

Japanese Army as "pure-minded" because no pin-up girls were permitted in its barracks, only a week after an admiring picture spread of twenty-three U. S. service pin-ups, including "The Girl We'd Like to Submerge With?"

For *Life's* editors, perched high in the sky where only the most piercing expressions of public opinion are audible and only the vaguest outlines of world politics are visible, never doubt for a moment that there is "a correct answer" to every problem. This answer is a compound of now is the time to know the score, and the hour has come to wise up and get going. On the international scene this policy is best expressed in the concluding lines of the editorial of May 10, 1948: "What is needed, and badly needed, is a great and constructive idea which can come off paper. Our mood is ripe for great change, and the state of the world demands it. . . . It is time for our statesmen to take a long view of the future, to make large plans for America's role, to be unafraid of great changes, indeed, to give them shape." With the American Century in its ninth year, *Life* is even cloudier about its meaning than when it began.

Actually, of course, *Life* is neither as Olympian as its editors may be led to believe by the sound of their own words nor as sinister as its enemies try to paint it. *Life* detests the devil because it is well-intentioned. Not only that, it is cocksure it can defeat him. The only thing it is not quite certain about is the nature of the battle, which sometimes leads it to fire wildly in all directions, caring more for the brilliance of the fireworks than for the impact on the target.

The mystery of *Life* is easily dispelled, and never more disarmingly than when the editors fall into one of their infrequent moments of introspection: "Here is a problem for all the press, not excluding *Life*," they mused on December 19, 1949. "How to use the mind? How to exercise the duty and power of choice without 'suppressing' or 'distorting' the news? These are hard questions that nobody has completely answered. All concerned . . . will do well to ponder the problem, and in particular to re-examine a system which all too often allows no pause for reflection and examination . . ."

—FRED M. HECHINGER

# The *Sun* Goes Down

*New York moved out from under the old paper while it kept revolving in its standpat heaven*



For the press, the sale last month of the 116-year-old New York *Sun* to an afternoon rival, Scripps - Howard's New York *World-Telegram*, was a

summons to an ancient ritual. "Respectable" journals from coast to coast mourned the passing of a "great" newspaper, killed (so its owner said) by the mounting demands of labor unions, and in the same breath rejoiced over the posthumous partnership of four such journalistic giants as Charles A. Dana, Joseph Pulitzer, James Gordon Bennett, Jr., and E. W. Scripps, no one of whom would recognize the latest "heir" by the slightest feature. In sharp contrast, as always, the "liberal" organs and pundits took up a dirge long since made familiar by Upton Sinclair, Oswald Garrison Villard, and Morris Ernst: One paper dead plus one paper bigger plus one chain more powerful equals another beating for the American people.

With the reticence that more and more often seems to get in the way of their first duty, which is to inform, the publishers declined to probe very deeply into the *Sun's* fatal malady. They have a gentlemen's agreement to refrain from saying anything mean about each other, and besides, some of the mourners may not have been feeling any too robust themselves. So the story was made to seem too important (for the wrong reasons) to some Americans, and too unimportant (because the right reasons never got into print) to the rest.

The *Sun* died of a number of ailments, among which high labor costs was one, but obviously not the only nor

the overriding one, since all of the surviving 1,768 daily newspapers in the United States have to contend with precisely the same factor.

When the *Sun* was founded in 1833, a man could launch a newspaper in New York with a few thousand dollars and, as the cliché had it, "a case [apronful] of battered type." He could sell it to fifteen or twenty thousand readers at a cent a copy, solicit advertisements when he had time, and make money. Thomas W. Dewart, the last of the *Sun's* several publishers, stepped into a going concern with the best and latest mechanical equipment, an adequate staff that included three or four world-famous specialists, more than 280,000 passionately faithful readers, and (though it was already beginning to slip) an almost legendary belief among advertisers that the *Sun* was the best afternoon medium through which to reach the conservative reader. When Dewart quit, he had more than 270,000 readers at five cents a copy and, although he had lost 1.5 million lines in 1949, still so much advertising that he needed only a dozen staff men and a handful of columnists to fill up the unsold interstices. Why wasn't it enough?

