

IV

"HOW TO MAKE 'EM READ IT"

^{During}
~~During~~ these years of the late twenties and the beginning of the thirties, The Telegraph received more and more national attention and in January 1931, Mark was invited to speak at the University of North Carolina ^{the} ~~to the~~ ^{Press Annals} ~~Seventh Annual Newspaper Institute~~ ^{Press} on the subject, "How To Make 'em Read it," though when the talk was later published it had the more dignified title, "The Inside of the Newspaper."

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As it expresses the ground rules Mark followed as a managing and associate editor, which he then was, and as a general manager, publisher, and editor, which ^{became later} ~~he has since been~~, I'm going to quote a considerable part of it.

"There is no pattern that I know of by which a paper may be made interesting to its readers, ^{he} ~~he~~ ^{said} ~~began~~. "Each managing editor cuts his own pattern and sews his own cloth. He may benefit from the ideas of others, but, after all, his job is to produce a paper that is interesting to his own particular constituency...."

"On the Telegraph," ^{he} ~~Mark~~ continued, "we have a notion that within certain limitations and with certain reservations, the paper belongs to the reader. He pays his money to you and in receiving his subscription you contract definitely with him to furnish him the news"

of the day. As an added sales inducement you throw in a salad of features and dressing of your own opinion, which is his concession to you. He has no choice of what comes to him in the way of news and you have no choice of what ^{food} you shall give him. News is not made by newspapermen; it is made by hundreds of millions of men and women of the world and only collected by reporters. A good newspaperman is only a photographer with words....

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"There are vast differences among newspapers in the manner of serving the meal to the reader. There are, for instance, those newspapers that regard stories of crime and violence as of paramount importance; there are those that regard any news of Prohibition, whether upon the wet or dry side, as of transcendent public interest; there are those managing editors who believe ~~that~~ what their public is most interested in are the amorous adventures of motion picture actresses; there are those who regard outcroppings of domestic infelicity as of much greater importance than the passage of a tariff bill, a ~~was~~ statement from the president, or the passage of a piece of major social legislation....

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"I do not claim it is the function of the news columns to educate or the duty of an editor to be the censor of what his readers shall have in the way of news. But it is the duty of an honest newspaper to give an honest, truthful, and accurate picture of

what transpires in the world....

"We have certain definite convictions how news should be played. We have the idea that our front page should not be merely a sewer into which we shall dump all the filth and violence ~~that is~~ brought to us during the day by our reporters and the press association wires. We have a notion that it should be a cross-section of what is going on in the world; that it should provide the greatest variety of narration of the activities of all manners and all classes of people; that as a subscriber reads it he may feel that he is, in effect, viewing a newsreel that films for him what the rest of the world is doing....

"I do not mean to say ~~that~~ we have a prejudice ^a against publishing crime news on our front page, provided it is worthy of the ⁿ front page. Upon the other hand, we do not regard crime and violence stories as news per se. We try to apply...to such stories the test of their news value ^h the prominence of the parties involved, the nature and unusualness of the crime and the significance of what has taken place. Naturally, in the background of such judgment there is always the consciousness of the ^{ff} final test to be made upon any news story: will it interest your readers?...

"On the Telegraph, for instance, we consider a fight by our young Macon heavyweight, W.L. Stribling, as of greater interest to our subscribers than a typhoon in the China Sea and, accordingly, we take it from the

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sports editor and give it equal and often prior rank over any other news of the day. We consider the outcome of the Georgia-^{Georgia}Tech or the Georgia-Yale game of equal interest with the amorous adventures of King Carol, as interesting as they may be, and the King is apt to find himself walking three headlines behind the football game.

"The point I'm making is that too many newspapermen are likely to follow the line of least resistance in selecting news for their front pages; too likely to play ^{up} stories of crime and violence simply because somebody has been killed or injured. People are ~~getting~~ killed and injured every day. There is nothing novel or newsy about that. We try, at any rate, to make an intelligent selection of news that actually mirrors what is going on in the world in the belief that by giving the greatest possible variety of news we are actually telling a truer story and striking the greatest popular interest."

