

Roller Coaster Journalism

NO one will pretend that Sunday colored comics came into being in response to a spontaneous irresistible demand on the part of the American public. Nor can anyone assert with confidence that our daily press, of whatever type, meets the wishes of its audience. Neither the substantial newspaper nor the tabloid nor any of the grades between is provably a desired commodity. They interact one upon the other, and tend to seek the same level of mediocrity. We have a journalism for juveniles. I deny that it is what the majority of the public would like to have.

Against this assertion let me set up the obvious arguments. Here is a business which had a turnover last year of one billion, one hundred million dollars, three-fourths of which was derived from advertising. Its product was distributed on an immense scale, two copies daily for every dwelling, one copy Sundays for each family. Is not the proof of the paper in its consumption?

As for the tabloids, I question whether, with one or two exceptions, they are soundly marketable commodities. The eight-column press, by and large, is on a solid fiscal basis. Its product sells, but so does hootch. The man who drinks does not register approval of the bootlegger's decoction by purchasing it; he buys because he can get nothing else.

Or, since some reader may have access to real Scotch (there is no real Scotch in our daily journalism), let us consider another example. Mass circulation and a huge intake no more demonstrate that the press is giving the public what it wants than the popularity of the B. M. T. and the Interboro are proved by the indecent crowding which goes on in them while newspapers are having their big sale. The public has a herd habit of taking what it can get; and it probably complains no more of obscene subway jams than it complains of the manner in which its tastes are degraded and its standards lowered by the daily press. The analogy is not so far-fetched as you may at first surmise. Here we have two public utilities, a transit system presumably under some sort of public control through State and municipal commissions, and a publicity institution which, under the Constitution, arrogates to itself freedom from any supervision, control, or interference. Libel laws do afford an insufficient protection to the public, to be sure, just as civil suits offer a recourse to persons injured in the subway rush. But at the mere suggestion of a supervisory commission—a censorship commission—there would arise a newspaper howl to high Heaven.

The public has less choice as to what it shall read in its daily paper than as to the conditions under which it shall travel to and from work. Both the transit system and the newspaper are charged with a public use, and both betray their public.

Perhaps I should make an exception here of the *Christian Science Monitor*, an ably edited newspaper, published primarily for those who have embraced a certain religious faith. I am told that it pleases Christian Scientists, that it is what they want. But the *Monitor*, although now self-supporting, is nevertheless a subsidized publication. It has never been subjected to the fiercely competitive race for mass circulation which stultifies other newspapers. The others, yielding to the advertiser's demand for more and more readers, print news mainly to appeal to the average mind, the fourteen-year-old mind. If they report to us the goings-on at Geneva, it seems a sop to Cerberus. It is like publishing the work of Horace M. Kallen as a "front" while depending for funds on the work of Warner Fabian. For even our toplofty newspapers expect to pay dividends on an appeal to the juvenile intelligence.

Not one American daily of considerable circulation has ever embarked on the adventure of appealing solely to adult minds. I invite you to inspect them, from tabloids to *Times*. I ask you to decide for yourself whether your companion at the breakfast table or in the subway or beside the reading lamp is suitable for your society. Whatever the newspaper you read, consider the question: Is this a wished-for child of the American public?

Alexander P. Moore, on the occasion recently of purchasing two Hearst picture papers, offered a pronouncement of his journalistic ambitions and ideals. He had great faith in the future of tabloids, and

might buy a string of them. They must print the news; if it were sensational, could he be blamed for that? But (and here our former Ambassador to Spain, at present Ambassador to Peru, waxed solemn as an owl), there would be no salacity in his papers—none!

Meanwhile Elinor Glyn continued in the *New York Daily Mirror*, one of the Ambassador's acquisitions, her glib discussion of sex appeal; and when her serial was completed Louis Joseph Vance made his appearance with "They Call It Love: The story of two New York girls in their venturesome search for love." I am one of those old-fashioned reporters who think that a newspaper is not a magazine, and has no proper place for fiction; but if I were going to print serials, probably that is the kind I'd prefer. Or perhaps (who knows?), I'd try out "Strange Interlude" as a serial; it's a lot more exciting.

