

EDITORIAL

ONE of the agreeable spiritual phenomena of this great age is the soul-searching now in progress among American journalists. Fifteen years ago, or even ten years ago, there was scarcely a sign of it. The working newspaper men of the Republic were then almost as complacent as so many Federal judges or generals in the army. When they discussed their art and mystery at all, it was only to smack their chests proudly, boasting of their vast power in public matters, of their adamant resistance to all the less tempting varieties of bribes, and of the fact that a crooked politician, giving them important news confidentially, could rely upon them to mangle it beyond recognition before publishing it. I describe a sort of Golden Age. Salaries had been going up since the dawn of the new century, and so the journalist began to feel his oats. For the first time in history he was paid as well as the Neanderthal men slinging rolls of paper in the cellar. He began to own two hats, two suits of clothes, two pairs of shoes. He was happy. But at the heart of his happiness, alas, there gnawed a canker worm. One enemy remained, unscotched and apparently unscotchable, to wit, the business manager. The business manager, at will, could send up a blue slip and order him fired. In the face of that menace his literary superiors were helpless, up to and including the editor-in-chief. All of them were under the hoof of the business manager, and all the business manager ever thought of was advertising. Let an advertiser complain, and off went a head.

It was the great war for human freedom, I believe, that brought the journalist deliverance from that old hazard; he was, perhaps, one of its few real beneficiaries.

As the slaughter increased on Flanders fields and business grew better and better at home, reporters of any capacity whatever got to be far too scarce to fire loosely. Moreover, the business manager, with copy pouring into the advertising department almost unsolicited, began to lose all his old fear of advertisers, and then even some of his congenital respect for them. It was a seller's market, in journalism as in the pants business. Customers were no longer kissed. The new spirit spread like a benign pestilence, and presently it invaded even editorial rooms. In almost every great American city some flabbergasted advertiser, his money in his hand, sweat pouring from him as if he had seen a ghost, was kicked out with spectacular ceremonies. All the principal papers, growing rich, began also to grow independent, virtuous, even virginal. No — — — — could dictate to them, God damn! So free reading notices disappeared, salaries continued to climb, and the liberated journalist, taking huge sniffs of free air, began to think of himself as a professional man.

Upon that cogitation he is still engaged, and all the weeklies that print the news of his craft are full of its fruits. He elects representatives and they meet in lugubrious conclave to draw up codes of ethics. He begins to read books dealing with professional questions of other sorts—even books not dealing with professional questions. He changes his old cynical view of schools of journalism, and is lured, now and then, into lecturing in them himself. He no longer thinks of his calling as a business, like the haberdasher's or tallow chandler's, or as a game, like the stockbroker's or faro dealer's, but as a profession, like the jurisconsult's or gynec-

cologist's. His purpose is to set it on its legs as such—to inject plausible theories into its practice, and rid it of its old casualness and opportunism. He ceases to see it as a craft to be mastered in four days, and abandoned at the first sign of a better job. He begins to talk darkly of the long apprenticeship necessary to master its technic, of the wide information and profound sagacity needed to adorn it, of the high rewards that it offers—or may offer later on—to the man of true talent and devotion. Once he thought of himself, whenever he thought at all, as what Beethoven called a free artist—a gay fellow careening down the charming highways of the world, the gutter ahead of him but joy in his heart. Now he thinks of himself as a citizen of weight and responsibility, a beginning publicist and public man, sworn to the service of the born and unborn, heavy with duties to the Republic and to himself. He begins to surround himself with taboos. There are things that he will not do, even to get a piece of news. There are things that are *infra dig*. And there are things that simply must be done, all advertisers save the very largest to the contrary notwithstanding.