The answer might begin with increased (and ever-increasing) publishing costs. Newsprint, of which the *Sun* consumed about four hundred tons a week, had shot up to a hundred dollars a ton from the forty-eight it fetched as recently as 1939. The best press Dana ever owned cost him less than a hundred thousand dollars; Dewart's battery (which Howard did not buy) might well be appraised at around three million. Dana paid some eighty employees an average of less than twenty-five dollars a week; De-

wart was paying twelve hundred an average of more than seventy-five.

This change in newspaper economics is perhaps even more graphic if put into terms of the relative importance of circulation pennies and advertising dollars. Up to very near the end of the last century, the generally accepted formula was that the readers' coins paid for newsprint and production (including amortization of mechanical equipment), and advertisers' checks for everything else (including, obviously, the cost of providing news and entertainment, which has risen more sharply than anything else). Nowadays the formula is very different. It cost Tom Dewart close to twenty cents to produce a paper which retailed for a nickel. (It costs the New York *Times* about a dollar to produce a Sunday edition that sells for fifteen cents.)

So over the last fifty years, the relative positions of the readers and the advertisers as targets of publisher charm and enterprise have been reversed. This has somehow mesmerized a few publishers into the comfortable illusion that advertising is a miraculous, buoyant substance that can keep not

only its own bulk but also that of the circulation afloat—i. e., that people would buy a newspaper day after day just to see what Macy's was up to. This illusion is sometimes accompanied by another: that people, especially conservative suburbanites, do not change much over the years; and that a publisher who once manages to achieve success with a magic *mélange* of folksy features, partisan editorials, Associated Press tidbits, and department-store specials has only to coast along forever on the momentum.

"Irresistible momentum" was the catch-phrase of the 1920's, when the *Sun* hung high in the publishing sky, golden-bright if not very warming. Republicans of the Coolidge and Hoover stripe gave the *Sun*, which had absorbed the *Globe*, a flourishing clientele, and the fullness of their vigor obscured the sober actuarial statistic that most of them were pretty old. The *Evening World*, relic of Wilsonian internationalism, was dying, along with its morning elder brother. The *Evening Post* appeared daily as the ghost of a long-vanished genteel tradition. The amorphous *Telegram* had eaten the sprightly *Mail* without being visibly nourished. Hearst was still dividing his money and attention between the flamboyant *Journal* and the floundering morning *American*. The overripe *Graphic* seemed to be turning readers away from the whole tabloid-cum-cheesecake formula. Death was in the air, but no bells tolled in the *Sun*'s quarters on Chambers Street. Nothing seemed more unlikely than that prosperity would ever end, that the Democrats would ever elect a President, or that the *Sun* would ever set.

Then, within a few years, the depression burst; the New Deal began; Roy Howard bought the *World* to breathe life into his lately-acquired *Telegram*; the *Graphic* folded; Hearst threw all his waning strength behind the merged *Journal-American*; the *Daily News* and *Mirror* surged forward as round-the-clock tabloids; and the *Post*, under new ownership, followed the Pied

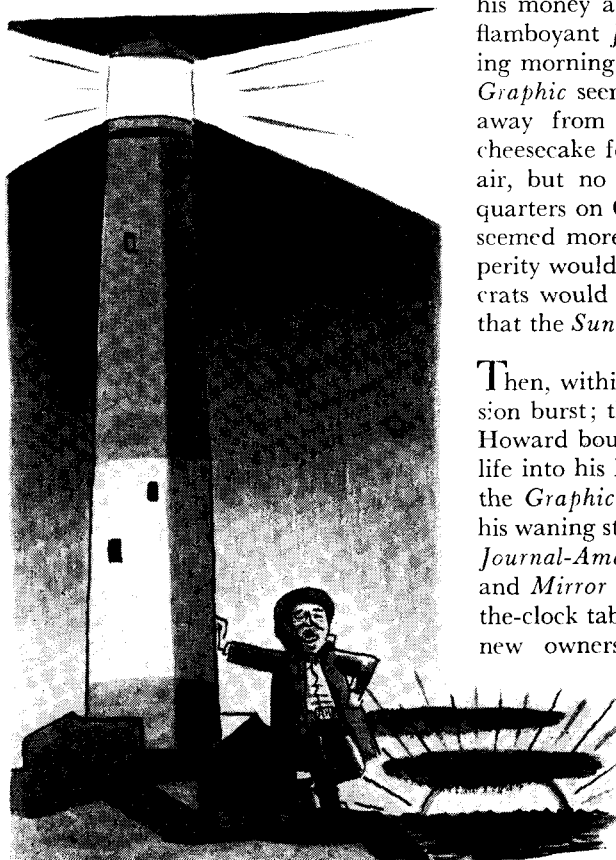
Piper of Hyde Park. The *Sun*, joining piously in obsequies for the fallen, could not conceal its smug conviction that on the whole it had profited. The