If, however, Mrs. Glyn and Mr. Vance were my favorite authors, I'd present to my audience the other things one finds in the *Mirror*, under the distinguished ministrations of our Ambassador to Peru: picture serials of "Madame Bovary" and "Twenty Years After"; for one advantage of printing picture strips with a thread of text is that the reader is never in doubt as to the thrilling part. And I suppose I'd throw in eight or ten comic strips, as the *Mirror* does, the vulgarer and more asinine the better, plus a theatrical illustration of a female a little more than half naked, plus the usual "news" pictures of young women in quite short skirts, with their legs crossed. But it must be called a newspaper, of course, not a pulpwood magazine, so there must be a smattering of stuff about Texas Guinan, gangsters' fights, Lindbergh, wrecks, Gloria Swanson, sports, and scandal. This, briefly and accurately, is the kind of thing a picture paper is.

At last accounts Ambassador Moore was stepping along quite jauntily in the path toward tabloid glory. His department was not so interesting as the sudden retreat from this field of William Randolph Hearst. Having sold to Mr. Moore two of his picture papers (the other being the *Boston Advertiser*), this past master of Yellow Journalism completed his repudiation of up-to-the-minute yellowness by putting to death a paper 155 years old: the *Baltimore American*, which he "merged" with his *News* in that city. He had now washed his hands clean of that format, and was left with twenty-three eight-column newspapers.

Could this mean that tabloids didn't pay? That, in the case of Mr. Hearst, appears to be what it did mean. He is neither the inventor nor the sponsor of this type of paper, and he had not made a go of it. His ancient enemies, the owners of the *Chicago Tribune*, had originated the idea (if that be the word), by establishing in New York the *Daily News*, which now boasts the highest advertising linage rate in this country, and a circulation of a million and a quarter, which no other daily approaches. It was as a challenge to the *News* that Mr. Hearst established the *Mirror* four years ago, and by prodigious efforts brought its circulation up to the fifth highest in this country.

But how was the fifth circulation in size to compete with the largest? Newspaper advertisers, dotting on mass circulation, dislike the tabloid format. It does not afford space for the billboard announcements most of them prefer in the daily press. Thus the *Mirror* never quite caught on. It was surprising to see Mr. Hearst, who has a costly reputation for hanging grimly onto the most desolate properties, thus admitting the failure of his biggest tabloid and making a clean sweep of all of them. He is a much more knowing publisher than most persons give him credit for; and his taking the veil thus publicly may give pause to other ambitious tabloideers.

For there is no sound evidence that the picture paper as such is a going business. One may strike a philosophic pose, and say that this sort of publication is a concomitant of democratic processes (as though we had a democracy in this country!); and it is true that the tabloids, dipping down for a subcirculation, may be regarded, in their capture of the adolescent mind, as a sort of kindergarten education for the reading of sound news. I doubt it. I doubt whether tabloid readers are translated often into

newspaper readers; and even if I believed it I would question whether this offered any sort of basis for business success.

Sometimes the public has an opportunity to express a definite preference, not merely as to the type of paper it wants to read but as to the type of news it wants, and the manner in which it wants that news displayed. The difference between newspapers, by and large, is not qualitative but quantitative. All are dominated by the same journalistic conventions as to news. (The *Herald Tribune* will object, I'm afraid, to having this said.) The difference between newspapers arises from the quantities of news they select to pour into certain molds—sports, politics, foreign, crime, mystery, scandal, business, and so on. There is this generalization to be offered: that all of them, with the possible exception of one or two of small circulation, are enslaved to stereotypes nearly a century old, based on emotional rather than intellectual excitement.

Once in every so often, as I say, the public, or a part of it, has an opportunity to speak its mind regarding this emotional presentment of world and community tidings. The *Minneapolis Journal*, for example, printed only the briefest facts, say two "sticks-full," regarding the execution of Ruth Snyder and Judd Gray. No newspaper's obligation to society required it to tell more than these few facts. Any newspaper which printed more did it to stimulate unconscious passions; and its purpose could only have been to gain additional circulation, to pick coins from the eyes of two dead felons. The *Minneapolis Journal* reaped its reward in a flood of approving letters and telephone calls, and in a permanent addition to its circulation surprisingly large in a city of that size.

