

# THE POLICE GAZETTE

BY MATTHEW HUTTNER

WHEN Richard Kyle Fox, possibly the world's champion publicist of sin, died in 1922 he left his heirs close to \$2 million and the tawdry remains of the saltiest publishing venture in American history. Pink-papered and racily illustrated, Fox's *National Police Gazette* flourished in a day when sex was hush-hush and a woman's ankle was considered to be "out of bounds." It was standard equipment in every tavern, bordello and barber shop from Brooklyn to the Golden Gate. Its circulation hit half a million at one point, and such was its power that underworld characters and political high-muckamucks could be ruined by its editorial comment.

Behind this astonishing success lay the genius of an Irishman whose showmanship and unique ideas captivated the nation. For the Barnum-like fashion in which Richard K. Fox catapulted the *Gazette* into a weekly of international importance knows no parallel in publishing history. Pulitzer, Hearst, McCormick and Patterson built much bigger empires, but they all started out with money and

influence. Fox built his domain practically singlehanded on sheer nerve.

Richard Kyle Fox came to America in 1874 with his wife, two dollars in cash, and an abiding faith in his own destiny. A few hours after docking he somehow got mixed up in a brawl with several hundred other Irishmen, and at the end of the roughhouse Fox found himself nursing a comrade in arms, one Mr. O'Brien. O'Brien, as it turned out, worked for the old *Wall Street Journal*, and when he learned that Fox wanted a newspaper job he gratefully introduced him to the business manager. The next morning Fox was hired to solicit advertising.

The *Journal* couldn't have secured a better man, Fox had just left the staff of the Belfast *News Letter*, Ireland's richest and most powerful paper. He had an enviable command of the English language, imagination and drive, and a genius for getting business. Before long he was bringing in ads for the *Journal* at a record rate, and was established as a young man to be watched in the publishing world.

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As live a wire as Fox was not long for the orthodox ways of the *Wall Street Journal*. Soon his eye fell upon the *National Police Gazette*, which was then quietly going to the dogs in a shabby cellar a few blocks uptown. Once it had been a brilliant weekly edited by a brilliant man, George Wilkes, who founded it in 1845. Now, after 31 hectic years and a succession of owners, its circulation had shriveled; it was a pathetic rag without prestige, character or any good reason for existence.

However, Fox had an idea that something could be made of the *Gazette*, and he decided to move in on it. In 1875 he threw over his lucrative *Journal* job and became the *Gazette's* advertising solicitor, a switch that astounded the proprietors no less than it did Fox's friends.

Fox made spectacular progress. In a few months he was business manager, and by 1877 publisher and proprietor. It happened this way: The *Gazette* was owned by two engravers. They fell behind in their payments of Fox's advertising commissions and took to offering him stock instead. One morning they woke up to find that Fox held the majority interest. "You boys go back to your engraving," he proposed. "I'll take the whole paper over and call it square." According to reports the owners got out in a hurry before he could reconsider.

Fox revolutionized the *Gazette*. With a sweep of his hand he fired the whole staff and hired two first-rate

writers — Bracebridge Hemming, author of the Jack Harkaway stories, and a picturesque journalist named Samuel A. MacKeever. MacKeever, who was only 28, proved to be something of a phenomenon. Until his death four years later he ground out ten columns a week under such *noms de plume* as Paul Prowler, Colonel Lynx, the Old Rounder and the Marquis of Lorgette.

## II

The *Gazette* had previously concentrated on crusading against political corruption. Fox jettisoned this policy and devoted the paper almost exclusively to sex and sin, and without making much of an effort to distinguish between the two subjects. The two following items may serve to provide an idea of the *Gazette's* coverage of local events:

JUST SENTENCE — Heustis, the Long Island abductor, who ran away with another man's wife some weeks ago, has been tried for the offense of stealing the clothes which the lady wore at the time of her departure, and has been found guilty of petty larceny. He was therefore sentenced to imprisonment in the penitentiary for six months as a warning to all such villains in the future. According to this sentence, all scoundrels who meditate absconding with other men's wives will, hereafter, find it necessary to take them *e puris naturalis* or not at all.