II

In all this, I fear, there is some illusion, as there always is in human thinking. The journalist can no more see himself realistically than a bishop can see himself realistically. He gilds and engaulds the picture a bit, unconsciously and irresistibly. For one thing, and a most important one, he is probably somewhat in error about his professional status. He remains, for all his dreams, a hired man—the business manager, though he doesn't do it very often now, is still free to demand his head—and a hired man is not a professional man. The essence of a professional man is that he is answerable, for his professional conduct, only to his professional peers. A physician cannot be fired by anyone, save when he has vol-

untarily converted himself into a jobholder; he is secure in his livelihood so long as he keeps his health and can render service to his patients. A lawyer is in the same boat. So is a dentist. So, even, is a horse doctor. But the journalist still lingers in a twilight zone, along with the trained nurse, the embalmer, the evangelical clergyman and the great majority of engineers. He cannot sell his services directly to the consumer, but only to entrepreneurs, and so those entrepreneurs have the power of veto over all his soaring fancies. His codes of ethics are all right so long as they do not menace newspaper profits; the moment they do so the business manager, now quiescent, will begin to growl again. Nor has he the same freedom that the lawyer and the physician have when it comes to fixing his own compensation; what he faces is not a client but a boss. Above all, he is unable, as yet, to control admissions to his craft. It is constantly recruited, on its lowest levels, from men who have little professional training or none at all, and some of these men master its chief mysteries very quickly. Thus even the most competent journalist faces at all times a severe competition, easily expanded at need, and so he cannot afford to be too saucy. When a managing editor is fired there is always another one waiting to take his place, but there is seldom another place waiting for the victim.

All these things diminish the autonomy of the American journalist, and hamper his effort to lift his trade to the professional level. When he talks of codes of ethics, indeed, he sometimes falls into mere tall talk, for he cannot enforce the rules he so solemnly draws up—that is, in the face of dissent from above. Nevertheless, his discussion of the subject is still not wholly absurd, for there remain plenty of rules that he *can* enforce, and I incline to think that there are more of them than of the other kind. Most of the evils that continue to beset journalism today, in truth, are not due to the rascality of owners nor even to the Kiwanian bombast of business

managers, but simply and solely to the stupidity, cowardice and Philistinism of working newspaper men. The majority of them, in almost every American city, are ignoramuses, and not a few of them are also bounders. All the knowledge that they pack into their brains is, in every reasonable cultural sense, useless; it is the sort of knowledge that belongs, not to a professional man, but to a police captain, a railway mail-clerk or a board boy in a brokerage house. It is a mass of trivialities and puerilities; to recite it would be to make even a barber or a bartender beg for mercy. What is missing from it is everything worth knowing—everything that enters into the common knowledge of educated men. There are managing editors in the United States, and scores of them, who have never heard of Kant or Johannes Müller and never read the Constitution of the United States; there are city editors who do not know what a symphony is, or a streptococcus, or the Statute of Frauds; there are reporters by the thousand who could not pass the entrance examination for Harvard or Tuskegee, or even Yale. It is this vast ignorance that makes American journalism so pathetically feeble and vulgar, and so generally disreputable no less. A man with so little intellectual enterprise that, dealing with news daily, he goes through life without taking in any news that is worth knowing—such a man, you may be sure, is as lacking in true self-respect as he is in curiosity. Honor does not go with stupidity. If it belongs to professional men, it belongs to them because they constitute a true aristocracy—because they have definitely separated themselves from the great masses of men. The journalists, in seeking to acquire it, put the cart before the horse.

III

Nevertheless, I believe that they can still acquire it. But not by passing idle resolutions, not by drawing up codes of ethics that most of their fellows laugh at, as a

Congressman laughs at a gentleman. The job before them—that is, before the civilized minority of them—is to purge their trade before they seek to dignify it—to clean house before they paint the roof and raise a flag. Can the thing be done? It not only can be done; it *has* been done. There are dozens of papers in the United States that already show a determined effort to get out of the old slough. Any managing editor in the land, if he has the will, can carry his own paper with them. He is under no compulsion, save rarely, to employ this or that hand; it is not often that owners, or even business managers, take any interest in that business, save to watch the pay-roll. Is the paper trifling, ill-informed, petty and unfair? Is its news full of transparent absurdities? Are its editorials ignorant and without sense? Is it written in blowsy, slipshod English, full of *clichés* and vulgarities—English that would disgrace a manager of prize-fighters or a county superintendent of schools? Then the fault belongs plainly, not to some remote man, but to the proximate man—to the man who lets such drivel slide under his nose. He could better it if he wanted to, you may be sure. There is in all history no record of a newspaper owner who complained because his paper was well edited. And I know of no business manager who objected when the complaints pouring in upon him, of misrepresentations, invasions of privacy, gross inaccuracies and other such nuisances, began to lighten.