Now, in New York the tabloid *News*, which printed a picture of the corset salesman's paramour in the death chair, picked up an added circulation of 300,000 from the electrocution. That was the top-notch figure. Other newspapers, according to the character of their reports, ranged down to 25,000 added circulation for the *Herald Tribune*, and 20,000 for the *New York Times*. Do not suppose that these latter papers gave any smaller volume of reading matter about the execution; to the contrary, they printed more text, and they printed it, obviously, in the hope of fattening their circulation figures. But their readers, I strongly suspect, meant to rebuke them by showing they didn't buy extra copies in order to read about a brutal and ghastly execution. It is probable that their extra sales came largely, if not wholly, from tabloid readers, whose tastes and appetites had been so debauched that they couldn't get enough without moving over to tables more soberly set forth.

The total addition that day to the circulation of all New York newspapers ran well past a million copies; but it was a one-day circulation, whereas the *Minneapolis Journal* found new readers likely to prove its devoted and constant friends. Possibly the newspaper advertiser will never learn that this enormous padding of circulation figures for a single day means nothing to him in the sale of commodities. Persons who buy one newspaper after another merely to get more details about a legal murder are not likely to look further than that one story. What prospect that in their excitement they will pore over advertisements? Yet the advertiser, who exercises discrimination in buying magazine space, will hear nothing, see nothing, touch nothing but mass circulation when he gets belatedly around to a newspaper. Shrewd fellow, too, he is supposed to be!

Dr. Thaddeus L. Bolton, head of the Psychology Department of Temple University, said not long since that the newspaper performed for the adult the same function as the roller coaster for children. He had in mind the whole press, in its capacity as an entertainer and vehicle of "escape" stories; and *Editor and Publisher*, often a severe critic of its trade, agreed: "Monotony is unbearable, everyone escapes it if possible, and one of the chief reliefs from boredom is a printed page recording the day's grist of exciting human experiences head-lined and pointed for busy eyes." To this indictment by a psychologist, and the appearance voluntarily of one

by Silas Bent

of the ablest newspaper men in America as a star witness in affirmation, let the press reply as best it may. All of us know that the primary function of a responsible newspaper is not to entertain and thrill, but to inform us of our unseen environment, and to supply the raw material of fact on which public opinion may be based. My own notion is that Dr. Bolton's observation fits somewhat more neatly such picture papers as the *Mirror* and the New York *Evening Graphic* (sometimes rudely denominated the *Pornographic*), which are true examples of a juvenile journalism. We have many papers more nearly grown up than they. Even the tabloid *News* prints a fair coverage in compact form of the day's tidings, and in that respect compares not unfavorably with some of its eight-column contemporaries. And there are other tabloids, of course, such as the money-losing Scripps-Howard paper in Washington, which are mainly informative, not picture papers in any sense.

But papers like the *Evening Graphic* may be dismissed from consideration as avenues of sound information on worthwhile subjects. They appeal to a mentality below the average mentality, which is the goal of our big city papers. They print material, whether "news" or features or fiction or comics or editorials, whether sports or pictures, calculated solely to amuse, or to stimulate and satisfy primitive hungers. They are peepholes upon scandals among "the élite." They gossip incorrigibly about screen stars, pugilists, stunt aviators, bathing beauties, and cabaret performers. They give counsel to the lovelorn, advice on beauty recipes, and assistance to the socially incompetent. They present a completely distorted world.

Thus they degrade the taste of their readers and set up wholly fictitious standards. It may be argued that the whole press does these things to some extent, but the real picture paper does nothing else.

At this juncture of attempting to make the picture tabloid out as a little worse than the run of the mine, I am sadly reminded of a story in which the whole press, or practically all of it, conspired. The story concerned an opera singer, and her first appearance on the stage of the Metropolitan.

There was nothing new about the methods used, and no spot news in the occasion. Whatever needed to be said should have been said, in just appraisal of a voice, by the music critics. But the press had found, in the case of Marion Talley and then of Mary Lewis, that to make an inspirational and romantic event out of such an occurrence sold papers; and so it did the same old ground and lofty tumbling for Grace Moore. You know the story: but I cannot forbear quoting to you, from the interview with Miss Moore, her advice to aspiring artists:

You can do it if you have talent, persistence, courage, and the inward flame! First, have you God-given talent? If so, carry on beyond all obstacles! You must have the moral courage to face defeat smilingly, to keep your head up, your eyes straight to the front, and to shun the temptation of the primrose path. Carry on till you sing to "His Glory," till you can make a weary people forget the troubles of reality. And good luck go with you. Now I shall open my door. I want to go into the arms of my mother, my dad—who always believed in me. Au revoir!