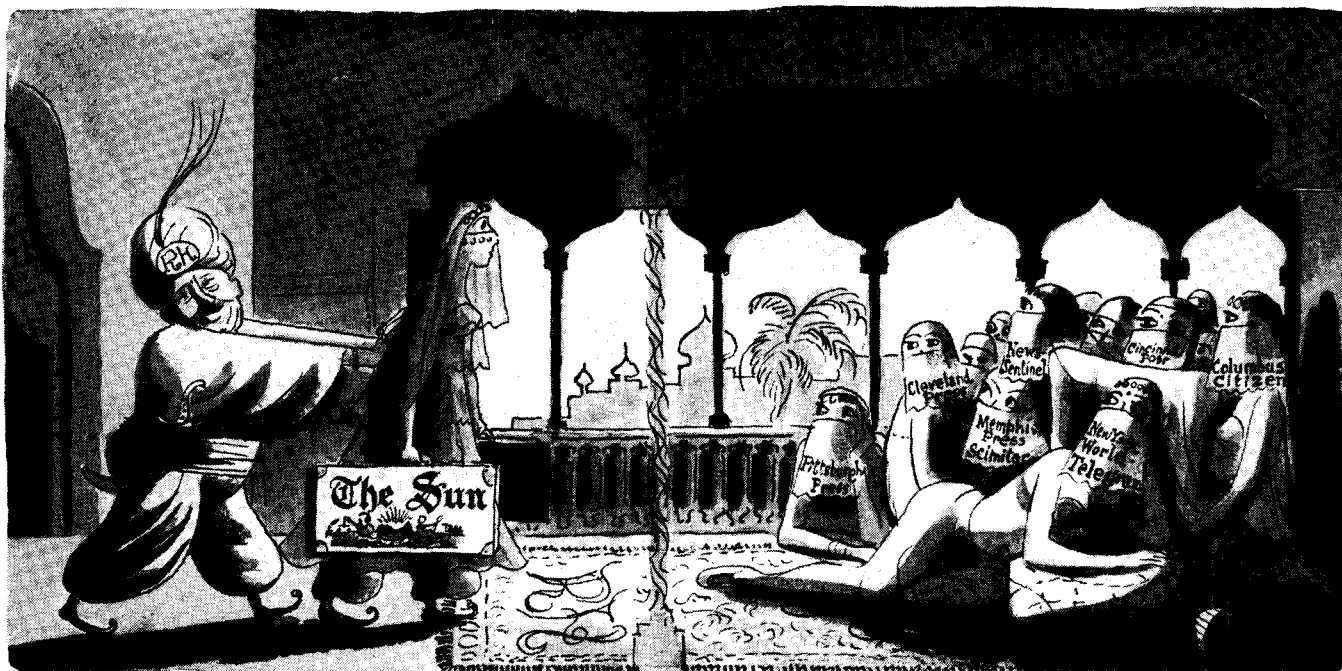
Dewarts failed to note that into the common grave with familiar mastheads had gone several outworn social-political shibboleths, some consumer tastes, and quite a few *Sun* readers whose hour had struck.