Not a few managing editors, as I say, are moving in the right direction. There has been a noticeable improvement, during the past dozen years, in the general tone of American newspapers. They are, I believe, measurably more accurate than they used to be, and many of them are better written. A great number of them are less absurdly partisan, particularly in the smaller cities. Save in the South and in the remoter fastnesses of New England the old-time party organ has gone out of fashion. With it has gone the old-time

reporter, and in his place there is appearing a young fellow of better education, and generally finer metal. The uplifters of the craft try to make him increase, and to that end encourage schools of journalism. But these seminaries, so far, show two palpable defects. On the one hand, they are seldom manned by men of any genuine professional standing, or of any firm notion of what journalism is about. On the other hand, they are all far too easy in their requirements for admission. Probably half of them, indeed, are simply refuges for students too stupid to tackle the other professions. They offer snap courses, and they promise quick jobs. The result is that the graduates coming out of them are mainly second-raters—that young men and women issuing from the general arts courses make far better material for journalism.

What ails these schools of journalism, in brief, is that they are not yet professional schools, but simply trade schools. Their like is to be found, not in the schools of medicine and law, but in the institutions that teach barbering, book-keeping and chiropractic. Obviously, the remedy for their general failure is to borrow a leaf from the book of the medical men, and weed out the incompetents, not after they have finished, but before they have begun. Twenty-five years ago any yokel who had got through the three R's was free to study medicine in the United States. In three years, and sometimes in two years, he was turned out to practice upon his fellow hinds, and once he had his license it was a practical impossibility to challenge him. But now there is scarcely a medical school in the United States that does not demand a bachelor's degree or its equivalent as a prerequisite to entrance, and the term of study in all of them is four years, and it must be followed by at least one year of hospital service. This reform was not achieved by passing laws against the old hedge schools; it was achieved simply by setting up the competition of good schools. The latter gradually el-

bowed the former out. Their graduates had immense advantages. They had professional prestige from the moment of their entrance into practice. The public quickly detected the difference between them and their competitors from the surviving hedge schools. Soon the latter began to disintegrate, and now all save a few of them have disappeared. The medical men improved their profession by making it more difficult to become a medical man. Today the thing is a practical impossibility to any young man who is not of genuine intelligence.

But at least four-fifths of the so-called schools of journalism still admit any aspirant who can make shift to read and write. The pedagogues who run them cannot be expected to devote much thought or money to improving them; they are in the position of the quacks who used to run the hedge medical schools. The impulse toward improvement, if it ever comes at all, must come from the profession they presume to serve. Here is a chance for the editorial committees and societies of journalists that now spring up on all sides. Let them abandon their vain effort to frame codes of ethics and devote themselves to the nursery. If they can get together a committee on schools of journalism as wise and as bold as the Council on Medical Education of the American Medical Association they will accomplish more in a few years than they can hope to accomplish with academic codes of ethics in half a century. Journalism will become a profession the moment it grows difficult to become a journalist.

IV

All the rest will follow. The old fond theory, still surviving in many a newspaper office, that it is somehow discreditable for a reporter to show any sign of education and culture, that he is most competent and laudable when his intellectual baggage most closely approaches that of a police lieutenant or a district

leader—this theory will fall before the competition of novices who have been adequately trained, and have more in their heads than their mere training. Journalism, compared to the other trades of educated men, is surely not unattractive, even today. It is more amusing than the army or the cloth, and it offers a better living at the start than either medicine or the law. There is a career in it for the young man of original mind and forceful personality—a career leading to great power and even to a sort of wealth. In point of fact, it has always attracted such young men, else it would be in an even lower state than it is now. It would attract a great many more of them if public opinion within the craft were more favorable to them—if they were less harassed by the commands of superiors of no dignity, and the dislike of fellows of no sense. Every time two of them are drawn in they draw another. The problem is to keep them. That is the central problem of journalism in the United States today.

