

certain of its strength, it tends to go to war. But against such nations the mind of the majority has surely turned. So we have the nations voting for amicable settlement of quarrels. It is a principle we have traditionally advocated in America—and sometimes practiced. We can be glad to see it making headway in Europe.

Peepshow Biography

LIBEL LAWS protect the living, but not the dead. When an English writer some months ago made reckless charges against the character of William Ewart Gladstone, there was no recourse to be had at law for the vindication of the Great Commoner's name. A member of the Gladstone family called the author a liar and foul fellow, was sued and won, and thus by indirect but effective means succeeded in calling the defamer of the dead to account. The means employed by Viscount Gladstone, the Prime Minister's son, is quite exceptional. As a rule the dead have to take their chances with biographers and historians. A spirit of sportsmanship alone should make a writer careful of the reputation of those who cannot call him to account. In this case at least the spirit of sportsmanship is a sound ally of the love of truth.

It seems, however, to be the vogue among biographers nowadays to treat their subjects as if they were characters in fiction—to set up in their own minds a theory as to motives and then to accumulate evidence of testimony or hearsay to substantiate it. Reputation, indeed, is treated as if it were something essentially a bubble and biography as essentially a pin to prick it with.

In Paxton Hibben's life of Henry Ward Beecher, which has just been published, there is little, if anything, new. No man in American history lived more obviously in the eye of the public than this great anti-slavery leader and preacher of freedom of the mind. To his achievement as a liberator of the souls of his generation from theological fears and from shackling conventions the author of this biography pays full tribute; but he has created a character, to whom he gives the name of Beecher, that is as essentially a product of his own mind as if he had written a novel with this character as its hero. To it he has given the air of verisimilitude by elaborate documentation; but the sources to which he refers are at best the ingredients of the mixture that he pours into the mold

of his own design. Mr. Hibben's method may be illustrated by one sentence. After quoting from a letter that an inveterate enemy of Mr. Beecher's had sent to a newspaper, the biographer writes: "No names were named, but the bottom dropped out of Henry Ward's stomach the moment he heard of it." Of course that is a novelist's trick, not a biographer's account of what he knew to have happened. Mr. Hibben has gone even beyond such authority as he cites. For example, he writes:

Sam Wilkeson, Jay Cooke's Man Friday in what the Brooklyn *Eagle* called the "Northern Pacific swindling games," was Henry Ward's business partner in the firm of J. B. Ford & Co., publishers of the "Life of Christ" and the *Christian Union*, and Col. John H. Puleston, another partner in the same firm, was Jay Cooke's New York representative in floating the Northern Pacific "pool." It was perhaps natural enough, therefore, that in January, 1870, Henry Ward Beecher should receive from Jay Cooke & Co. \$15,000 worth of stock in the Northern Pacific Railway, for the express purpose of "influencing the public mind to favor the new railroad. Beecher's aid," it was provided, "included the use of the *Christian Union* newspaper."

There was, of course, nothing dishonest in Beecher's share in this transaction.

What Mr. Hibben means by this last sentence we do not know, for the charge that he brings against Henry Ward Beecher is of the most serious kind of breach of journalistic ethics—the acceptance of money from a special interest in exchange for editorial influence.

As authority for his statement Paxton Hibben cites this passage in Oberholzer's life of Jay Cooke:

Governor Rutherford B. Hayes, of Ohio, if he were not in the "pool" had the opportunity to invest in lands in Duluth. Wilkeson employed himself in New York in an attempt to place the names of Henry Ward Beecher and Horace Greeley upon the subscription list, with some pleasing concessions to them as to the time and manner of paying their installments. Beecher was to have \$15,000 and Greeley \$20,000, both being reckoned first-rate powers in influencing the public mind to favor the new railroad (*Note*. Wilkeson to J. C., January 31, 1870, and Fahnestock to J. C., Jan. 25, 1870. At Greeley's death his interest was \$10,000). Beecher's aid included the use of the *Christian Union* newspaper to which Wilkeson

contributed a series of articles highly eulogistic of the Northwest.