Why look for dead bones, when the manna covered the ground like snow? This fellow Howard seemed as leftish as the Pulitzer sheet he had helped do in. "Off the rocks with Landon and Knox!" the *Sun* cried confidently, and there was not another afternoon paper in New York to cash in on pure Republicanism. In 1936, the *Sun* had its biggest circulation year: over 300,000. Advertising boomed. Howard of the slowly-climbing *World-Telegram* came hat-in-hand to see if the Dewarts would like to chip in with him, buy up the *Post*, and put it out of its misery. They would not. Let the "radicals" split their field; a paper with the Old Guard behind it had only to wait.

But the earth continued to move, while the *Sun* stood still. The G.O.P. was making an attempt to start a new life with Willkie; not so the *Sun*. Howard lured Hugh Johnson, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Tom Stokes to the *World-Telegram*. The Dewarts stood pat with H. I. Phillips, Rube Goldberg, and its annual reprint of an old editorial about Santa Claus. Howard began beating the tabloids with picture spreads of missing co-eds, shapely actresses, and Long Island divorce raids. The *Sun* wasted a Pulitzer Prize reporter on waterfront crime. Howard embraced the New Deal philosophy and sniped at nearly all its authors on personal grounds, thus garnering readers on both sides of the street. In the *Sun*, Phelps Adams and George Sokolsky continued to blast at a way of life long since accepted by the vast majority of Americans. It became merely a question of how long readers addicted to Herbert Hoover, the Toonerville Trolley, and stamp-collecting would hold out. The Dewarts never got it through their heads that a publication that allows itself to become the mouthpiece of any one small group is doomed to decline as that group declines.

So Tom Dewart sold his "intangibles" (name, circulation, and good will), for a very secret sum estimated at anywhere from \$2,000,000 to \$3,500,000, to Roy Wilson Howard, who in 1927 had paid Dewart's father \$2,-





500,000 for the *Telegram*, and who in 1931 had paid the Pulitzer heirs five million for their papers—a total investment of from \$9.5 to \$11 million.

Howard now has his *Telegram* and *World* investments back, and stands to recover the *Sun's* price in five years or less. For he now owns the only afternoon paper in New York through which advertisers can reach readers who would be ashamed to hide behind Hearst's red-headlined *Journal-American*, and who would as soon be caught buying the *Daily Worker* as the "radical" *Post-Home News*.

But happier even than Howard, who began his career in the American tradition as a newsboy in Indianapolis, are the advertisers and the advertising agencies. For they are reaching the same people (the first day's run of the *World-Telegram* and *The Sun* exceeded seven hundred thousand) for less money. And if this juxtaposition of sober statistics leads the layman to a suspicion that Howard and the advertising gentry have been addressing almost identical prayers heavenward, the coincidence is not altogether accidental. One need not be irreverent to note that Tom Dewart, at least, heard them.

This is the significant fact for all Americans. For advertising men have no roots in the First Amendment, no interest in the magnificent traditions of American journalism, no immediate goal except to make money. And when-

ever they find one or more publishers with the same mentality, the result is a foregone conclusion.

So the story of the *Sun* is not the passing of a great newspaper. Actually, it had not been a great newspaper during the half-century since it passed out of Dana's hands. Nor is the *Sun* story the fact that the number of dailies in America has diminished by over twenty per cent since 1938.

The story of the *Sun* is that the only factors standing between any paper and a similar fate are a few tangibles that can be looked up in Dun & Bradstreet, and a lot of intangibles that have mostly to do with the vigor of publisher initiative and reader response.

Among the latter might be listed the loyal support of a public that understands what is going on, knows what it wants, and refuses to play the role of disinterested bystander. It is doubtful whether many men of influence went to Tom Dewart to say frankly that his (and their) paper was slipping. For it is a curious fact that a nation that has fought several wars, any number of legislative free-for-alls, and not a few Supreme Court battles to secure the right to read what it wants, has produced a generation which apparently believes that it has shown its full devotion to the First Amendment when it deposits its pennies (or nickels) on the newsstand counters.