This may have been said by a musical star, just graduated from "Hitchy-Koo," but it has the ring of the press agent about it. I am lost in amazement, despite my newspaper experience, at the greedy fashion in which the American press, dignified and tabloid, laps up such stuff. Half the stories presented to us as uncolored news arise from interested sources. But here again I return to my point: the percentage of press-agent stuff in the picture papers is even higher than fifty. Sometimes I wonder why they employ any reporters. Photographers, it would appear, are all they need.

The practice of illustrating news with half-tones, and then of printing separately whole feature sec-

tions of pictures in rotogravure, did not originate, of course, with the picture papers. It began more than half a century ago. But during the World War, when most of us distrusted the printed word because of the censorship we knew existed, we came to have a naive faith in pictures, as always telling the truth. We were wrong. They were frequently fakes. But we became, nevertheless, what newspaper men call "picture-minded." The tabloids have exploited this attribute further than their eight-column elders. There is a fact nothing new about the picture papers, either as to their illustrations, or their format, or the kind of news and features and comics and fiction they print. So far as I know their only contribution to American journalism is the illustration-serial. That, I believe, they may claim the credit for.

Yet these highly emotional and irresponsible

as complex as ours, it may seem to some readers that a disproportionate amount of space is being giving over to arousing in newspaper readers a vicarious sense of prodigious valor and prowess. The editors don't think so. "Sport news," one of them said recently to *Editor and Publisher*, "comes nearer than anything else I know of to the common denominator of news. There is probably more universal reader interest in the sports pages than in any of the other parts of the modern newspaper."

These men would deny with indignation, I do not doubt, my suggestion that the abdication of their news function to the inflation of sport tommyrot has been influenced by the immense circulation of the *Daily News* or by the astonishing growth, in four years, of the *Daily Mirror* from nothing to nearly half a million readers. Yet in the nine years since the *News* was founded the journalistic pace toward inconsequence, as manifested not only in sports but in other categories of news, has been vastly accelerated.

Now, there is no denying that the rapid industrialization of the United States has contributed to the maintenance of the old emotional stereotypes of news. It has contributed in two ways: first, by demanding mass circulation of newspapers in marketing its commodities through advertising; second, by setting up that monotony from which, as Dr. Bolton observes, the worker, with more leisure on his hands, demands an escape. The newspapers, having found that the old penny-press formula did sell papers (just as the same sort of stuff in pulpwood newsstand magazines, fictionally presented, sells them by the hundreds of thousands), have never found the courage to call a halt and try out seriously the kind of paper which would be mentally engrossing, without an insistent appeal to the emotions. The imperative demand for large circulations, in order that the advertiser might exploit a certain attitude of mind, was not to be brooked.

Since the experiment has never been tried, there is no way of securing the success of a newspaper edited solely for intelligent persons, rather than mainly for the fourteen-year-old mind, through devoting about one-fourth of the news space to sports, whole pages to murder trials, and \$1,500,000 in one year to the purchase of stunt aviation stories, as the *New York Times* has done.

There is no way, as I say, of proving that a large public wants the other thing, the intelligent thing; but neither is there any way of proving that there is an authentic public demand for what is now being sold, either by our "better-class" press or by the despised tabloids. It would be amusing if the *Daily News*, which has frightened the eight-column publishers to the very verge of their graves by its phenomenal growth, were to give them another and more useful scare. It is already a crusading picture paper; unaided it forced the Senatorial investigation into the soft-coal mine strike; and it prints daily, as I have told you, a considerable coverage of news. What if it were to venture the untried experiment? It would be most engaging to watch this tabloid, by a gradual change of policy and content, exhibit to the self-satisfied eight-column press a courageous, critical, actually informative daily.

It would be amusing. But it won't happen.

