmen all over the country to canvas from house to house and go almost on their hands and knees to housewives to persuade them to become regular readers of their paper. And in other ways the meanest methods of the market-place are practised.

"Gone are the days when a newspaper won distinction and enhanced circulation by the exclusive character of its intelligence, by its accuracy and soundness, and its consistency and definiteness of principle.

"The engagement of smartly-dressed young men, fresh from the University or public school, who usually have a haughty disdain of short-hand, and cultivate the habit of writing cleverly at the expense of truth, accuracy, or perspective, is among the innovations of recent years.

"Under the existing system editors cease to be public men of high standing and influence. Multiplicity of control has taken the place of individual management and editorial supervision. In far too many papers the manager dominates the whole organisation, and the editor, except for an occasional public ceremony, sits in obscurity in his sanctum unknown to all the members of his own staff".

Some of the points raised by "Working Journalist", such as the free gift and insurance systems, have already been dealt with. Other statements, more particular those referring to circulation managers, smartly-dressed University men, and obscure editors, suffer from the fact that particular instances have been generalised. The facts probably have an element of truth as far as the English Press is concerned, but the defects complained of are not common in newspaper practice in South Africa. Circulation canvassers have been at work in this country but the statement that the Editor is sometimes unknown to all members of the staff would not apply. Many journalists would prefer to see such a practice introduced, for when they appear before the Editor it usually means that they are "carpeted".

Dealing /

Dealing more specifically with the South
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African Press, Mr. W. S. Chadwick after having made the bold
statement that the Press body of the world was often pro-
stituted to the service of Gold, declared:

"The Press paints humanity in the colours
its masters order, and the dread truth is
that humanity is fast becoming what the Press
has made it. The world's thinkers believe
that only Thought is immortal. Yet we are
told that if six newspaper proprietors in
England decided that the Public Opinion of
England should be a week hence, their thought
would be expressed with the nation's voice!
Under Press domination of thought, nations are
becoming hazed, bewildered communities of slaves;
sacrificed in hideous development- with all
potential power and beauty eliminated- on the
altar of the Moloch...Gold Education (true func-
tion of the Press) has been sacrificed to expediency.

Once again it is necessary to sift the wheat
from the chaff and to admit that while Mr. Chadwick's flam-
boyant words contain elements of truth, they are largely
obscured by the words in which his thoughts are clothed.
It is difficult, even after careful analysis to discover
what Mr. Chadwick means by his pretty-sounding phrase "sac-
rificed in hideous development". The power of the Press in
swaying public opinion is well demonstrated by Mr. Chadwick
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but this aspect has already been dealt with elsewhere. The
conclusion there arrived at was that the part played by the
Press in moulding public opinion was considerable but that,
in view of the fact that contrary opinions were not stifled
and could be expressed vocally and in "Letters to the Editor"
the power exercised in this direction was infinitely more
to the advantage of the community, province, or nation
rather than to its detriment.

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313. "Sjambok", February 20th, 1931, since defunct.

314. See Chapter vi.

A further factor tending to cause a decline of the fourth estate is the type of journalist at present being employed. Owing, no doubt, to the general unfavourable economic conditions which have prevailed in recent years, newspapers have been unable to pay good salaries for good men, juniors, without experience, a fully developed news sense, or knowledge of the most effective means of news-getting are being engaged to replace senior men who have resigned. Staffs are being kept to a bare minimum with the result that work has to be done in a hurry and there is little opportunity, owing to the scarcity of men, of always selecting the most suitable man for a particular job. The man on the spot must do it. This leads to a situation which was picturesquely expressed by Mr. Gordon Craig . Mr.

Craig stated :

"It is something rather modest and charming that he (G.B.S) still looks on himself as one of those 'unfortunate journalists' (you call yourselves unfortunate, don't you?), doomed, because of circumstances, to write on any given subject at a moment's notice-- never mind whether you know about it or not-- and to rattle things off and convince the readers of the penny paper or the shilling or five-guinea book into which you put them".

Thus it seems that the management is between the devil and the deep blue sea in regard to the choice of newspapermen. If "Working Journalist" is to be believed, University men are disdainful of shorthand-- a most useful acquisition for a journalist-- and write cleverly at the expense of truth and accuracy, while the dangers attendant upon the work of a man writing on a subject with which he is not fully acquainted are manifest. While this matter will be dealt with at greater length in the concluding chapter, it may be appropriate to point out here that one newspaper at least /

315. Author of "Ellen Terry and Her Secret Self, in an interview dealing with George Bernard Shaw's replies to the accusations made by Mr. Craig in his book.

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least is attempting to enhance the educational qualifications of their reporters by means of extra-mural studies. This is an example which might advantageously be followed by other and more influential newspapers in this country.