ATTEMPTED RAPE — A villain by the name of Martin Shays, attempted a rape upon a young lady in this town Wednesday last, but entirely without success. The lady was in bed, but fought like a tigress in defense of her private rights.

Fox was the first publisher to feature divorce, and also the first to embellish newsprint with magnificent woodcuts. "If they can't read, give them plenty of pictures," he decreed, and the *Gazette* screamed its new policies in sixteen pink pages of illustrated sin. (Nearly seventy years later, Colonel Robert R. McCormick of the Chicago *Tribune* and Joseph Medill Patterson of the New York *Daily News* both admitted that they had learned more about tabloid technique and the adroit use of color from the *Police Gazette* than from any place else.) *Gazette* readers appear to have been much taken up with the pink covers on the magazine, which portrayed, say, a scene in one of New York's "sinks of iniquity."

On page two Fox ran the editorials, most of them tongue-in-cheek diatribes against sin — perhaps a defense of capital punishment, an acid account of hypocrisy among do-gooders, or an exposé of police incompetence. Further on there were answers to correspondents about criminal records, more blasts against racketeering, and news items with headings along this line:

#### SNARED BY A SCOUNDREL

An Innocent Country Beauty  
On Her Travels, Encounters Her Fate In  
An Adventure Of The Worst Type

A number of columns, most of them with alliterative titles, were the heart of the *National Police Gazette*. "Vice's Varieties" was "an assorted lot of evil

deeds of evil doers." "Noose Notes" described a hanging with all the heavy gaiety of an old-fashioned family reunion. There were "Crimes of the Clergy" and "Homicidal Horrors" and, most popular of all, "Glimpses of Gotham" by the ubiquitous MacKeever, which familiarized readers "with the sumptuousness of Fifth Avenue and the squalor of Five Points, with the boudoir of the great actress and the cell of the condemned man." (After MacKeever's death, Fox published "Glimpses of Gotham" in book form and it sold 250,000 copies.)

The *Gazette* ran pages of furious fiction and thousands of feature stories, often in installments, for instance, "Steps to Ruin," "Gaslight Temptations" and the unsolved kidnapping of Charley Ross. A clergyman caught in *flagrante delicto* was honey to the *Gazette's* tongue. So was a "high-toned" scandal. An enticing account of two beauties in Keokuk punching, gouging and butting each other for the favor of a local swain was a natural for the paper. All of this was accompanied by hair-raising pictures.

Fox had some of the finest artists in the country working for him. Men of talent and imagination like George E. McEvoy, Matt Morgan, Charles Kendrick and George White were on his staff. Some of the woodcut effects they produced remain unsurpassed. Whether it was William H. Vanderbilt colliding with a family sled or two charming society damsels being spied on by peeping Toms, the action was

always lusty and titillating. A villain in the act of spiriting off a protesting maiden is foiled by some Handsome Harry. Or the congregation of a Pittsburgh Presbyteriate is in a terrific brawl on what should have been a quiet Sabbath: Rival factions, at odds over the choice of a pastor, are entangled in a riotous free-for-all. Pews are upset, prayer books are strewn everywhere; the pastor is at the throat of the deacon.

## III

The *Gazette* was never dull, and there was a good reason for it. In those days many of the star reporters for the great metropolitan dailies shared one great weakness, a craving for hard liquor combined with a shortage of hard cash. For four bottles of whisky and \$10 Fox could hire the town's top writing talent over the weekend. Writers whom he picked up this way would be locked in a special den with some pugilist posted outside to make sure the *Gazette* got its money's worth. On Monday morning Fox had a slew of fascinating material. His only advice to the journalists before locking them up was: "Write! Write a lot! Write the stuff the dailies don't dare print! Be as truthful as possible, but remember, a story's a story!"

