

## SWEET ARE THE USES OF PUBLICITY

*A National Industry to Meet a Nation-Wide Demand*

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**M**R. H. G. WELLS, a man of many convictions, gave forcible expression to one of them when he said a few years ago that Americans spend half their lives in a "loud glare," and the other half behind a very effective smoke-screen. They are as dexterous in courting publicity as in eluding it. "When you go to the United States," he wrote, "and see head-lines and interviews with a girl about her engagement, or with a professor about his resignation, you at first say: 'Good God, there is no privacy here at all.' Then you discover that outside that crude, cheap, hasty lighting-up of salient objects and events, there are abysses of darkness, immense pits where much goes on and nothing is exposed; and people, rich people especially, are unobserved in them, and doing the most extraordinary things."

This is a truth so manifest that no one dreams of questioning it. But the phenomenon is not confined to America or to the twentieth century. Long before newspapers began their enlightening career, astute men knew what to blazon to the world, and what to withhold from observation. How otherwise would the Delphic oracle have run its long and honorable course? How otherwise

would treaties, pacts, protocols, coalitions, concordats and the like, have come into being? In the press of to-day the columns of foreign news are padded out with fragments of unimportant intelligence enlivened with adroit speculation. We are told that the Prince of Wales has learned a few words of Welsh, that Mussolini desires all Italians to wear the same kind of head-gear (a thing abhorrent to the human spirit), that a poor little mission has been looted and burned in China. But an indiscreet explosion of poison gas, where none was supposed to exist, is lightly handled; and into the sacred sanctuary of the great god, Capital, no one ventures to intrude. When a Paris despatch is headlined, "Europeans to Keep Steel Sales Hidden—Trust Will Not Disclose Its Export Markets, or Sharing of Business Among Members," we know that Trusts abroad and Trusts at home are very much alike. One touch of finance makes the whole world kin.

The gentle wish-wash of social gossip which has a generous allowance of space in American newspapers rises occasionally (as when the Queen of Rumania visited our shores) into a tidal wave of imbecility. During our submerged period,

nothing seemed of importance save the lady's vapid utterances and amazing wardrobe, unless, indeed, it was the desolating fact—cabled hysterically from Paris—that her son, Prince Nicholas, had appeared in the rue de la Paix “with a hole of considerable size in the heel of one of his socks, which showed plainly above his Oxford shoe.” Yet amid the feverish paragraphs which dealt with the intimacies of the queen's toilet there was never a word of information as to her purpose in coming to this country. Her too zealous publicity agents exhausted themselves in raptures over her “low-cut pumps of amber snake-skin,” and left us to suppose she had journeyed all the way from Rumania to show them to us.

Two years ago the managers of Philadelphia's ill-fated Sesqui-Centennial Exposition contrived adroitly to wedge a prize-fight (Dempsey-Tunney) between a Greek play and a great religious ceremony. They were broad-minded men, devoid of prejudice. Reams of printed matter filled the newspapers for weeks before this epoch-making event. Preachers, women's clubs, “red-blooded men” and “hundred-percent Americans” (terms of mystery both of them), uplifters and some dozens of societies for regulating other people's lives—all contributed their views. Much irrelevant information was offered and read. Yet, as the “New Republic” pointed out, the one thing that should have been known, Dempsey's physical condition (he had for years preserved a maximum of reputation on a minimum of fighting), was as carefully hidden as is the financial status

of Moscow. The betting was done in the dark, with results which should be—but will not be—a warning to bettors in the future.



A typical illustration of American sentiment concerning privacy and publicity is the ever-renewed dispute anent the printing of income-tax returns. People with incomes do not want the returns printed. They say, and with some show of reason, that taxes are personal calamities, and of no concern to the public. People without incomes not only want the returns printed, but take a somber delight in reading them. The more fabulous the figures, the keener the relish for this Barmecide feast, which appears to afford the feasters a ghostly form of nourishment. The conservative press supports, as in duty bound, the people with incomes, and denounces the printed lists as the surrender of life's last decency. The radical press supports, as in duty bound, the incomeless people, and denounces all efforts at secrecy as inspired by sinister motives. And to supply the comic element which is seldom lacking in public affairs, an occasional bootlegger or burglar (men who certainly have a need of, if not a right to, secrecy) takes pleasure in paying his taxes, and stating with commendable candor the nature of his avocation, and the profits accruing therefrom. One Chicago burglar of a humorous turn claimed a deduction for certain small tools lost on the job. Crime being a popular and lucrative American industry, it is only right that it should help to support the government it defies.