Mr. Silas Bent was on the editorial staff of the *New York Times* from 1918 to 1920, and for some years thereafter wrote many important feature articles for that paper. Before he joined the *Times* he had been on papers in Louisville, Ky., and St. Louis, Mo., and was for a time Professor of Journalism at the University of Missouri. During the last few years he has been a free-lance writer, contributing frequently to the *World's Work*, the *Dial*, the *Nation*, the *Nation's Business*, and other periodicals. His "Ballyhoo, the Voice of the

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MRS. KNAPP IN COLLAPSE

NEW YORK EVENING GRAPHIC

'PEACHES' DENIES LOVE LURE

CITY GRAFTING GANG LED BY MASTER MIND

Doesn't Like Him

MRS. KNAPP NEAR BREAKDOWN OVER RETRIAL ORDEAL

CHINESE ARMY MOVES TO ATTACK JAPANESE

PEACHES DENIES SHE IS A LOVE THIEF

Sleuth Saves Infant at Fire

STOP PRESS NEWS

Loughran-Lomaki To Fight Again

Special Pink Sports Section

U.S. Golf Stars Seek British Title

EXHIBIT A

dwarfs have had their influence on their big brothers. Even our most sedate dailies have learned now to print whole pages of pictures. The Associated Press, a news agency serving twelve hundred of our most complacent papers, has formed a subsidiary to serve pictures to such of its members as will buy. It began with forty "glossies" weekly, and is now distributing one hundred and thirty. The same influence is betrayed in the drift to triviality in the news this and its competing agencies are distributing. All of them are increasing their sports departments, which are their immediate equivalent of the roller coaster. Are they doing this for the tabloid picture papers? No, most grave and reverend seignors, not for the tabloids, but at the demand of our most grave and reverend newspapers.

In the last four years the *New York Times* has increased the space devoted to sports—mostly commercial sports, of course—from two pages to three and a quarter pages; the *World* in that period has grown from 16.5 to 20.5 columns daily; the *Herald Tribune's* increase has been six columns, or three-fourths of a page. "Our policy," says the assistant managing editor of the last-named paper, "is to limit the ballyhoo of professional sports as much as possible." He is authority for the statement that sixty per cent of the local news printed in his daily is sport stuff.

In a city as interesting as New York, and a world

The BOWLING GREEN

Granules from an Hourglass

SOMETIMES, sitting in a crowded smoking-car during a spring epidemic of colds, you hear everyone coughing and sneezing and have that unpleasant feeling that the air about you is crowded with germs. The prudent man settles as close into himself as possible, gets behind his newspaper, drags pensively on his pipe—and reflects that it is exactly the same with the whole mental atmosphere of humanity. The medium we think is more than a little poisoned with false doctrine, sentimental triviality, and all manner of contagious drivel: so you sit tight and chew your own notions and say nuffin to nobody.

I am always pleased by the advertisements about "the smartness of reptile shoes," it seems so very Biblical. For I remember something about bruising the serpent with your heel.

The other day, looking at some grass, I realized better than ever before the extraordinary greatness of Walt Whitman's title for his book. To take as his emblem this commonest, humblest, most disregarded and yet most satisfying of all earth's generousities, that I think was genius.

In a South Carolina town (so we learn from a client) there is a woman who owns a copy of "The President's Daughter." Much pestered by appeals for subscriptions to charity, and also by requests to read the book, she turned her copy into a Loan Fund. She rents it for 25 cents a day and gives all the proceeds to her church and to the Missionary Society. Her waiting list for the book now has 20 inches of names.

I hope Sime Silverman, the editor of *Variety*, doesn't mind my lifting things from his admirable paper now and then; for I do it in pure homage to the liveliest edited journal I know. For several weeks I've been trying to squeeze in here a reprint of Jack Lait's review of *Volpone*; but here is something that can't wait, Jack Conway's remarks about Mae West's play *Diamond Lil*. A little acquaintance with Con's argot will be very instructive to readers of the *Saturday Review*:

Go over and get a hodful of Mae West in "Diamond Lil" and try and get a couple of duckets in the next to the last row. If you do, be sure and take a peek at those stockholders and the relatives. Mae has 50 per cent. of the joint and also gets a royalty. The stockholders can't understand why they can't get some one a little cheaper. Take Mae out of that opera and it wouldn't draw fishcakes.

She remains the stage Babe Ruth of the prosties, and threatens to become an institution. It won't be long before the yokes will be demanding a squint at her, and she ought to prove as popular in the sticks as Odd McIntyre.

The play is a throw-back to the days when Jimmy Doyle used to walk into the Chatham Club, put his iron hat on the piano and coo ballads until the chumps ran out of throw money, and the broads were reefing their own gams for sugar.