The *Gazette's* advertising was low-brow, crude, occasionally hilarious and always enormously profitable to Fox. "I am the acknowledged belle of my own city, and have beaux by the score," advertised Miss Flossie Lee of Augusta, Maine, "but wish to extend

my acquaintance over the whole country." Suckers were offered full-sized pictures of Flossie as well as a dozen photos of other "charming young lady friends" all for 25 cents. For the same price the West Supply Company of St. Louis would send you a document advertised as *Marriage and its results with 14 vivid pictures*, a photo of your future spouse along with a "teasing love letter" and 15 valuable secrets. And for only ten cents, "Married Ladies or those contemplating marriage" could get a sample of Hart's celebrated "female powder," particulars regarding a "Boon to Woman," and "information to every lady," whatever that was. The Standard Card Co. of Oswego, N. Y., offered "readers and strippers for all games, fine holdouts, loaded dice, crap ringers, etc." The Pedine Co. claimed it had a remedy guaranteed to make the feet smaller. Dr. Sanden of New York and Chicago peddled an electric belt which was guaranteed to cure "Nervous Debility, Seminal Weakness, Impotence, Lumbago, Rheumatism, Kidney and Bladder Complaints, Dyspepsia, Malaria and Piles." Suckers had a choice between a \$5 belt containing 26 degrees of strength and one for \$10, four times stronger. Judging from the number of ads inserted by Dr. Sanden, there were plenty of suckers.

At least fifty quacks paid Fox a dollar a line just to publish their libidinous humbug on sexual invigorants and the cure of venereal disease. The San Mateo Med. Co. of St.

Lotus had a "delicious MEXICAN CONFECTION" which "positively and permanently increases sexual power . . . Restores Vigor, Snap and Health of Youth." Dr. Jas. Wilson of Cleveland advertised a marvelous "instrument worn at night" for doctorless correction of "Youthful Indiscretion (self abuse or excess) resulting in loss of memory, spots before the eyes, nervousness, weak back, and defective smell." J. H. Reeves of P. O. Box 2320, New York, offered *Gazette* fans an enticing handout. For only the asking he would send "victims of youthful imprudence a simple means of self-cure" which he had, it appeared, been lucky enough to discover "after having tried every known remedy in vain." J. C. Allan Co. also knew a trick or two. Without mentioning specifically what their medicine was good for, they claimed: "No. 1, will cure any case in four days or less. No. 2, will cure the most obstinate case, no matter of how long standing." Apparently there was no need to count any further.

Anticipating repercussions, the *Gazette* covered itself by piously announcing that it would not under any circumstances permit ads of a "lewd, obscene or fraudulent character." Then Fox added a line: "The proprietor will not hold himself responsible for the advertiser's honesty."

#### IV

Fox made the *Gazette* the world's leading journal of sport, stage and sensation. He set out to do it without

respect for person, position or power of wealth; and he made a lot of enemies along the way. Owney Geoghegan, the proprietor of a Bowery dive, appears to have resented the *Gazette's* appraisal of him and once stormed Fox's office with murder in his heart. Owney regained consciousness at the bottom of the stairs. Lorillard, the tobacco titan, gave a swanky ball the likes of which New York hadn't seen in months. The *Gazette's* society editor polished it off in a few snide paragraphs which included a description of an imaginary Lorillard coat-of-arms (a "cuspidor couchant with two cigars and a plug of tobacco rampant"). Once when there was talk about an appropriation for importing a dozen gondolas to ornament the lake in Central Park, the *Gazette* pinned these words on a prominent alderman by the name of Barney O'Shane:

Gintlemin, the idea is a good wan, but — I would make an amindmint. Why should we buy twelve of them goldolas? I make a motion we buy two of thim — a male wan and a female wan. Thin, gintlemin, let nature take its course.

