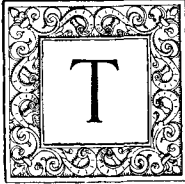


The Country Newspaper

BY WILLIAM ALLEN WHITE



THE country town is one of those things we have worked out for ourselves here in America. Our cities are not unlike other cities in the world; the trolley and the omnibus and the subway, the tender hot-house millionaire and the hardy, perennial crook are found in all cities. Class lines extend from city to city well around the globe. And American aversion to caste disappears when the American finds himself cooped in a city with a million of his fellows. But in the country town—the political unit larger than the village and smaller than the city, the town with a population between three and one hundred thousand—we have built up something distinctively American. Physically, it is of its own kind; the people for the most part live in detached wooden houses on lots with fifty feet of street frontage, and from one hundred to one hundred and fifty feet in depth. Grass is the common heritage of all the children—grass and flowers. A kitchen-garden smiles in the back yard, and the service of public utilities is so cheap that in most country towns in America electricity for lighting and household power, water for the kitchen sink and the bath-room, gas for cooking, and the telephone with unlimited use may be found in every house. In the town where these lines are written there are more telephones than there are houses, and as many water intakes as there are families, and more electric lights than there are men, women, and children. Civilization brings its labor-saving devices to all the people of an American country town. The uncivilized area is negligible, if one measures civilization by the use of the conveniences and luxuries that civilization has brought.

In the home, the difference between the rich and the poor, in these towns, is

denoted largely by the multiplication of rooms; there is no very great difference in the kinds of rooms in the houses of those who have much and those who have little. And, indeed, the economic differences are of no consequence. The average American thinks he is saving for his children, and for nothing else. But if the child of the rich man and the child of the poor man meet in a common school, graduate from a common high-school, and meet in the country college or in the state university—and they do associate thus in the days of their youth—there is no reason why parents should strain themselves for the children; and they do not strain themselves. They relax in their automobiles, go to the movies, inhabit the summer boarding-house in the mountains or by the sea, and hoot at the vulgarity and stupidity of those strangers who appear to be rich and to be grunting and sweating and saving and intriguing for more money, but who really are only well-to-do middle-class people.

In the American country town the race for great wealth has slackened down. The traveler who sees our half-dozen great cities, who goes into our industrial centers, loafs about our pleasure resorts, sees much that is significantly American. But he misses much also if he fails to realize that there are in America tens of thousands of miles of asphalted streets arched by elms, bordered by green lawns, fringed with flowers marking the procession of the seasons, and that back from these streets stand millions of houses owned by their tenants—houses of from five to ten rooms, that cost from twenty-five hundred to twenty-five thousand dollars, and that in these houses live a people neither rural nor urban, a people who have rural traditions and urban aspirations, and who are getting a rather large return from civilization for the dollars they spend. Besides the civilization that

comes to these people in pipes and on wires, they are buying civilization in the phonograph, the moving picture, the automobile, and the fifty-cent reprint of last year's fiction success. The Woman's City Federation of Clubs is bringing what civic beauty it can lug home from Europe and the Eastern cities; the opportune death of the prominent citizen is opening playgrounds and hospitals and parks; and the country college, which has multiplied as the sands of the sea, supplements the state schools of higher learning in the work of bringing to youth opportunities for more than the common-school education.

Now into this peculiar civilization comes that curious institution, the country newspaper. The country newspaper is the incarnation of the town spirit. The newspaper is more than the voice of the country-town spirit; the newspaper is in a measure the will of the town, and the town's character is displayed with sad realism in the town's newspapers. A newspaper is as honest as its town, is as intelligent as its town, as kind as its town, as brave as its town. And those curious phases of abnormal psychology often found in men and women, wherein a dual or multiple personality speaks, are found often in communities where many newspapers babble the many voices arising from the disorganized spirits of the place. For ten years and more the tendency in the American country town has been toward fewer newspapers. That tendency seems to show that the spirit of these communities is unifying. The disassociated personalities of the community—the wrangling bankers, the competing public utilities, the wets and the dries, the Guelfs and the Ghibellines in a score of guises that make for discord in towns—are slowly knitting into the spirit of the place. So one newspaper in the smaller communities—in communities under fifteen thousand, let us say—is becoming the town genus! And in most of the larger towns—so long as they are towns and not cities—one newspaper is rising dominant and authoritative because it interprets and directs the community. The others are merely expressions of vagrant moods; they are unhushed

voices that are still uncorrelated, still unbridled in the community's heart.

It is therefore the country newspaper, the one that speaks for the town, that guides and cherishes the town, that embodies the distinctive spirit of the town, wherein one town differeth from another in glory—it is that country newspaper, which takes its color from a town and gives color back, that shall engage our attention at present. That newspaper shall be our vision.