Perhaps the early fruits borne of the policy of the "Friend" just outlined were reflected in an article published in that paper on January 10th, 1931, under the four following headlines:

- "Reporters who Guess Right",
- "Anticipating Council Decisions",
- "Mayor explains how "Friend gets the news",
- "Intelligent Journalism".

Extracts from the report read as follows:

"That 'The Friend' has a way of anticipating municipal developments and decisions before the members of the Town Council have the opportunity of considering them was the burden of a complaint voiced at yesterday's special meeting.

"The Mayor (Mr. E. M. de Beer) said in reply: "We must credit the modern journalist with a certain amount of ingenuity, whereby he can anticipate events with reasonable accuracy. In this case there could have been no leakage because the Council and the Finance Committee had not even considered the matter when the news appeared in the paper".

"Mr. D. Nathan: There is still what I may call an unfair leakage through this Council. The Mayor: If the Council had come together and discussed the matter there could have been some question of a leakage, but that is not the position. It was, the Mayor added, a case where the press had guessed correctly. If a journalist guessed wrong, he would, presumably, be required to give an account to his chief."

The "guessing at news" is another factor which is contributing towards the decline of the Press and directing a blow at that confidence and trust of the public which is essential if the newspaper is adequately and effectively

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to fulfil its function as a purveyor of news and views. In many cases the "guess" is clothed in such language as "it is alleged", "it is believed", or "it is learnt" from a source which is invariably not divulged, but there are equally numerous cases in which an inference from known facts is passed off as reliable and authentic news. An instance of this occurred in connection with the sentence of death passed upon Louis van Wyk for the murder of a farmer named Tucker in the Northern Transvaal. Knowing that the Governor-General in Council would sit at Capetown on a certain day, a representative of a certain newspaper announced on the following day that the death sentence passed on van Wyk had been confirmed, whereas in fact the confirmation or commutation of the sentence, owing to pressure of other urgent matters, had not been discussed on that occasion and was not dealt with until the following week.

An instance of incorrect inference or "drawing the long bow" may serve to emphasise the dangers which lie in the growing practice of not sticking strictly to facts. Mr. Arthur Barlow, political correspondent of the "Rand Daily Mail" wrote: "I understand that General Smuts will personally lead an attack on Mr. Pirow on account of that gentleman's handling of the Police force, and that Colonel Sir Theodore Truter, the late Commissioner of Police, is coming specially to Capetown, to supply the Leader of the Opposition with powder and shot". On the same afternoon, the "Pretoria News" published an interview with Sir Theodore Truter, who emphatically denied that he was going to Capetown specially "to provide powder and shot" to General Smuts for an attack on

Mr./

317. The "Rand Daily Mail".

318. January 19th, 1931.

Mr. Pirow's handling of the Police Force. "If I go to Capetown I shall certainly not go with the intention ascribed by Mr. Barlow, Sir Theodore Truter stated.

Mention was made earlier in this chapter (page 290.) of the use made in newspapers of private conversations. A specific instance of this occurred in connection with the return of the Springbok cricketers from a Tour of England in January, 1931. A wired report from Capetown, purporting to be an interview with the Springbok captain, Mr.

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H.G. Deane, and published inland read as follows :

"Astonishingly frank statements were made by H.G. Deane when he gave to an interviewer his impressions of the second Test match. "Oh for a Denys Morkel or an Owen Smith", said Deane when referring to the South African fielding. He talked of misfields and general slackness, and spoke rather pointedly of the pleasure of captaining a team willing to work hard for every advantage. "When some of your men are working half-heartedly your responsibilities become tremendous", said Deane. "Slackness so easily spreads throughout a side and you must keep spurring them on all the time".

When Mr. Deane arrived in Johannesburg from the Cape he accounted for the "astonishingly frank statements" 320 in the following unequivocal terms:

"The interview from Capetown which appeared in your paper was a gross distortion of a personal conversation with the reporter, following an interview I had given him in connection with the English criticism of the M.C.C. side. At the time I was frankly disappointed with our fielding, which was far below the standard the team was capable of, and I distinctly recall mentioning that I myself was one of the worst culprits. As for sighing for Morkel or Owen Smith, to do so would be a reflection on the side. The reporter remarked that I could have done with Morkel and Owen-Smith, and I replied "they would have been useful in the field".

It is to the credit of the newspapers publishing the first message that they gave equal prominence to the/

319. "Pretoria News", January 1st, 1931.

320. "Pretoria News", January 8th, 1931.

the repudiation. That was the least that could have been done to make amends for this lapse from grace and breach of confidence.

Attention was drawn by a contributor signing himself "E.H." in the "Natal Witness" ³²¹ to a "crib" by a London newspaper of an article submitted by him for publication and returned "with the Editor's regrets". In his own words,

"I recently submitted to a London daily an article on the industrial menace coming from the Far East, quoting original figures and prices of competitive articles manufactured in Britain, America and Japan. Three weeks later I noticed a cabled report in our local press giving an account of a sensational news item appearing in the "Daily Mail" drawing attention to a new menace to British industry, and quoting verbatim the figures and facts I had given in my article".