"Diamond Lil" has a ward politician, rival heavy, Salvation Army captain who turns out to be a copper, and all the riff-raff that used to haunt the sawdust on the floor joints in the days when a street cleaner could get a workout on the Bowery.

Mae is the leader's gal and has a yen for the sky chauffeur. There is also a spick from Rio, who is supposed to be the magimp of another jane but is making a play for Mae. The other frail cops a sneak on them while her spaghetti bender is giving his arteries a workout in Mae's boudoir. She tries to stick a shive in Mae, but our heroine turns the sticker and croaks the other moll. When they blast in, Mae has covered the stiff's pan with her own hair, and is combing it. (Directors, please note.)

The boudoir would get a rise out of a Grand Rapids furniture salesman. It has a gilded swan bed that looks like it might have come from the Everleigh Club. They also have a junkie who takes a couple of blows and talks about buying New York. That kind of a hophead went out with hoopskirts.

The opera is doing business and the nut must be very reasonable, so it looks like a pipe for eight weeks more anyway.

But don't muff those stockholders. Crashing the window,

you will notice them to your left, lined up like a double octet. As the curtain takes it on the lam upward you will hear them beating the hambos to the punch lines. If anybody in the troupe has on anything new, the stockholders will give you the office, if you listen. Also the salaries.

Jo Jo of the raucous pipes is prominent in the back room scene. He sings his laughing hyena song and goals them. Mae sells "Frankie and Johnny" and "Easy Rider" like Millie De Leon sold hip waving in the old days.

You could take the same book and troupe, spot it in a modern cabaret, dress up the frails in modern clothes and it would play just as well and probably have more appeal. The fillies in long skirts would be safe now on double fifth and wouldn't get a tumble at a longshoreman's picnic. Mae manages to look seductive and voluptuous, after spotting the peasants a couple of armorplate body grippers and three old-fashioned low-necked gowns. She also wears those striped stockings that used to be so popular in the "Police Gazette."

The play will entertain any of the old-timers, due to its reminiscent qualities; the younger generation will get a great kick out of it and a flash at the way they did those things when mother was a girl.

Browsing through the Folder, I find an advertisement, received a year or more ago, concerning a magazine called *Larus* which announced itself as about to begin publication at 12 Baker Street, Lynn, Mass. *Larus*'s description of itself was so engaging that I have several times wondered whether the journal came into existence and lived up to its prospectus. This is what it said of itself:

Although published in New England, it will not be devoted to polite papers by pleasant gentlemen, luting the balm of the Concord woods, or relating with bated breath what dreadful things Mark Twain said about Emerson at that so unfortunate banquet; nor will it be wistful or whimsical.

It will not, having begun well under strong leadership, succumb to females and slip gently into quasi-modern senility.

It is not "smart," God save the mark: one can learn from it neither that fresh and timely epigram made by Jean Cocteau (twenty gold years ago), nor what brand of patent cereal is had for breakfast by that famous horse "on which the son of England never sets," nor whether iguana or armadillo is the correct leather for the tops of button shoes.

It will not be built upon prejudice, nor mould its readers into a self-conscious group, with on the one hand a profession of independent intelligence, and on the other a mob-attitude.

It does not titillate the ganglia by artistic lubricity, nor attempt a literary substitute for glandular therapy.

It is not an organ for a mutual admiration society of nice young people.

It is not a political tract.

It is not hare-brained, appearing with its cover upside-down, or on edge, or, indeed, with its mentality upside-down or on edge, either.

In brief, *LARUS* is not a popular magazine; it is for the very few, and they of the highest order.

If the allusion to "pleasant gentlemen luting the balm of the Concord woods" was by any chance intended as a nifty at Thoreau's expense, the identification is inadequate. What one likes best in Thoreau was his arrogance. The man who remarked that Emerson, shooting at beer-bottles on an Adirondack vacation, was no better than a cockney picnicker, lived on a high serene of ethical certainty which is good to contemplate. It is true that whiles one finds something a little meagre and frosty in the judgments of those vanished Massachusetts mandarins (I myself like to think of Ralph Waldo popping off the beer-bottles with his fowling-piece), sometimes one wonders if the ascetic and hermit, no matter how exquisite his memoranda on pantheism, was not a mere child in the art of living. For there is a certain furious and tragic merriment in the compromises of modern life: to be ground in the hopper and still extract one's silences and Buddhist interludes. Silence should be something advanced upon and won; not something retreated to. There seems to me something tragically negative, for example, in Thoreau's comment on Whitman—"As for sensuality in *Leaves of Grass*, I do not so much wish that it was not written, as that men and women were so pure that they could read it without harm."