Of old in this country the newspaper was a sort of poor relation in the commerce of a place. The newspaper required support, and the support was given, somewhat in charity, more or less in return for polite blackmail, and the rest for business reasons. The editor was a tolerated person. He had to be put on the chairmanship of some important committee in every community enterprise to secure his help. In times of social or political emergency, he sold stock in his newspaper company to statesmen. That was in those primeval days before corporations were controlled; so the editor's trusty job-press never let the supply of stock fall behind the demand. Those good old days were the days when the editor with the "trenchant pen" stalked to glory through libel-suits and shooting scrapes, and when most American towns were beset by a newspaper row as by a fiendish mania.

But those fine old homicidal days of the newspaper business are past, or are relegated to the less civilized parts of the land. The Colonel and the Major have gone gallantly to dreams of glory, perhaps carrying more buckshot with them to glory than was needed for ballast on their journey; but still they are gone, and their race has died with them. The newspaper man of to-day is of another breed. How the Colonel or the Major would snort in derision at the youth who pervades the country newspaper office to-day. For this young man is first of all a manufacturer! The shirt-tail full of type and the cheese press, which in times past were held as emblems of the loathed contemporary's plant, have now grown even in country villages to little factories. The smallest offices now have their typesetting-ma-

chines. The lean, sad-visaged country printer, who had tried and burned his wings in the editorial flight, is no more. Instead we have a keen-eyed, dressy young man who makes eyes at the girls in the front office, and can talk shows with the drummer at the best hotel, or books with the high-school teacher in the boarding-house. This young gentleman operates the typesetting-machine. Generally he is exotic; frequently he is a traveler from far countries, but he rides in the Pullman and the clay of no highway ever stains his dainty feet. In the country town, in the factory that makes even the humblest of our country dailies, the little six and eight page affairs, all unknown, unhonored, and unsung, three or four and sometimes half a dozen of the smart, well-fed, nattily dressed machine operators are hired, and the foreman—the dear old pipe-smoking, unshaven foreman who prided himself in a long line of apprentice printers, the foreman who edited copy, who wrote the telegraph heads and ruled the reporters in the front office with an iron rod of terror, the foreman who had the power of life and death over every one around the building but the advertising man, the foreman who spent his princely salary of fifteen dollars a week buying meals for old friends drifting through with the lazy tide of traffic between the great cities, the foreman who could boast that he once held cases on the *Sun* and knew old Dana—that foreman is gone; in his place we know the superintendent. And, alas! the superintendent is not interested in preserving the romance of a day that is past. He is not bothered by the touch of a vanished hand. When the vanished hand tries to touch the superintendent of the country newspaper office to-day, a ticket to the Associated Charities' wood-yard is his dull response. The superintendent is interested largely in efficiency. The day of romance is past in the back room of the country newspaper.

But in the front room, in the editorial offices, in the business office even, there abides the spirit of high adventure that is incarnate in these marvelous modern times. Never before were there such grand doings in the world as we are seeing to-day. Screen the great war from

us, and still we have a world full of romance, full of poetry, full of an unfolding progress that is like the gorgeous story of some enchanter's spell. Where in all the tales of those *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* is anything so wonderful as wireless telegraphy, so weird and uncanny as talking over the seas without wires? What is Cinderella and her romance compared with the Cinderella story to-day—the story that tells us how the world is turning into her prince, shortening her hours of work, guaranteeing her a living wage, keeping her little brothers and sisters away from the factory and in school, and pensioning her widowed mother that she may care for her little flock! How tame is the old Cinderella story beside this! And Sindbad is losing his load, too—slowly, as the years form into decades, Sindbad is sloughing off the old man of the sea; the twelve-hour day is almost gone, and the eight-hour day is coming quickly; the diseases and accidents of labor are falling from his shoulders, being assumed by his employer; his bank savings are guaranteed by his government; his food is no longer poisoned; his tenement is ceasing to be a pit of infection; his shop is no longer a place of torture. And every day the newspaper brings some fresh and inspiring chapter of these great stories to their readers. Stories of progress are the magnificent tales of sorcery and wizarding that come gleaming in celestial light across the pages of our newspapers every day. And in our country papers we rejoice in them, because we know the heroes. We know Cinderella; she works in our button-factory. We knew her father, who lived on Upper Mud Creek and was a soldier in the big war of the 'sixties. We know Sindbad; he is our neighbor and friend. He is not a mere number and a wheel-tender to us. We played with him as boys; we went to school with him in the lower grades before he had to leave, when his father died, to support the family. We see Cinderella and Sindbad every day, and when we read of their good fortunes we feel kindly toward the paper that tells us of these fine things. We open the country paper and say, "How blessed on the mountains are the feet of them that bring glad tidings,"

and so we read it, every line. It is the daily chronicle of the doings of our friends.