"By this last English mail I received my MSS. back from the editor of the "Daily Mail" with a polite note: The editor's compliments, but he regretted his inability to use the article, and by the same mail, a copy of his newspaper in which the article he had been unable to use had been cribbed and worked up into a sensational news item filling valuable space.

"We all know the beauty secrets of our prominent actresses, and the opinions on every subject under the sun of Charlie Chaplin and many other celebrities and nonentities in the theatrical, political and sporting world. But their expertness in their respective professions does not necessarily give their opinions on matters outside these, any weight. Yet such people are paid fabulous prices for articles either dictated or written, while the struggling and unknown writer and plain John Citizen has his articles, ideas and correspondence ruthlessly cribbed."

The writer of this thesis has not heard, during his more than five years of newspaper experience, of any other incident of this nature and the reply of the Editor of the "Natal Witness" to "E.H." is a fair statement of the position.

The Editor wrote:

"Our /

"Our correspondent seems to have been very unfortunate. It is seldom that any save very small and obscure newspapers "crib" from contributors - when they do "crib" they crib from the other and better newspapers.

"The payment of substantial fees to celebrities and notorieties for press articles on subjects with which they are not familiar is, we agree, a bad practice. But it has only arisen in response to public demand. The public will devour some triviality by an actress when it will not look at the most earnest effort of plain John Smith".

The allegation made by "E.H." that such a system of "cribbing" exists made it imperative that it should be mentioned here but the practice is certainly not a common one, much less a universal one, unless the "cribs" are so skilfully disguised as to be unrecognisable from the original material from which the "crib" is alleged to have originated. It is certainly far more common for one newspaper to "take over" news items from other papers, sometimes with acknowledgment and sometimes without, and, although this form of privacy is depreciated, it is not particularly vicious in its nature in view of the fact that the newspaper from which the item was "cribbed" was "first with the news", which, after all, is one of the first objects of enterprising journalism.

A further defect of the Press is the inability entirely to recapture the atmosphere of a meeting or function, with the result that persons present interpret the facts reported in the true light, but misunderstandings are likely to arise in regard to readers who were not present but who have been dependent for their acquaintanceship with what happened upon Press reports. This defect is not intentional as each journalist interprets events and occasions as they

appeal /

appeal to him and constructions may be placed upon his words giving a meaning which he did not intend to convey. Thus the extracts which follow are from a letter appearing in the "Star", together with the Editor's terse and pointed comment.

Sir, - One could wish that the reporter responsible for condensing the account of Saturday night's dinner by the Catholic Men's Society to the Catholic members of the M.C.C. team had possessed a little of the "humorous vein" he rightly credited to Mr. Hendren, and which was equally due to the company present. Some extracts from the speeches are not verbally correct, others lose their true sense by divorcement from the context and the banter usual to a sporting occasion of that nature; the report as a whole, especially with its headline, has been read by many, to my personal knowledge, as a travesty of the sayings and doings of the evening.

Especially does one resent the way in which Mr. Turnbull's remarks have been presented. He certainly said, in effect, what is attributed to him about their losing, but he added the important qualifying clause that they, the M.C.C., were alone responsible for their defeat. Unfortunately, this same clause was omitted from the report in another local paper. The bald reference to "the three of them as 'the nucleus of a Catholic colony in the team'" is senseless as it stands. He was really repeating a joking remark, I did not catch whether to or by his late father when bidding him what is now known to have been his last farewell. There was an obvious note of emotion in his voice when repeating the joke. But the words as quoted, with their lack of setting, are merely trivial, to say the least.

"Mr. Patsy Hendren replied in humorous vein. He wished, he said, that the umpires had been R.C.'s for then there would have been no grumblings". I cannot vouch for the wording, but he said this in effect, in his usual whimsical way, and as "pulling the legs" of those present, who were all Catholics (except probably the reporter and the restaurant staff). The pity is that Mr. Hendren's jocular words were not punctuated in the report by the laughter which followed but were, instead, translated into the heavy type headline, "Wished the Umpires had been R.C.'s". That introduction, together with the other references lifted out of their context and surroundings, has left a very painful feeling with members who were present and heard all that was said.

(Signed) E. M. James

(A function of this kind is best held in private. It is almost impossible to do justice to "humorous speeches" in a brief report.)

The solution which the Editor suggests would

certainly/

certainly obviate the difficulties which are likely to arise in this connection, though it is doubtful whether the Catholic Men's Society would have been content to such an auspicious occasion to go unreported.