There is here not the slightest evidence that Mr. Beecher received a cent or that he employed the "Christian Union" as a means of promoting interests of the railroad. As a matter of fact, at that date Henry Ward Beecher was not the editor of the paper. An examination of the files of the "Christian Union" of that date reveals nothing that could be construed as an attempt on the part of the paper to influence its readers on behalf of the railroad.

If this is the "new biography," then the "new biography" is old, old stuff. Of course, like a true "debunker," Paxton Hibben makes the great climax of his book the now almost forgotten Beecher-Tilton case. In telling the story of that scandal Mr. Hibben cites as his authorities newspaper items and the *ex parte* statements of Mr. Beecher's bitterest enemies as if they were irrefutable evidence. As a matter of fact, the newspapers of that day, even those regarded as respectable, were often a match for our modern tabloids. A good part of Mr. Hibben's book is of the stuff that Freudian dreams are made of. Mr. Hibben seems to think that Henry Ward Beecher invented "necking," and he can think of nothing better than that fantasy to build his biography on.

It would hardly be fair to say that such a book as this is nothing more than the tabloids in binding; but it is fair to warn the readers of it that when they may think they are reading the biography of a great man they are in fact reading contemporary scandal.

What News Is Worth While?

A YOUNG man recently disappeared from his customary haunts. President of the Reynolds Airway Corporation at twenty-one years of age, he had suddenly dropped out of sight. The daily press made a great mystery of it. Column after column was filled with—not news, for nothing seemed to be known. After the newspapers had aroused public curiosity to a high pitch concerning this mysterious disappearance, the young man was discovered in St. Louis. Tired of New York life and the importunities of his friends, he had sought new pleasures in Chicago and St. Louis and escaped from boredom by masquerading under an assumed name. When his disguise was penetrated, he was much annoyed. It was the old story of a poor little rich

boy trying to get a vacation. Paper, ink, and the time of reporters had been consumed in a terrific hubbub about nothing at all.

The reader of the daily newspaper must expect to find time spent in reading such a story wasted. He cannot tell in advance to what significant end a story of this sort may lead. Daily newspapers seize upon the spectacular happenings of the day, whether petty or not, and give them at least an ephemeral fame.

The sensational treatment of crime, the exaggerated reports of the domestic complications of the socially elect, and the emphasis placed upon sports are all indications of what is called the news sense; but they also form a habit of treating current happenings in a way to sacrifice the significant for the superficial.

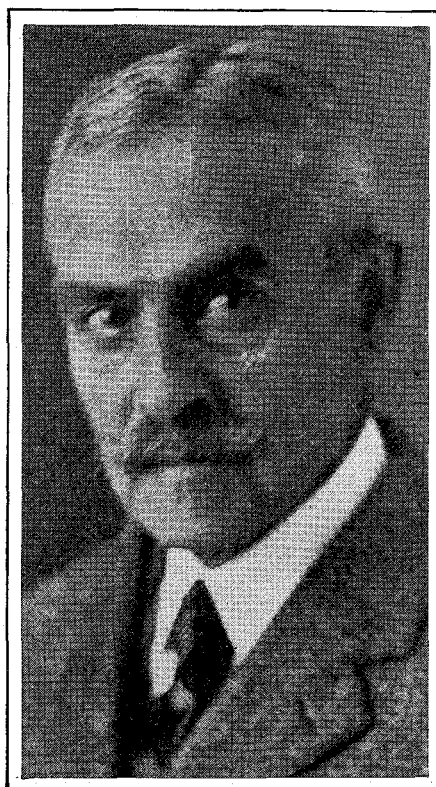
Yet it is not altogether the fault of the newspaper that excessive publicity is given to the trivial. The newspaper must take whatever news may come and make the most of it. A story finds its way to the office through any one of many channels. There is no time to appraise its news value with any idea of its relative importance and significance. The story and its possibilities must be judged instantaneously—the paper may go to press in a few hours or a few minutes. There is no time to discover whether young Reynolds has met foul play or is merely taking an unofficial vacation. And there is so much space to be filled. Even when its triviality is recognized, a report must be used if something better does not offer itself immediately. The newspaper's main business is to see that nothing escapes.