The eagerness of adults for “reve-

lations" of any kind about anybody is like the well-remembered eagerness of children for a "secret." Nothing was ever so full of promise and so empty of fulfilment as the secrets of childhood unless it be the revelations of maturity. Think of the vogue accorded to the "true" biographies of distinguished Americans—"The True George Washington," "The True Benjamin Franklin," when they first flaunted their verities to the public eye. Yet they were, in the main, indistinguishable from the presumably false lives which preceded and which followed them. A brief biography of Mr. Coolidge promised to tell "his whole life as a human being"—something which has never yet been told about anybody since the beginning of the world. "The Secrets of the White House," as revealed by its house-keeper, went no further in all likelihood than the President's inclination to economy and fish-cakes.

England may be less adroit than the United States in shadowing her "abysses of darkness"; but in the matter of "loud glare" she stands second to none. The memoirs of the irrepressible "Margot," now the widowed Countess of Oxford and Asquith, were as loud as a saxophone, and as glaring as a Broadway electric sign. When some reminiscences by Mrs. Lloyd George were under consideration, the publishers thought fit to promise her readers "Fascinating glimpses into the secret history of politics" and "Intriguing sidelights upon leading personalities"—assurances which they must have known to be vain. The "Life Story of the Queen of England," as told by a "fire-eating Laborite" who was her

Majesty's "personal friend," belongs to the realm of harmless absurdities. But it does not sin on the side of reticence.

The indifference of the French to the private lives of public men (unless there is a *cause célèbre*) amazes Americans who like to know every day what their President is about. Président Doumergue has an official residence at Rambouillet. Half-a-dozen lines in the press suffice to inform the public that he has gone to it, and there is apparently nothing more to tell until he returns to Paris. Premier Poincaré has a summer home in Lorraine. When he goes there, another half-dozen lines announce the fact, and a soothing silence follows. What these gentlemen do with their moments of leisure is apparently their own concern. Now surely President Coolidge may be excused a little silence, a little secretiveness, a little inscrutability (if it came to that) in view of the fact that he has been compelled to live his outward life in proximity to a camera and a radio. Think of the fish he has caught and the worms he has caught them with? Think of the pictures of him in chaps and a sombrero! Think, good Heavens, of the pictures of him in the head-dress of an American Indian! Think of his few guarded words let loose upon the country! Think of the thousands of photographs of Mrs. Coolidge! Think of the hundred thousand allusions to her as "the first lady of the land." And think of a vast, keen, strenuous nation forever regaling itself with this infantile substitute for news.

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James Gordon Bennett, in the height of his arrogant renown, said

that the function of a newspaper was not to instruct, but to startle. He knew whereof he spoke, and he startled successfully for quite a number of years. But startling, like shocking, is effective only when it plays a lone hand. Competition ruins the market, because people cannot be either startled or shocked beyond a certain point, when custom renders them insensitive. "Margot" depended upon startling her stolid public, and shocking the delicately minded. She did not need to go far to obtain the desired result; no further really than the ambitious lady in Sir Owen Seaman's ballad:

"Across the sounding city's din  
She wandered, looking indiscreet,  
And ultimately landed in  
The neighbourhood of Regent St."

But such half-way measures would win little publicity in these advanced days. "Now that women have learned that they can talk about everything, they won't talk about anything else," observes a captious critic; and it takes a deal of plain speaking to make any impression upon a jaded and sex-soaked world. Isadora Duncan left us a categorical list of "lapses"; and people whom she must have reasonably hoped to horrify were only amused. The carefully exploited irregularities of the Countess of Cathcart could not save her dull play from failure, while better plays by perfectly respectable men and women ran their merry course. It was easy for Swinburne, writing for a reticent generation, to achieve a *succès de scandale* with a volume of verse in which the purpose was louder than the fulfilment:

"Far rolling my ravenous red eye,  
And lifting a mutinous lid,  
To all monarchs and matrons I  
said I  
Would shock them—and did."