~~Then Mark ^{also} talked at some length about the grouping of news that is, putting local news or state news on the same pages. He did not advocate it then, and he does not advocate it now.~~

Then, he discussed a subject close to his heart: "I believe most publishers regard ^{it} as axiomatic that the success of their newspapers, ~~from the editorial end,~~ comes from competent staffs. ~~he said~~ They will accept

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the statement without argument, yet I do not believe ~~that~~ they are doing a great deal to raise the standards of their staffs. They no longer allow drunkenness around the office; they no longer think it is humorous when a man fails to show up for work or has a hangover. The professional tramp newspaperman has already disappeared and the standards of newspapermen have been raised, but I do not think the publishers have yet discovered what has gone on in their offices. If they have, it is not apparent in the pay envelopes of the men who work for them in the news department.

"The scale of the wages in the composing room, where the men are leagued in a union to demand a minimum wage and a maximum number of hours for that wage, beyond which they get overtime, is ^{usually} ~~upon the whole~~ higher than the scale in the news department, where the men want no union that will foreordain the brightest to labor at a salary that the dullest may also make and where the newspaper may command as many hours as it requires for the production of the paper without any thought of paying overtime. It is my firm conviction that newspaper reporters are, ~~upon the whole~~, miserably underpaid. They give the newspaper whatever personality its news columns have; they are responsible, in the end, for the public's confidence in ^{their presentation of} the news columns. They are either accurate or inaccurate, fair or unfair, able, mediocre, or weak, and, their work reflects itself in the paper and from

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their work the public judges the paper....

"It has been incomprehensible to me how publishers can so underrate the importance of their reporters, who are, after all, their personal emissaries, as to be willing to pay them street sweepers' salaries while requiring of them an education only a little short of that entitling them to a Master of Arts degree.

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"There is no substitute for intelligence in the news departments of a newspaper. There is no good way to obtain that intelligence without paying for it.... We do not bridle and harness reporters and say they must travel this rut. They may tell the story as they please, provided the story contains all essential information. By that method, I believe, newspapers can vastly improve their news writing and bring freshness and color to the narration of ordinary events.

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"There is...an infinitely vast difference between the characters of newspapers as they are represented in their editorial columns. No two characters are alike; no two editorial pages are alike. It is the editorial page above all others that gives the newspaper its tone, its individuality, its freshness or its dullness, and its character.

"That which goes into the good editorial page is not merely ~~matter~~ ^{what} that has been collected to fill space; it represents the best efforts of the man ~~who is~~ responsible for those columns to interest the public at every

possible point of contact. There is, for instance, the humor that every newspaper must have. Reading a newspaper without it is as dreary a task as I imagine eating a bale of alfalfa hay might be.

"There should be also something to interest those whom we affectionately refer to as the old-timers. As the years draw on, all of us like to join the stove league and talk of old times. More readers than one suspects are interested in the higher arts and there ought to be something for them, ^{by} some intelligent discussion aside from the formal reviews and criticisms. It will be well also to have a columnist who might be considered the newspaper's red bow tie, whose opinions are radical, who does not always accept the conventional thing as ~~the~~ wise or proper, ~~thing~~, whose opinions shock and stimulate. Such a columnist, of course, must keep in mind that, if he drives his audience away with wild rantings, he must, in the language of the stage, get the hook. His function is to prod and poke, not necessarily to bludgeon, although he must have a capacity for indignation and a keen sense of human and social justice.

"By all means there should be one or two columns devoted to reproduction of the best editorial opinions of the week, ^{by} a column of what state editors ~~are saying~~ and what national editors are saying. The public ^{grows} gets tired of feeding on the fodder of one mind. It wants

to know what the rest of the state and nation are thinking on questions discussed in the local paper. By simply using the scissors and a little discrimination any editor, daily or weekly, can bring into his pages an invigorating and stimulating change of pace....