These tactics inevitably brought on a bucketful of damage suits for ruined reputations, all of which Fox pooh-poohed. "We do not heed threats or libel suits," the *Gazette* wrote self-righteously. "We are strong in the justice of our motives and will have out the truth at any cost whatsoever. We never dodged a challenge or evaded an investigation in our

lives. Those who fear, make truce, but coercion never swerves the just and bold."

Just to show how he felt about the matter, Fox ran an itemized list of suits brought against the *Gazette* over a six-month period in 1885 and then openly dared the litigants to try and collect. The sum of the suits, threatened or filed, was a whopping \$3,120,000, including one brought by Lillian Russell (\$20,000) for some brazen references to her career. If anyone ever collected there is no record of it. However, Anthony Comstock's famous Society for the Suppression of Vice hauled Fox into court on four different occasions, and the fourth time he was fined \$500 for "indecent advertisements."

Nobody can say how many times Fox came close to being killed or beaten by some of his irate targets. The record appears to show only one successful assault, and even in this matter the facts are somewhat clouded. The incident began when the *Gazette* reported that Richard Swayne Arthurson of St. Louis

eloped with a married woman, was arrested, convicted and fined \$15.00. He then returned to his wife, with whom he lived for a week, when he eloped again. This time he chose a maiden, having learned, as he said in a letter to Mrs. Arthurson, that there is no law against running off with unmarried females.

Shortly after this appeared, Mr. Arthurson came looking for Mr. Fox, and the morning after the two met

Mr. Fox came to work without a front tooth. He denied, however, that the injury had been inflicted by Arthurson. "I was struck by an elevated railroad train," he maintained, and to prove it he filed suit against the Metropolitan Street Railway for \$100,000. The case was never tried.

At least once a week, Fox entertained delegations of do-gooders come to correct the errors of the *Gazette's* ways. There was the time a delegation of clergymen marched into his office bearing aloft the *Gazette's* pen-and-ink cover of Miss Blanche Pruitt, Queen of the Ballet, in all her voluptuous grandeur. At the spokesman's first words, "Let us pray!" Fox immediately dropped to his knees and gave forth as zealously as anyone in the delegation. This maneuver took the edge off the group's fervor, and there seemed nothing for them to do but leave.

# V

One of the few men who recognized Fox's genius from the start was a New York policeman named William Muldoon. Muldoon had lent Fox \$500 to help him get going and they became close friends. Later Muldoon became wrestling champion of the world and the manager of the Boston Strong Boy, John L. Sullivan.

Partly from his association with Muldoon, and partly through his keen publishing insight, Fox began in 1879 the country's first regular sports department. It soon became so popu-



lar that it eclipsed even crime in its hold on *Gazette* readers. This was at a time when bare-knuckle fighting was the rage; and when Paddy Ryan met Joe Goss the *Gazette* scooped the fight. It printed a scintillating display of ringside pictures which attracted possibly more attention than the Garfield-Hancock Presidential campaign.

For years Fox carried on a feud with John L. Sullivan. The *Gazette* publisher had been all set to back Sullivan in his quest for the title and had gone down to Harry Hill's Sporting Theatre one April evening in 1881 to look the fighter over. As usual, Sullivan was the center of attraction that night; when Fox arrived he was bragging of his prowess to a rapt circle of admirers. Fox sent a waiter over to invite Sullivan to his table. But John L. announced with a roar: "It's no longer from him to me than it is from me to him. If he wants to see me, *he* can do the walking."

From then on John L. Sullivan became Fox's pet hate. The insulted publisher searched high and low for a pugilist who could flatten him. First he backed Paddy Ryan. Sullivan slaughtered him in February 1882 and contemptuously called the diamond-studded championship belt donated by Fox a "dog collar." Fox was furious. He threw fighter after fighter at the great champion — Slade of Australia, Greenfield of England and finally the brute Jake Kilrain. Sullivan knocked them all out. It was only after the historic bout with Kilrain on

July 8, 1889, which cost Fox \$10,000 that Sullivan and the *Gazette* publisher patched up their feud. From then on they were friends for life and the *Gazette* provided an intimate coverage of the champion's most spectacular battles. Circulation reached an all-time high of 500,000.