Of course our country papers are provincial. We know that as well as any one. But then, so far as that goes, we know that all papers are provincial. How we laugh at the provincialisms of the New York and Boston and Chicago papers when we visit the cities! For the high gods of civilization, being jealous of the press, have put upon all newspapers this spell: that every one must be limited in interest to its own town and territory. There can be no national daily newspaper, for before it reaches the nation its news is old and dull and as clammy as a cold pancake. News does not keep. Twelve hours from the press it is stale, flat, and highly unprofitable. However the trains may speed, however the organization of the subscription department and the press-room may perfect itself, the news spoils before the ink dries, and there never may be in our land a cosmopolitan press. So the cities' papers find that they must fill up those spaces, which in a nation-wide paper should be filled with the news from the far corners of our land, with city news. Thus in every country paper we have the local gossip of its little world. And our country papers are duplicated on a rather grander scale in the cities. What we do in six or eight or ten or twelve pages in the country, the city papers do in twenty or forty pages. What they do with certain prominent citizens in the social and criminal and financial-world, we do also with our prominent citizens in their little worlds.

And in the matter of mere circulation, our American country newspapers are a feeble folk, yet they do as a matter of fact build their homes upon the rock. The circulation of daily newspapers in our cities—towns of over four hundred thousand—aggregates something over eleven millions. The other daily newspapers in the country circulate more than twelve millions, and the weeklies circulate twenty millions more, and most of these weeklies are printed in our small country towns. We have, therefore, a newspaper circulation of nearly thirty-four millions outside of our great cities, and only eleven millions in the great

cities. At least so says our latest census bulletin. And the money we country editors have invested is proportionately larger than that our city brethren have invested.

But the beauty and the joy of our papers and their little worlds is that we who live in the country towns know our own heroes. Who knows Murphy in New York? Only a few. Yet in Emporia we all know Tom O'Connor—and love him. Who knows Morgan in New York? One man in a hundred thousand. Yet in Emporia who does not know George Newman, our banker and merchant prince? Boston people pick up their morning papers and read with shuddering horror of the crimes of their daily villain, yet read without that fine thrill that we have when we hear that Al Ludorff is in jail again in Emporia. For we all know Al; we've ridden in his hack a score of times. And we take up our paper with the story of his frailties as readers who begin the narrative of an old friend's adventures.

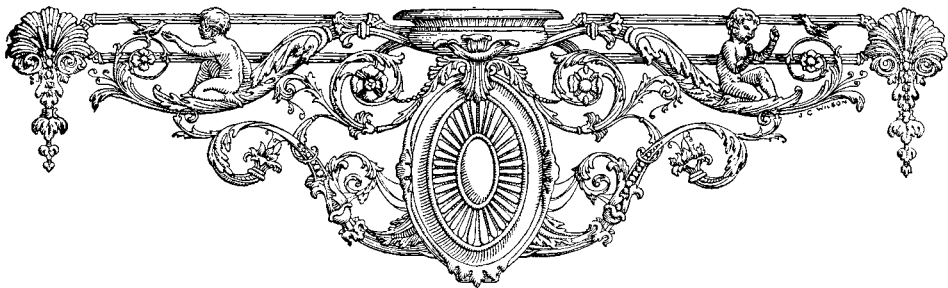
The society columns of our city papers set down the goings and comings, the marriages and the deaths of people who are known only by name; there are gowns realized only in dreams; there are social functions that seem staged upon distant stars. Yet you city people read of these things with avidity. But our social activities, chronicled in our country papers, tell of real people, whose hired girls are sisters to our hired girls, and so we know the secrets of their hearts. We know a gown when it appears three seasons in our society columns, disguised by its trimming and its covering, and it becomes a familiar friend. To read of it recalls other and happier days. And when we read of a funeral in our country newspapers, we do not visualize it as a mere church fight to see the grand persons in their solemn array on dress parade. A funeral notice to us country readers means something human and sad. Between the formal lines that tell of the mournful affair we read many a tragedy; we know the heartache; we realize the destitution that must come when the flowers are taken to the hospital; we know what insurance the dead man carried, and how it must be stretched to meet the

needs. We can see the quiet lines on each side of the walk leading from the house of sorrow after the services—the men on one side, the women on the other—waiting to see the mourning families, and to be seen by them; we may smile through our tears at the uncongenial pall-bearers and wonder what common ground of mirth they will find to till on the way back from the cemetery. In lists of wedding-guests in our papers we know just what poor kin was remembered, and what was snubbed. We know when we read of a bankruptcy just which member of the firm or family brought it on, by extravagance or sloth. We read that the wife of the hardware merchant is in Kansas City, and we know the feelings of the dry-goods merchant who reads it and sees his own silks ignored. So when we see a new kind of lawn-mower on the dry-goods merchant's lawn, we don't blame him much for sending to the city for it.