From the disabilities inherent in the daily newspaper the weekly news journal is free. It has time to judge the value of news. It can ignore the sensational and the trivial. It can cull from the mass of news with which the reader of the daily newspaper is inflicted that which seems to have relative importance. It can to some degree at least, as the daily newspaper cannot, dissociate rumor from fact. If the weekly news journal does not do this, it fails in its chief function. If it repeats the rumors and the trivialities that cover the pages of the daily press, it does so without the excuse that the daily press has. It can maintain a standard of accuracy to which the daily newspaper in its haste cannot conform. And it can estimate with a fair degree of success the place that current events will have in history. If the files of *The Outlook* from its beginnings are consulted, it will be found that little has been recorded which it

would be no loss to have forgotten and little has been unrecorded that has since proved to be of significance in the history of the times. This goes to show that the reader of the weekly news journal has at least the opportunity of seeing contemporary events in perspective.

The Outlook's Editor in Europe

ALTHOUGH the name of Elbert Francis Baldwin was well known to readers of *The Outlook*, it was impossible for any one not asso-



Elbert Francis Baldwin

1857-1927

ciated with him to know what he had contributed to the character of this journal. It might almost be said that his writings for *The Outlook* formed the lesser part of his journalistic service. Important as his contributions, and especially some of his later European correspondence, were, it is not at all certain that all his articles put together were not outweighed by what *The Outlook* bore of his stamp outside of any of his printed words.

No journal ever had among its editors one who held it to higher standards than those set by Dr. Baldwin. First of all, we should put his insatiable zeal for accuracy. When he said that he knew a statement to be true, his colleagues felt secure in sponsoring it. And when he questioned a statement that had been made in an editorial about to go to press, none of his colleagues felt quite at

ease until what Dr. Baldwin had questioned had been either discarded or verified. He was not satisfied in being accurate in the matter of generalities. He was particular about the minute—about the placing of an accent, about the suitable form of address, about dates and names. For over a quarter of a century he kept what this journal said under his critical scrutiny. Whatever reputation *The Outlook* has for carefulness in statement of fact is to a very great degree due to the continued influence of Dr. E. F. Baldwin. In close approximation to that we should place Dr. Baldwin's wide knowledge of world affairs. He had exceptional access to sources of information especially through his familiarity with foreign tongues and through his acquaintance with public men of many countries.

To recount the subjects in which he was interested and of which he had some knowledge would be almost equivalent to a survey of the whole field of life. He had, for example, such knowledge of art as to make his judgment of pictures worthy of the respectful attention of any art critic. He was well acquainted with musical literature and was discriminating in his estimate of musical compositions and musical performances. He was a student of domestic political affairs as well as of international relations. He had a more than layman's knowledge of theological subjects. He was a wide traveler and knew the habits and customs of many peoples.

During the latter years of his life he was *The Outlook's* European correspondent. In fact, he was more—he was *The Outlook's* editor in Europe. No one can take his place, for there is no one with his qualifications as a foreign correspondent and also with experience in *The Outlook* itself. What he has done *The Outlook* will continue to do, but it will have to do it in another way.

His death at Geneva, which we announced last week, came after many months of struggle with ill health; but to the end he was in harness. In spirit he was much younger than his years. Born seventy years ago last March, Elbert Francis Baldwin took his bachelor's degree at Williams College in 1884 and his master's degree there in 1887. In the interval he studied at the University of Berlin. Four years ago he received from Williams the Doctorate of the Humanities. He was a member of *The Outlook's* staff from 1893 to the day of his death. During those years all that he did was guided by loyalty—loyalty to the task in hand, loyalty to his friends and colleagues, loyalty to his ideals.