By 1890 Fox was sitting on top of the world. The *Gazette* was a million-dollar enterprise housed in a towering structure alongside Brooklyn Bridge. It occupied more space and machinery than any other publication in the United States. It had subscribers in 26 foreign countries. The *Gazette's* giant illuminated clock was the best-known timepiece in town and Mr. Fox one of the country's leading celebrities. He raced his own horse, a \$10,000 beauty named Police Gazette, and supported his own baseball team, the Foxes. His building was easily the sporting center of the world. Its furniture was palatial, modeled after rare old specimens in the Louvre. It contained a special museum of Fox trophies set against stands of plush and velvet and oil paintings of the great heroes of the day; and it was topped off by a fabulous Fox sensation — a huge dumbbell which was said to weigh 1030 pounds.

Fox was not a man to hoard his good fortune. His charity list was an arm long. He spent more than a million dollars in awards to athletes and sportsmen. He donated diamond and gold medals and belts left and right, not only to prize fighters but to walkers, club swingers, Annie Oakleys, rowers, wrestlers, weight-lifters, swim-

mers, track men and fencers. Long before William Randolph Hearst borrowed the idea, Fox was getting publicity by staging every kind of contest imaginable. The *Gazette* crowned champion singers and dancers, champion rat catchers and oyster shuckers and champion steeple climbers. Nor did Fox forget his best salesmen, the bartenders and barbers. He awarded medals to the champion drink-mixer and the champion hair-cutter. The latter is said to have cut a head of hair in less than 30 seconds, and the customer to have received a special award for bravery.

Fox's most fantastic philanthropy was a row of tenements which he tried to build up in rat-infested Chinatown. He poured thousands of dollars into remodeling them. He put in marble stairs, steam heat, hot and cold water, gas, bathrooms and incredible bronze statues of many of his prizewinners — all for \$10 per month per flat. It didn't work out, however. The tenants were accustomed to coming home drunk and rioting in the halls. They pawned the *objets d'art*, even the plumbing. Whole bathrooms were disposed of for five dollars, and one party, more enterprising than his neighbors, sold a flight of the prize marble stairs.

The *Gazette's* slump coincided with the rise of the tabloids during the years around the first World War. The tabloids stole Fox's thunder: people refused to wait a whole week for scandal and snappy pictures when they

could find them every day in the penny press. The eighteenth amendment was another disaster for the *Gazette*. The speakeasies which supplanted the old saloons appeared not to care much about Fox's journal, and a major source of circulation was eliminated. Then about 1922 women began to bob their hair, and the old-fashioned barber shop, another *Gazette* citadel, was lost. Rather than run the risk of offending their new female customers, barbers began to cut off their subscriptions to the *Gazette*. As one observer, in a fit of rhetoric, put it: "Dame Fortune had delivered a right uppercut to the chin of the old pink paper which left it as groggy as Kilrain in his seventy-fifth round 'nigh New Orleans.'!"

The paper took a lease on life during the Dempsey-Tunney fights of 1926-27, when its circulation went back to 200,000. But the rise was only temporary. Against a flood of confession and girly magazines the illustrated weekly curled up its toes and flopped over. In February 1932 it was sold for a bankrupt.

Occasionally, however, some new angel pops up who cannot resist the lure of the old *Gazette*. The latest buyer, an adventurous spirit named Harold Roswell, claims that he actually passed up a chance to buy *Life* magazine in order to purchase the *Gazette* in 1935.