I seem to be in a mood for constructive criticism. Let me add one more pearl of wisdom before I withdraw. I put it in the form of a question. Suppose the shyest lawyers of every town organized a third-rate club, called it the Bar Association, took in any bootlegger or precinct politician who could raise the dues, and then announced publicly, from the Courthouse steps, that it represented the whole bar, and that membership in it was an excellent

form of insurance—that any member who paid his dues would get very friendly consideration, if he ever got into trouble, from the town's judges and district attorney. And suppose the decent lawyers of the town permitted this preposterous pretension to go unchallenged—and some of them even gave countenance to it by joining the club. How long would the legal profession in that town retain its professional honor and dignity? How many laymen, after two years, would have any respect left for *any* lawyer, even a judge?

Yet the journalists of the United States permit that precise thing to go on under their noses. In almost every city of the country there is a so-called Press Club, and at least three-fourths of them are exactly like the hypothetical Bar Association that I have described. They are run by newspaper men of the worst type—many of them so incompetent and disreputable that they cannot even get jobs on newspapers. They take the money of all the town grafters and rascals on the pretense that newspaper favors go with its receipt. They are the resorts of idlers and blackmailers. They are nuisances and disgraces. Yet in how many towns have they been put down? In how many towns do the decent newspaper men take any overt action against them? My proposal is very simple. I propose that they be shut up, East, West, North and South, before anything more is said about codes of newspaper ethics.

H. L. M.

THE YANKEE IN PARIS

BY VINCENT O'SULLIVAN

COMING back from the Olympic football game, after the American players and the American flag too had been plentifully hissed and howled down by a crowd of about twenty-five thousand Parisians, while some Americans on the bleachers who had ventured to cheer their own side had been knocked senseless by infuriated Frenchmen and the police refused to interfere—on that subdued and dusty return, and for some days after, what struck me above all was the bewilderment of the Americans. They were like a man who suddenly learns that his wife has betrayed him. A cherished dream had been shattered. "We thought the French *liked* us!"

Yes, the half-and-halves who pursue beer and sentiment and "Trilby" atmospheres in Montparnasse, as well as those who distribute money with a free hand to the hotels in the Rue de Rivoli, to the dress-makers in the Rue de la Paix, and to restaurants and backside shows all over the place, actually thought the French liked them!

"They are always so polite to us. They say they just love Americans."

"Who?"

"Why, the people in the stores and in the hotels."

That is, the people who make money out of the Americans!

There are three American daily newspapers in Paris. They were evidently as much taken aback by the demonstration on the football ground as their readers. But after a momentary and undecided revolt they soon began to print apologies and explanations. These did not come from

any French source: the French did not apologize at all. It was said that the demonstration was the natural outburst of a patriotic crowd when they saw their countrymen going down to defeat. But the Americans were likewise insulted when they were playing against the Rumanians and the Esthonians by a mob who couldn't have told you in what part of the world those countries are to be found. A lady near me who was particularly violent against "the dirty Americans" confessed that she thought the Esthonians were Negroes. Then, the American newspapers laid stress on the assertion that the action of the crowd was condemned by the entire Paris press. That is far from being the case. The New York *Herald* (Paris edition) came out with the surprising statement that the anti-American demonstrations were staged by a bunch of communists and anarchists—of all people on earth to be accused of nationalism!

Ere many days the word of command went round to drop the subject. Commercial interests came into play. The American tourists must not be discouraged. The editors of the *Herald* and the *Chicago Tribune* (Paris edition) were given the Legion of Honor by the French Government not long ago.

II

One reason why the Americans in Paris were so taken aback by the hostility of the crowd that Sunday is that they live among themselves and have only superficial relations with the French. The French they come into contact with are some few who frequent Americans and talk English,