But the main spotlight will continue to play on the power struggle between

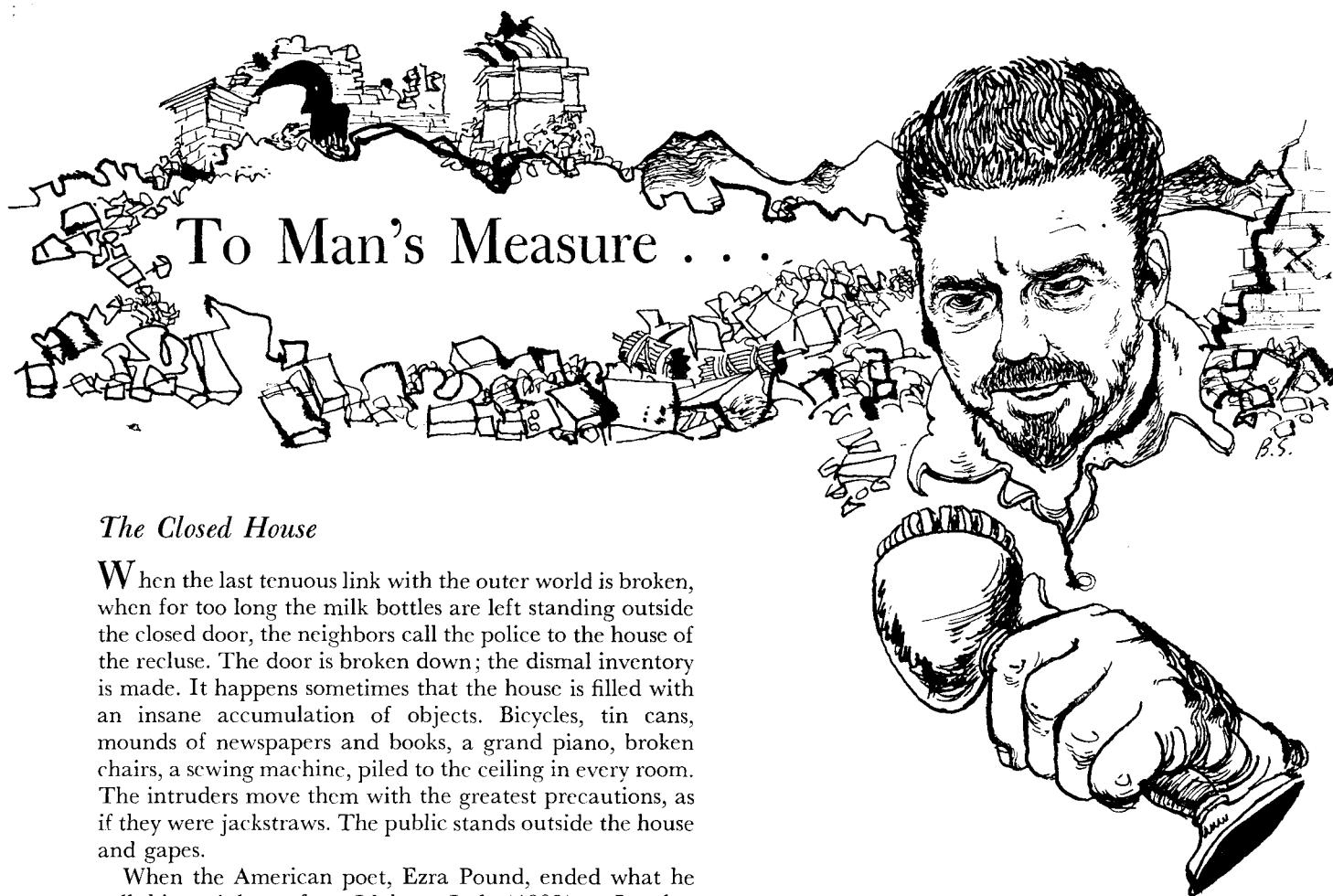
newspaper publishers and advertisers.

No one argues that advertising is bad *per se*, or that the urge to make money is unbecoming in a publisher. To admit this is not, however, to dismiss the central fact that the alliance between publishers and advertisers is in reality a continuing and never-ending battle of wits and dollars, a struggle in which only the publishers can be expected to represent the reading public. Nor let us forget that the publishers were not saddled with this terrible responsibility by default; they willingly, indeed eagerly, assumed it as a continuing obligation to a people that had given them special status.