"There are two things ~~that~~ that all newspapers can have and should not be without. They are editorials and the letter column. I would not have anyone underestimate the importance of that column devoted to receiving the red-hot opinions of Vox Populi. To my mind it is as important as the column in which the editor speaks his mind... If you will let the other fellow hit as hard as he pleases in the space reserved for his communication, he will not require that you soften your blows when you strike at him. What he resents is not being allowed to answer you in his ^{own} ~~or~~ terms. If you give him that privilege, there is nothing he can say of you but that you are fair. We exclude from our letter columns no communication that is decent ⁱⁿ-that is, that is not scurrilous or libelous ⁱⁿ-and we publish even the libelous letters about ourselves. That is no gracious magnanimity for which we take unction to ourselves. We consider it essential to the publication of a fair newspaper. We have learned, too, that when the fullest freedom of expression is given in the letter column, the radical who is about to burst with his ~~own~~ ideas has nothing to say or says it so ridiculously as

to discredit himself...The letter column is the greatest of all a newspaper's safeguards and, properly conducted, one of its greatest editorial assets.

"There are those who say editorial writing is a dying art; that editorial space is wasted space. It is a dead art if he who ^{writes} does it is lifeless, ^{and} colorless, ^{and} weak, and timid. The space is wasted unless he has something to say and the courage to say it. In the hands of a thoughtful, courageous man, the editorials may be the most vital ^{part} thing in the paper....

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"William Allen White leaped to fame from the obscurity of a weekly newspaper in Emporia, Kansas, because he had something to say about the condition of Kansas politics. Not every editor can be famous; not every editor covets fame; but White, in speaking out, was merely recognizing the truth that those who buy a newspaper have the right to know the editor's reactions upon every question that agitates the public mind. Nothing is more despicable than the trimmer; nothing is so much despised as the flannel-mouthed Mr. Milquetoast who hems and haws and perhaps his way into oblivion.

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"Subscribers...have a right to expect in editorial discussions...the utmost frankness and the utmost honesty. No man who sits in an editorial chair should be conscious as he writes of any obligation save the obligation to the highest truth. He should have no enemies to punish

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unless his enemies are directed against those whose acts are subversive of public good; he should have no friends to reward unless his feeling of friendship is inspired by acts of excellence in the common good. When he discovers injustice, he should denounce it as injustice; when he discovers rascality, he should call it rascality; when he senses demagoguery, he should call it demagoguery; when he discovers excellence, he should call it excellence, nothing more and nothing less. There is no ultimate consequence to the editor who speaks out bravely except the enhancement of his own self-respect and the character of his newspaper.

"The prescription I give for publishing a paper that will be read is to have the resources for collecting news, the intelligence to handle it, and the courage to comment upon it frankly, unafraid, unawed, and unsubsidized."

Mark's prescription for publishing a good newspaper ~~was reflected in~~ reminds me of a letter he wrote Mark Jr. twenty-one years later. At the time, Mark Jr. was editor of the editorial page of Alicia Patterson's ^{supplimentary} paper, Newsday, in Garden City, Long Island. In August 1950, the movie, "The Miracle," opened at Long Island theatres and the Catholics immediately organized a boycott. They picketed the theatres and scared ~~would-be~~ patrons away.

Mark Jr. wrote an editorial saying that the Catholics

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had the right to stay away from the movie if they wanted to; that they had the right to ^{urge} ~~tell~~ the faithful not to attend, but that the boycott infringed on the rights of others, including the right of the theatre owners. Freedom of expression, he wrote, was a First Amendment right, and the Catholic Church should not be in the position of trying to deny that right to anyone.

X The Catholics ^{promptly} ~~then~~ organized a boycott against Newsday, ^{which} ~~it~~ was denounced in every Catholic pulpit on Long Island. When ^{the paper} Newsday had lost a thousand subscribers, Alicia Patterson caved in and apologized to the Catholics in a signed editorial.

This move naturally greatly upset Mark Jr. and he wrote ^{to} his father, ^{asking} ~~and asked~~ what he thought about it. After discussing the consequences that the prestige of Newsday might suffer ^{as a result of} ~~at~~ Miss Patterson's "cave-in," Mark took up Mark Jr.'s situation, ^{writing:} ~~He wrote:~~

shrink
"What she might do to her staff and to you as an individual is, perhaps, more serious. If it makes you ~~shrink~~ ^{shrink} in the face of a fight, if it makes you stop to calculate the effect of every stand you take in terms of subscribers, then she has deprived you of your full strength as an editorial writer. Long-continued or habitual practice of that approach will make you a coward, too. My concern is that you not let ^{it} ~~it~~ happen to you. Life is too damned short to be afraid and much too mean to live if you have to be a newspaperman who