It is true that the most enchantingly acceptable philosophizations have usually been written by celibates. Family men are more wary about uttering these lustrous positivisms. Thoreau's contempt for the audiences to whom he lectured was not, I think, an engaging trait. He could fall in love with a shrub-oak but not with a human being. His idea of lecturing was to read a manuscript essay; he regarded the occasion as a success if the gathering was so dismayed that no one dared speak to him afterward. He was courteous to woodchucks and turtles; but aren't we all? It's being courteous to human beings that requires Galilean hardihood. He was

rather pleased with himself when he chased a straying shoat for hours and finally caught him and wheel-barrowed him home. But isn't that what domestic or metropolitan man has to do every day and all day long? The ineffable greased pig of his secret joy, you can see him pursuing it grimly, under the scarps of terraced buildings or in the bewildering discipline of paternity.

But, as I say, it is for this arrogant and fugitive certainty that one loves Thoreau. He was happy, and therefore his doctrine was true; happiness refutes all argument. One laconic entry in his journal always seems to me specially characteristic. "Aug. 9, 1854. To Boston. *Walden* published. Elder-berries." For his books have just the tart sweetness, the acrid refreshment, of elder-berry wine. Perhaps he really knew very little of life; or perhaps he knew more than it is safe for any man to suspect; you can argue it convincingly either way. He left us books that provide one with debate, full of beautiful troubling elixir. Perhaps he was himself a bit like the shrub-oak he fell in love with—"Rigid as iron, clean as the atmosphere, hardy as virtue, innocent as a maiden." He was much more than a "pleasant gentleman." He was the man who cried out, when he saw women wearing jewelry, that a pearl was "the hardened tear of a diseased clam, murdered in its old age"; and said, after lecturing in the basement of a church, "I trust I helped to undermine it." If he had been alive, he would certainly have spent 1917-18 in jail.

I had only meant to make a casual allusion to Thoreau, but having got so far I may as well go on a stick or two further. Some day perhaps I might read some of the books about him; *Walden* and the *Journals* are my only lore. Odell Shepard's admirable condensation, "The Heart of Thoreau's Journals," is an anthology alive with the purest bourbon of the mind. If one were a collector, among the books most charming to own would be one of those 706 copies of *A Week on the Concord* which the publisher returned to him as unsalable (about 215 were actually sold, of the first edition of 1000) and which he carried up to his attic. Who ever forgets his immortal memorandum—"I have now a library of nearly 900 volumes, over 700 of which I wrote myself."

Speaking as a financier, there is bound to be a bull market in Thoreau. H. M. Tomlinson, when he was here a few months ago, was amazed at the low price at which it was possible to buy a First of *Walden*. But we have seen, in ten years or so, *Moby Dick* rise from about \$2½ to \$250. The same will very possibly happen to Thoreau, for he has something to say to us that few have ever said quite so definitely. I know of two men of letters, both ardent dabblers in speculation, who (being hard up) bought a First of *Walden* jointly, and put it carefully in a safe against the anticipated rise. When the price gets up to \$100 they intend to cash in. When that time comes I will tell you who they are.

Thoreau worked for a dollar a day as odd-job man; but his oddest job of all was that of trying to guess the truth.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

Roller Coaster Journalism

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Press, was published last year by Boni & Liveright. "A conspectus of modern metropolitan newspapers in the United States, primarily it is concerned with marked changes which have come to them during this generation." For much of the material of his book the author went to original sources, to pamphlets and trade journals.

There is, of course a voluminous literature on journalism. We cull from it, as particularly germane to Mr. Bent's discussion of the tabloids, the following titles: "Main Currents in American Journalism," by Willard G. Bleyer (Houghton Mifflin); "History of American Journalism," by James Melvin Lee (Houghton Mifflin); "History of Journalism in the United States," by George Henry Payne (Appleton); "Ethics of Journalism," by Nelson Antrim Crawford (Knopf); "Conscience of Newspapers," by L. M. Flint (Appleton); "Commercialism and Journalism," by Hamilton Holt (Houghton Mifflin); "Public Opinion," by Walter Lippmann (Harcourt, Brace).