Roswell publishes his baby once a month from a Broadway office walled with blowups of old *Gazette* scenes. On the theory that if the times have



changed, people haven't, he has boldly imitated Richard K. Fox. He has restored the pink cover and ancient masthead and borrowed copiously from the heyday of the *Gazette*. Today's monthly resembles a tabloid Sunday supplement with exposés, sex crimes, sports and plenty of cheese-cake. For fifteen cents the reader gets a glamorous pinup girl on the cover and an inside containing reports on such matters as "Why Hedy Lamarr Can't Stay Married," "Love Goes to a Murder" and "Lady Wrestlers in Action."

The advertising, as anyone might guess, is still on the pulp level. By answering any one of a dozen *Gazette* ads you can learn how to be a magician or a fingerprint expert, how to expose card cheats, write thrilling love letters, beat the races, avoid gray hair, mix exotic drinks, make yourself "commando-tough in double-quick time," borrow money, cure your aching feet and back, and join "the Hundreds of Thousands of Men Who . . . Appear SLIMMER . . . Feel Better . . . and Look Younger" with "COMMANDER, the Amazing NEW Abdominal Supporter."

Roswell has run up against many of the same problems as Fox. He has had

to contend with threats of bodily harm. He has fought (and won) a battle for the retention of his mailing permit. He has been dogged by damage suits (without anybody collecting). The latest of these, filed by the town of Phoenix City, Alabama, was the result of a typical *Gazette* exposé called "The Wickedest City in America."

It is a tribute to Roswell's ingenuity that the *Gazette* has made an amazing recovery. Its circulation has soared from about 20,000 a month in 1935 to over 300,000 today. Its subscribers include Alfred DuPont, Supreme Court Justices Murphy and Black and, naturally, Tommy Manville. Senators have defended the paper on the floor of Congress and Presidents Roosevelt and Truman have endorsed certain of its articles. "Roosevelt liked our article in support of his second term so much that he influenced the Democratic National Committee to buy a quarter of a million copies," Roswell told me.

Which only goes to show that the publishing ideas of the old master, Richard Kyle Fox, are basically as sound nowadays as they were in that gaslit era when he parlayed \$2 into a fortune of nearly \$2 million.



## IS GOD NECESSARY?

BY ALSON J. SMITH

ONE of the most trenchant commentaries on the current revulsion from materialism is Dr. Carl Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*. Significantly enough, it was not written by a member of what Henry Mencken used to call "the reverend clergy" but by a psychiatrist. Indeed, much of our best theology today is being written, not by theologians, but by scientists.

In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* Jung says that he has never had a single patient over 35 years of age whose problem, in the last analysis, was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. He quotes a conversation between himself and a patient:

DOCTOR: You are suffering from a lack of faith in God and immortality.

PATIENT: But Dr. Jung, do *you* believe in those things?

DOCTOR: I am a doctor, not a priest. But I tell you this — if you recover your faith you will get well; if you don't, you won't.

The feeling that salvation depends on recovering, or finding, or creating some sort of a religious faith is pervading a good part of atom-stricken humanity today. The creation of the

bomb, of course, and the chorus of scientific *mea culpa* that has accompanied it has dramatized something that has been going on ever since World War I shattered the complacent, orderly universe of our fathers. That war and its aftermath tore apart the cozy, friendly world which was going leisurely on to perfection under the aegis of the internal combustion engine, and reminded mankind that the old problem of Good and Evil remained unsolved. In the midst of jazz-age boom and bust, apple-selling and international double-crossing, it gradually dawned on the more intelligent members of the human race in the United States and elsewhere that they were — lost! It is this growing consciousness of *aloneness* that is the most characteristic feature of the literature of the inter-war period. "O lost!" runs the refrain of Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*. "Remembering speechlessly, we seek the great forgotten language, the lost lane-end into heaven, a stone, a leaf, an unfound door." We are afloat on the River of Time, we have lost our father, and We Can't Go Home Again — back to the old, comfortable

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