More than money is required here; more even than a determination to go broke and hock to the hilt before quitting. Initiative, imagination, and hard work play a part: A month in Bermuda may prove as disastrous as a barefaced deal, for journalism is a 365-day-a-year trade. Surely the conscientious serving of all the readers one pretends to want, rather than a select "leadership core," is a minimal expectation: The old-time publisher-editors who periodically pounded their reporters' beats would scarcely settle for some of today's editorial teas and suburban lounge-car soundings. Finally to print too much, written too dryly, displayed too dully, is a little like paying off one's obligation to the public in Confederate banknotes.

—LEWELLYN WHITE





### *The Closed House*

When the last tenuous link with the outer world is broken, when for too long the milk bottles are left standing outside the closed door, the neighbors call the police to the house of the recluse. The door is broken down; the dismal inventory is made. It happens sometimes that the house is filled with an insane accumulation of objects. Bicycles, tin cans, mounds of newspapers and books, a grand piano, broken chairs, a sewing machine, piled to the ceiling in every room. The intruders move them with the greatest precautions, as if they were jackstraws. The public stands outside the house and gapes.

When the American poet, Ezra Pound, ended what he calls his *periplum*—from Idaho to Italy (1908), to London (1909-1920), to Paris (1920-1924), to Italy again (1924-1945)—he returned to his native land under arrest for treason. He had broadcast for Mussolini. In Washington, certified insane and confined, he later was awarded a prize for his poetry. It was then that the amateur thought-police and the newspapermen broke into the house of his poetry. Stepping over words and phrases in Greek, Latin, Italian, French, German, Spanish, and Provençal, skirting ideographs in Sanskrit and Chinese, hopping over erudite, or confidential, allusions, the newspapermen investigated the latest addition to the house, *The Pisan Cantos*—written while Pound was a prisoner of the U. S. Army in Pisa—picked up a few words here and there, the most readily comprehensible, the ugliest, and hurried back to print them.

The public looked with astonishment and real dismay at various objects extricated from Mr. Pound's poem. Item: the word "yidd"; item: the word "nigger"; item: the American flag described as "the bacon-rind banner"; item: the American people, Mr. Pound's compatriots, alluded to insistently as "*barbaroi*"—an epithet that it is not necessary to translate. The public could not believe that a man so venomously detached from the feeling of his country could be given a prize. It was as if a cross-eyed, bowlegged girl had won at Atlantic City.

Pound is sixty-five now and locked up. You think of all the books he has written and of all the articles written about him before the war, when his anti-Semitism was taken for no more than a tedious idiosyncrasy, his dispraise of his country for no more than wounded vanity. You read *The*

*Pisan Cantos*. In fairness, the cantos are a lament more than anything else. They are exciting to read if you keep clear of the crossword puzzles. It was decent in Pound not to go back on Mussolini, "poor Ben," or, after having talked on the Italian radio, to make no attempt to sound like the Voice of America. There are other items besides the ugly ones to present from *The Pisan Cantos*, and two of them are these: "As a lone ant from a broken ant-hill from the wreckage of Europe, *ego scriptor*." and: "Oh, let an old man rest."

But what poet sounds like the voice of America? What poet in our times is not in a closed house of his own? It is not always by choice. Few of the better poets think that this is a time for "art for art's sake." Most are socially conscious. They are sorry that they have to live in a marginal world, writing for each other, writing about each other—as Whitman said, "incommunicado." They recognize and fear the danger that writing will become an end in itself.

The war affected poets in various ways. It got the Frenchman Aragon out of his doctrinaire Communist isolation. He wrote *Le Crève-Coeur*, in which he could quote Richard II—"You may my glories and my state depose. But not my griefs. Still am I king of those"—and speak brokenheartedly of occupied France. He was listened to by Frenchmen and inspired their resistance. The war brought Pound to the microphone. Obsessed with the comic illusion that "Muss" would someday accept his credit scheme, and grieving because the monuments he loved were being destroyed, he talked his way into treason.