He could not do it now—not at least with that equipment, and with the disadvantage of being really a poet. In fact he recognized his limitations, and wisely changed his ways or ever he came to die.

A few years ago a clergyman could gain a fair share of publicity by denying in the pulpit those articles of faith which he had been ordained to uphold. If he attracted the attention of his bishop, as well as of his congregation and the ever-attentive press, he was a made man—not perhaps for life, but certainly for a season. It was only when bishops grew wily and lay low, and when muddled congregations no longer knew what they believed and what they didn't believe, that the hard-pressed man of God was compelled to introduce heathen rites, and rhythmic dances, and choral songs of dubious vintage. This was up-hill work. Nothing is more disheartening than to try to keep on agitating an indifferent world which fumes one day and forgets the next.

The uses of publicity, the capture of space in our newspapers, has developed a national industry to meet a nation-wide demand. It costs a great deal to advertise, and the advertisement, while rich in suggestion, is necessarily weak in authority. But when camouflaged as news, it is effective and all pure profit. This is what the "public relations counsel," alias "publicity man," alias "press-agent," sets out

to accomplish; and this is what men of real genius, like Mr. Henry Ford, do skilfully and systematically for themselves.

The "Saturday Evening Post" observes with some bitterness that one reason why Mr. Ford is richer than anybody else is because he gets his expensive advertising for nothing. His method is simple, natural, and seemingly without guile. Everything works into his scheme from the royal family of England to Mary's little lamb. Somebody is forever asking him questions about the study of history, the education of children, the religion of atheists, the desirability of wealth, the morality of the movies; and his answers, properly head-lined, are printed in the morning papers. When a new car is to be put upon the market, the attention of the public is directed to this fact, not in a vulgar business way, but unobtrusively, as a matter of national interest. There is no need to engage prominent women and men to ride blindfolded in the car, and recognize it by the smoothness of its motion, which is a recklessly extravagant thing to do. There is no need to issue costly booklets, showing that it derives its perfection from the arts of the Renaissance. A man who can tell thousands of readers that he is selling a product below cost, and can get this word over as news without paying a penny for it, is bound to be the richest, as he is certainly the smartest maker of motors in the world.

A year or two ago a candid writer in the "Survey" who wanted free advertising space for the charities she had most at heart, told us to

what lengths she had gone in framing material which the editor could be induced to mistake for news. Her field of labor was a humble one. The ramifications of the system extend to great commercial enterprises, and to propaganda on a colossal scale. Adroit workers can place an article on the market, an island on the map, a theory in the minds of the public. We see their hand in periodical suggestions of France's unfriendliness, of Japan's military spirit, of Great Britain's fast-growing fervor for prohibition. A well-written book on Soviet Russia, cheerily optimistic and suavely persuasive, is more than likely to be a stunt, ordered and paid for by an American corporation disposed to risk business with Moscow.

This is serious labor with serious ends in view. The motives, if not the methods, are comprehensible. But publicity has its pleasures as well as its uses, and these pleasures are of an amazing simplicity. Reduced to their least common denominator, they consist in seeing our names in the newspapers. What a sure instinct it was which told the youthful Edward Bok that the half-grown boys and girls at a children's party would relish this experience as keenly as did their elders. What acumen to guess at a subconscious aspiration in minds "yet fresh with childhood." Edward "wrote up" that party and many others for the "Brooklyn Eagle," taking pains always to mention the names of even the youngest guests. He was paid at the rate of four dollars a column, and it takes a good many names to make any impression on a column of newspaper print, so he



was not likely to leave any out. The parents of the children were apparently as well pleased as were their offspring, for we are assured by the adult and Americanized Mr. Bok that "Everybody was happy."

There are reputable journals in the United States which look more like photograph albums than news-sheets. The dozen or so of pictures they present every day are mostly women—not women in public life, but "popular society matrons," "popular débutantes," "popular members of the younger set." Some of them are giving teas, some of them are being entertained at teas, some of them are visiting, some of them are sailing for Europe, some of them are returning to college or to school. There are no corresponding photographs of popular undergraduates of Yale, lads returning to Groton, or young men who are entering the Harvard law school in the autumn. Fashionable intelligence is recruited exclusively from feminine ranks. There are good reasons for this. What could the most adroit reporter make of the costumes worn by men at the opera?

