

THE PEDIGREED PRESS

SISTER MAURA

PEOPLE take the daily paper as a matter of course. It appears at the breakfast table and again during the afternoon, without a past as far as they know. Intellectuals view it with an air of scorn, and literary folk regard its language as mere "journalese"; the *literate* consider it an upstart, or even a spurious, form. But is it so? The paper so casually accepted may be the product of blood, sweat, and tears.

Very few save the staff realize what an achievement bringing out the daily paper is. One daily involves as much labor in its production as the average novel, that leisurely type of publication, and many presses bring out both a morning and an evening paper. A newspaper establishment is a world in itself, containing editorial, advertising, circulating, printing, and engraving organizations, all geared to print as much as a novel or two a day. It is a strenuous world, full of life, activity, and the unexpected—and its product goes into the scrap basket after forming public opinion on the events of the day.

Papers differ in character as widely as *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet*. There are aristocrats of the Press, like the *Transcript* which perished recently for lack of proletarian support. For this paper Bliss Carman wrote the special feature articles which he afterwards garnered into three books of charming essays. There may be degenerates of the Press; but the paper which meets the needs of the average citizen has the virtues of the commonalty. Its appeal is not to the learned but to the literate; not to the head quite so much as to the heart. Indeed, its banner device might well be *Nil humanum a me alienum*.

As for "journalese", this term of reproach is falling into disuse. Managing editors taboo "bromides" and circumlocutions of all kinds, and usually guide cub reporters in the path of right diction by giving them a list of favorite hackneyed expressions to avoid. In fact, the Press has been the training ground of the best writers of the time. Chesterton, Shaw, Barrie, Belloc (whose prose Morley likens to the choicest of the eighteenth century), Morley himself, Sir Charles Roberts, and many another, learned on the staff of a newspaper to wield the vernacular as a clear, vigorous, flexible medium of expression,

with a tendency to rise to higher rather than sink to lower levels of language.

Far from being an upstart, journalism can claim a proud and ancient lineage. "The noblest Roman of them all," the genuine great-souled man of Aristotle's praise, Julius Caesar, published the first newspaper. This surprises no one familiar with the perfect reporter's style—"factual," detached, and lucid—of his *Gallie Wars*. In the first year of his first consulship, 59 B.C., Caesar determined to keep the people informed of what went on within the august and awful walls of the Roman senate. He had a report of proceedings posted every day in the Forum under the apt title of *Acta Diurna* (Daily Doings). The *Acta* enlarged its scope until it contained news stories of many kinds. It remained always state-controlled, being in charge of one or more magistrates; but the real editors were the *actuarii*, and their staff included shorthand reporters called *notarii*. *Operarii* copied the paper posted in the Forum, and circulated it in various parts of the empire. Copies were also kept on file in the public library. The *Acta Diurna* ran, under one name or another, for five hundred and thirty-five years, the longest-lived of papers! Its famous name has been lately revived in a tri-monthly, published to encourage students in mounting the highlands of Latin composition.

Just how the modern Press originated, is obscure. Manuscript news letters had a vogue as early as the time of Agincourt; and the first regular printed papers, called *corantos* or *courants*, seem to have developed from them. Printed news sheets circulated in Germany in the first half of the sixteenth century. These reported extraordinary events, such as the "*gar wunderbarliche erschreckliche neue Zeitung*" of strange signs in the sky.

The first modern newspaper in the strict sense of the term is *La Gazette*, published in Paris on the morning of May the thirtieth, 1631. It came out under the mighty patronage of Richelieu, and with the king's approval. Its founder, Théophraste Renaudot, was a poor doctor from Loudon in Poitou, whom Richelieu had brought to the capital to organize public relief. Renaudot started a free medical clinic in Paris, and, as the genial Archbishop Downey of Liverpool says, "He found it conducive to his success in business to be able to tell his patients all the news of the day. He was so successful that he had the news printed and circulated in his dispensary."

Francis Dickie gives this account of the printing of the first issue: "The night of May 29th, 1631, is a memorable one, for it

saw the birth of the *Gazette*. All night, Theophraste, helped by a friend in his dwelling, *Grand Coq*, worked the hand printing-press. Picture to yourself the press room, for it was also his home. From different points on the wall, long stout cords stretched to various pieces of furniture. On these lines were hung to dry the pages of the first issue. As dawn broke, Renaudot walked rapidly towards the Louvre and delivered the first three copies, to the King, to Richelieu, and to his friend Father Joseph. The paper was of good size, four sheets in quarto; it contained 'hot news' with date lines from Constantinople, Rome, Spain, High Germany, Venice, Vienna, Hamburg, Prague, and Leipzig. Though all the news was made up of letters, some many weeks old, it was still 'hot news' inasmuch as it was unknown."

That was the beginning. Being a good business man, M. Renandot soon gave space in his paper to classified advertisements of different kinds, and thus insured its financial success. He included a questionnaire, and carried "want ads". *La Gazette* has never ceased publication: its pre-war circulation was a million.

In the earlier sixteen hundreds, England took its foreign news in the form of *corantos* or *courants*. Jonson speaks of "weekly courants with Paul's seal"; and Fletcher declares through one of his characters, "I would set up a press here in Italy to write all the corrantoes for Christendom". In the troublous days of Charles I, journalists, both Cavalier and Roundhead, became active, and they continued so until the Lord Dictator suppressed all licensed journalism in 1655. *The Kingdoms Weekly Intelligencer*, *The Perfect Diurnall*, and *The Moderate Intelligencer*, among them, succeeded in giving the public the suppressed details of Cromwell's infamous massacre at Drogheda in 1649.