Our papers, our little country papers, seem drab and miserably provincial to strangers; yet we who read them read in their lines the sweet, intimate story of life. And all these touches of nature make us wondrous kind. It is the country newspaper, bringing together daily the threads of the town's life, weaving them into something rich and strange, and setting the pattern as it weaves, directing the loom, and giving the cloth its color by mixing the lives of all the people in its color-pot—it is this country newspaper that reveals us to ourselves, that keeps our country hearts quick and

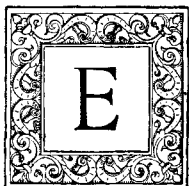
our country minds open and our country faith strong.

When the girl at the glove-counter marries the boy in the wholesale house, the news of their wedding is good for a forty-line wedding-notice, and the forty lines in the country paper give them self-respect. When in due course we know that their baby is a twelve-pounder, named Grover or Theodore or Woodrow, we have that neighborly feeling that breeds the real democracy. When we read of death in that home we can mourn with them that mourn. When we see them moving upward in the world, into a firm, and out toward the country club neighborhood, we rejoice with them that rejoice. Therefore, men and brethren, when you are riding through this vale of tears upon the California Limited, and by chance pick up the little country newspaper with its meager telegraph service of three or four thousand words—or, at best, fifteen or twenty thousand; when you see its array of countryside items; its interminable local stories; its tiresome editorials on the waterworks, the schools, the street railroad, the crops, and the city printing, don't throw down the contemptible little rag with the verdict that there is nothing in it. But know this, and know it well: if you could take the clay from your eyes and read the little paper as it is written, you would find all of God's beautiful sorrowing, struggling, aspiring world in it, and what you saw would make you touch the little paper with reverent hands.



The Plum-pudding Dog

BY MRS. HENRY DUDENEY



LIZABETH sat alone in the small, tidy kitchen of the new house. It was about tea-time, and a streaming wet September day. Overhead there wasn't a sound, and that seemed queer. Her hands lay idle, which was stranger still. Her mouth, which had kept smooth and red although she was past forty, appeared reflective. On the table, drawn close to the fire and easy to her hand, was an atlas opened at the map of Europe—that and the railway timetable.

Not a sound in the house! The kettle on the fire had not begun to sing; the clock in the corner had stopped—its hands pointed to half-past twelve. She had stopped that clock the night that Mrs. Marshall died, for its ticking had got upon her nerves. Not yet had she found resolution to set it and start it. When a soft-hearted woman is forty and has seen so many deaths, her nerves become unsteady. The long total of compassionate years had shaken her, and she must get away for a change.

She was free to go where she liked, to handsomely pay her way. And this at forty-two, after nursing people and seeing them die one after the other since she was seventeen. Her mother had died then. The doctor had said, "You're a born nurse." So she had taken to nursing in a humble, unprofessional way, and here she was at forty-two, with the last one departed.

Mrs. Marshall, her mistress, had been a grocer's widow, and childless. She had left her bit of money and her house and furniture to Elizabeth. The last old woman she ever need tend, was gone, and that was a good thing, for she was better off. Elizabeth was pious; also she was very much relieved. She sat by the fire thinking of them all—and they were all better off, it seemed.

Mrs. Marshall had been buried on Monday, yet it was hard to break old habit. Elizabeth, sitting by the fire, kept listening for sounds in the bedroom. She listened for the tinkle of a bell or the sound of a cough; her meditative eyes besought the bare hob, for it was queer not to see a small pot there. She missed the smell of broth and milk.

She bent over the atlas, following all the places with her finger, fording rivers, climbing mountains. She was breathless—and afraid. She wished that she had some friend to go with. She might do worse, after all, than stay at home and adopt a baby, for she knew she would miss the nursing. She had loved those people who had died one by one. They were all she had. She bitterly wanted something to love and cuddle and spoil. She wanted a creature that, not even knowing your name, would trust you. A baby, then? It would be a foolish thing to do—she stared stubbornly at the atlas and at all the places—but something to cuddle and be silly with— Would not that be better than gadding about alone?

She heard steps on the wet gravel, and there was a knock at the door. She went and opened it. A man was standing there, of the sort who might have seen better days. She thought by the look of him—by his smooth lip and side-whiskers—that he had been a groom. She stared over his shoulder at the desolate day—dripping leaves so big and green and heavy.

There was a bulge in the breast of his coat and a quick whimper came from it. Elizabeth's long years of ministration told her that something living and weak lay hidden in his coat.

"What's that in your breast pocket?"

He laughed. "You're sharp," he said. "A pup; pedigree, bless you. The poor little devil's cold."

"Bring him in to the fire," said Elizabeth. "You wipe your shoes first."