England, unobserved by Mr. Wells, does not lag far behind us in the exploitation of rank and fashion. We have Mr. Mallock's word for it—and presumably Mr. Mallock knew—that the guests a London hostess desires and welcomes are those whose names have a proper ring when her entertainments are reported in the press. This statement cannot of course refer to the supremely exalted circles that seek nothing—least of all recognition—from less highly placed humanity. Every center of civilization, London,

Paris, Rome or New York, possesses a group of men and women who combine birth, affluence, some intellectual or artistic distinction, and—in London—some political interests. These men and women are understood by the seasoned reporter and the astute press-agent to belong to the pursued, not the pursuers. They are quarry, not hunters. No photographs of their infant sons or of their school-girl daughters are attainable. Whatever romance precedes their formally announced engagements is known only to the romantic couple. The gospel of push and shove does not enter into their philosophy of life. Their forefathers pushed and shoved themselves long ago into the seats of the mighty.

The interview is said to be an exclusively American institution. It is occasionally disconcerting to distinguished foreigners who visit our shores, and who are asked when they step reeling from the ship what they think of New York Harbor, of sky-scrapers, of the coming election, of prohibition, and the outlawry of war. Their polite evasions are transformed into resounding truisms—so at least says Mr. Guedalla—when the interview is published; and they find themselves in the unpleasant position of counseling a country of which they know little, about matters of which they know nothing at all.

This, however, is only one insignificant aspect of a game which Americans play with adroitness. Reporters have given us to understand that the pressure is not all on their side. They do not invade the privacy of the office or the sanctity

of the home. They receive the freedom of both. A man who has a communication to make to the public, and who makes it through the medium of a news-column, is not victimized by curiosity. A woman who shows a reporter a dress, and says, "You can describe me as wearing this," should refrain from regretting the unwarranted personalities of the press. A cynical writer in the "New Republic" is of the opinion that it is easier for an office-holder to be a hero to his valet, if he has one, than to the City Desk of a newspaper, where every move he has made toward the shining goal of publicity, every vista opened where the view is good, every Chinese wall built to hide a rubbish heap, are as familiar as the letters of his name.

When Colonel Charles Lindbergh astounded and delighted the world by doing, in a singularly unobtrusive manner, something which had never been done before, he won for himself undying renown, and what the newspapers called "the deafening plaudits of the American nation." His modesty was as unconquerable as his courage, and was more severely tried. It was not his fault that the "Baltimore Sun" said, "Lindbergh has exalted the race of men." He did not say it, and he could not help the "Sun" saying it. His gaiety and good-temper veiled his personal reticence. He actually refused to sponsor a cigarette, giving the inadequate reason that he did not smoke, and rejecting a bribe that has proved irresistible to the great ones of the earth. Five months after his flight it was computed that the news and comment in American newspapers alone would have filled four

volumes of the Encyclopædia Britannica (a good deal of guesswork goes into this kind of calculation); yet to the appalling mass of print—for the most part irrelevant—the composed figure of the aviator lent dignity and decorum.

By way of contrast the press announced Miss Ruth Elder's attempted flight across the Atlantic in head-lines fit for fashionable intelligence: "Ruth Elder Brave but Truly Feminine." "Powdered Her Nose and Arranged Her Curls as Plane Roared for the Take-off." Whole columns were devoted to her personal appearance, her "vivid head-dress," her "gay-colored sweater," her laudable ambition "to fly to Paris and buy an evening gown," and the pertinent fact that she was "undeniably the prettiest of air-pilots." Had she succeeded in doing what the less expansive Miss Earhart did later on, she would have eclipsed the Queen of Rumania. Even after failure all was not lost. Solacing paragraphs appeared in the papers: "Ruth Elder to Get \$100,000 in One Hundred Days." "Flier Signs to Appear in Vaudeville."

Sweet, indeed, are the uses of publicity.