The career of John Dillingham illustrates well the liberty-loving spirit of the early English Press. Though a parliamentarian and at one time leading pressman of his party, he broke with them when Lilburne was imprisoned without trial in 1648; and he denounced the injustice in a leader (a form he had originated) which works to a final climax in French, "*Dieu nous donne les Parlements brièfe, Rois de vie longue.*" These were brave words; for though the licenser did not understand French, other readers of *The Moderate Intelligencer* did. But the paper weathered the ensuing storm and others, and ran until August, 1655.

Ten years later, Henry Muddiman brought out *The Oxford Gazette*, soon called *The London Gazette*, which is still published. The first English daily, *The Daily Courant*, appeared in 1702, and in 1704 Defoe brought out his tri-weekly *Review*. Unlike the majority of his contemporaries, Defoe was not violently partisan, and he strove for accuracy. As the century advanced, Steele and Addison, Johnson and Goldsmith established the tradition of literary journalism.

The earlier newspapers were as a class controversial, and vituperative even in name; apparently they knew nothing of the polite rules of parliamentary procedure. *The Weekly Discoverer*, for instance, was acrimoniously attacked by *The Discoverer Stripped Naked*. After this bitterly partisan period, papers became regional in character, as their names indicate: *News Out of Hull*, *The Newcastle Courant*, *The Salisbury Postman*, *The York Mercury*, *The Gloucester Journal*. *Mercury* was a favorite name, probably because it suggests news travelling on winged feet; there were *The Northampton Mercury* and *The Leeds Mercury*, and earlier *Mercurius Britannicus*, *Le Mercure Anglois*, *Mercurius Cincius*, and others.

The nineteenth century paper, with its greater urbanity and vaster range of news, local, national, and foreign, is gloriously represented by *The Times*. This famous paper began life as a business undertaking. John Walter, a London merchant "all whose ventures failed, and scarce one vessel scaped the dreadful touch of merchant-marring rocks," faced disaster squarely, and cast about for means to meet his creditors and retrieve his fortunes. He bought the patent rights of logography, a printing device which its inventor, Henry Johnson, described as "the Art of Arranging and Composing with words Intire." Evidently it was a precursor of linotyping. In 1784, with the assistance of Samuel Brown, Walter secured a printing house and set up The Logographic Press. The venture prospered, and the following year he included a newspaper among his publications. This he named *The Universal Register*. The significant word here is "Universal", and Walter continued to make it good even after he changed the name of his paper to *The Times* on January the first, 1788.

Thomas Barnes and John Thadeus Delane were the editors who made *The Times* a power in the land, respected and sometimes feared by governments, a leader of public opinion, and no respecter of persons—in a word "The Thunderer". A recent tribute to the paper comes from the University of Missouri

in the shape of a medal bestowed on *The Times* as "the leading newspaper of the world". The qualities cited for praise are "its impartiality, its learning, its courage, and its incorruptible English honor."

The first English paper in the western hemisphere was *The Boston Weekly News-Letter* dating to 1704, the year in which Defoe's *Review* appeared. *The Royal Gazette* of Halifax has the distinction of being the first paper published in Canada; it dates to March the twenty-third, 1752, and is still published. A commemorative tablet marks the site where it was originally printed at John Bushnell's Press, 173 Grafton Street. In 1776, Mrs. Margaret Draper, the proprietor of *The Boston News-Letter*, moved to Halifax, bringing all her press equipment with her. On her death this passed into the hands of one of her compositors named John Howe.

In 1828, John Howe's son, Joseph, became owner of *The Novascotian*, a paper which had begun publication in 1824, and he made it the most famous of early Canadian newspapers. Its best claim to fame is Haliburton's universal classic, *The Clockmaker*, which it ran serially from 1835 to 1836. The all-Gaelic *MacTalla* also appeared in Nova Scotia, carrying on the tradition of a language that was spoken in the British Isles before English and French were thought of.

In the very year in which New Brunswick became a province, 1884, it had a newspaper of its own, the renamed *Royal Gazette and New Brunswick Advertiser*. As early as 1849, Timothy Warren Anglin had edited a vigorous weekly in Saint John; this he called after the well known Dublin *Freeman*. The first Prince Edward Island paper was *The Gazette*, brought out by James Robertson and his nephew. After they returned to Scotland, the name was changed to *The Royal Herald*; but the provincial government still publishes a *Royal Gazette* in Charlottetown.

And so the account of early local papers across Canada might be multiplied.

In the present spacious days, bulletins from around the world, running continuously on teletype ribbons, keep every editorial room informed of the news of the minute. Even the strongest individualist on the staff submerges his identity, content to let his news stories and editorials appear under no other name than that of the paper. In every Gestapo-ridden land of Europe, the secret Press is still the voice of freedom, keeping alive the spirit of the nation. *La Libre Belgique* is but

one of many. Joseph Skalda, the Czechoslovakian hero, organized and inspired the secret Press of his country until his imprisonment and death. Poland, Greece, Yugoslavia, France, Norway, and Belgium, all have their hidden heroes of the Press.

Journalism gives a vivid picture of the times, "shows the very body of the time its form and pressure." This is its enduring value. An age may be preserved in its history, but it lives in its newspapers.