A deplorable corollary which the acute competition among newspapers, with its attendant beneficial results in speeding up news, brightening productions, and encouraging enterprise, has brought with it is the "slanging" of one newspaper by another, while the spirit prevailing among journalists of rival newspapers is, with very few exceptions a friendly one, those who sit in the seats of the mighty see fit to wash their dirty linen in public and to take their rivals to task whenever it is thought that a point can be scored in this way. Many of these attacks are politically-inspired, but there are also numerous instances where vials of vituperation have been poured by one newspaper upon another without politics entering into the matter in any way. This tendency is particularly marked in America and probably reached its peak during the Hearst—Bulitzer feud.

"In 1896 the journal (one of Hearst's papers) acquired a press capable of printing from four to sixteen pages all in colours, "something that had never before been attempted". The "Sunday Journal" added an eight page coloured supplement - "eight pages of iridescent polychromous effulgence that makes the rainbow look like a lead-pipe", and sneered at "The World" comic supplement as "black and tan"
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 "weak wishy-washy", four pages of a "desolate waste of black".

"When in 1897 Hearst bought the tottering

"Morning/

"Morning Advertiser" he accused the "World" of deliberately plotting to keep the Journal out of the Associated Press and denounced Pulitzer as "a journalist who made his money by pandering to the worst tastes of the prurient and horror-loving by dealing in bogus news, such as forged cablegrams from eminent personages, and by affecting a devotion to the interests of the people while never really hurting those of his enemies, and sedulously looking out for his own".

"The 'New York Tribune' in the spring of 1918 ran a series of militantly bitter attacks entitled "Coiled in the Flag, Hears-s-s-s-t". The Tribune cited Chapter and verse to prove Hearst cold in loyalty: "Since the United States entered the War the Hearst papers have published 74 attacks on our Allies, 17 instances of defence or praise of Germany, 63 pieces of anti-war propaganda, one deletion of a Presidential proclamation--total 155, or nearly three a week, while America has been engaged in a life and death struggle with civilisation's enemy".

"The Hearst counter-attack was swift. The "Tribune" was bitterly denounced as a corporation organ. A Pamphlet "Distorted Quotations from the Hearst paper, a campaign of falsehood" was issued, asserting: "The attack upon the Hearst papers was carried on by the circulation of pamphlets containing false, distorted, or disjointed quotations from the Hearst papers. Most of the papers about the course in the war are bald falsehoods.... A few sincere, earnest, well-meaning persons have been deceived by these counterfeit presentations of Hearst's editorials. The campaign of calumny and misrepresentation has not impressed or affected the great mass of newspaper readers".

"Governor Smith delivered an address that was

a masterpiece of invective. He denounced Hearst as a "pestilence that walks in the dark", and as "enemy of the people", and asked the organisation of a non-partisan committee "to protect public servants and citizens generally from his irresponsible methods of misrepresentation and slander".

"Applying a moral measuring rod to Hearst, Villard said: "He has done more to degrade the American Press than anyone else in its history. He has fought many a good battle, but in all, his efforts have been tarnished by self-interest, self-seeking and by arousing in the never failing and justified suspicion of his sincerity".

Although vilification has at no time gone to such extremes in South African Journalism, the now-defunct ³²⁴ "Ons Vaderland" referred to "Op die Hoogte", a weekly newspaper issued in Pretoria by the South African Party for propaganda purposes, as "overflowing with filth" (vuilnis-oerloop) ³²⁵ while the "Rand Daily Mail" made the statement that "Nobody reads and nobody heeds the Afrikaans Press". This statement led to a flutter in the dove-cote as it was felt that advertising in the Afrikaans Press would be affected by such a statement. The Pretoria Branch of the South African Society of Journalists passed a resolution to the effect that:

"This meeting of the Pretoria Branch of the S.A.S.J. deprecates the slur cast upon the Afrikaans Press in a leading article in the Rand Daily Mail on March 10, 1931, and requests the Council to dissociate itself publicly and without delay with the sentiments expressed in the article in question",

Council replied with the following evasive resolution :

"That the General Secretary be instructed to inform the Pretoria Branch of the S.A.S.J. (1) in reply to a question raised in regard to a reference in a leading article to the Afrikaans Press, that the Council is not and

never /

324. February 15th, 1931.

325. March 10, 1931.

never can be responsible for expressions of opinion in leading articles, and (2) that the Pretoria Branch is at liberty to publish in The Journalist the original resolution on the subject, together with the Council's ruling."

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and it was not until the Annual Conference that the matter was finally disposed of.

These, then, are among some of the more noticeable and pronounced defects of the modern Press. In how far they are ingrained and ineradicable, whether means may be devised to effect an improvement in the general position, and to obviate the temporary lapses caused by ambition, enthusiasm, and the "desire to shine" through emphasis on the necessity for a high ethical tone in the newspaper world, will be considered in the concluding chapter when present indications of the possible future development of newspapers will be analysed.