The "loud glare" which is business-like and has a practical purpose achieves its end because of a certain child-like quality in the American mind. Editors, like motion-picture directors, recognize this quality, and cater to it. They know how easily the public is amused. Rows of serious men who do not seem devoid of intelligence will sit for hours looking at films which are on the intellectual level of the extinct dime

novel. They will devote to the comic strips in newspapers the same sober, sorrowful attention that women give to the columns of society news. Somebody must be interested in hearing that a hostess at Palm Beach "whose staff of servants numbers forty-nine," was compelled to borrow eight butlers from her friends before she could give an entertainment. This stimulating story would never have been told had it not been sure of a hearing. People without servants want to read about other people's butlers and kitchen-maids just as people without incomes want to read about other people's tax returns. Perhaps a smoke-screen would be as advisable in one instance as in the other. Contrasts have never been safe things to consider closely.

A simple and innocuous pastime is afforded by Galveston, Texas, where "the most beautiful woman in the world" is yearly crowned, and notices of the event wired over the country. How Galveston becomes aware of the far-flung beauty of the world—the light-haired, half-grown Danish girl, the flawless Sicilian peasant, the "shawled colleen of Galway," is not apparent; but pic-

tures of "Miss Universe" (the stars in their courses compete) are reproduced in American papers, and startle us, less by their loveliness than by their amazing nudity. A year ago an astute purveyor of news explained that while a coveted publicity could be gained by eliminating a woman's clothing "as far as the law allowed," this minimum was unfortunately reached at a bound, and competition ceased.

The Hon. Bertrand Russell, who delivers his lightest and least sought-for opinion as if he were sitting on the Supreme Bench, is disposed to be hard on the press. He appears to hold it responsible for the circumstances it reports, the qualities it mirrors, the publicity which it is required to give. He says that "only self-respect can make journalists cease to be lackeys," which is true because only self-respect can make any of us (even radicals and pacifists) decent human beings, and fit for the society of our kind. The office of American journalism is not to teach reticence and dignity to the public. The most it can do is to defer to these highly civilized qualities whenever they come its way.



## SCENERY

### *Mostly Straw-Flowers and a Young Bachelor*

ELIZABETH CORBETT

**R**IGHT after dinner I'd taken the clippers and set to work on the box-hedge around our dooryard. June is a busy time on a truck-farm, but that hedge had been the pride of Pa's life. When Pa died that left just my brother Pete and me at the old place, and Pete didn't hold with clipping hedges or planting flower-beds or cutting the lawn. So those things usually fell to me to do.

I'd clipped just from the corner to the gate when Jim McAulay came along. Jim had bought the eighty acres south of us on the shore of Lake Michigan; he was one of those city fellows who didn't feel like going back to a city job after the war. He lived alone, with nobody to do for him in the house or around the place, but he always seemed to have plenty of time to go visiting his neighbors. I suppose he got lonesome being by himself all the time. Anyhow an Irishman always likes somebody to talk to.

"We need rain, don't we?" said Jim. He took the clippers out of my hand. "Let me cut this for you. You sit in the shade and rest awhile."

"Oh," I said, "I'll get the other pair of clippers and work along with you."

Jim grinned. He was a red-haired fellow with big freckles, but when

he grinned he was quite good-looking. "Better watch me work. It's more of a treat," he said. "Your flower-beds look nice."

"These beds in the dooryard are always a good deal the same. I try my experiments out where the neighbors can't see 'em. Pete says I'd plant the whole farm to flowers if he'd let me. But even Pete can't deny I've got the nicest field of straw-flowers in Wisconsin."

"Straw-flowers?" repeated Jim. "What's the connection between straw and flowers?"

I laughed. "Straw-flowers are what they call those flowers you dry to use in bouquets that will last all winter. Last year I took five hundred bunches down to the State Fair at Milwaukee and sold 'em for a quarter a bunch. I could have sold more if I'd had 'em. This year I'm going to have more."

"Your flowers make you a lot of extra work," said Jim, setting the clippers going at last. Jim was the kind of fellow that thinks he's hoeing when he has a hoe in his hand.

"They do. But there's nothing I like so much as to see things growing and know it was I made 'em grow."

"Well, if that's your idea of farming!" said a voice close behind us.

Jim and I both jumped. Pete had