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The approach of the New Year would be an appropriate season for American newspaper men, from lowest to highest; to make a few good resolutions; not to be broken along with other New Year's resolutions, but to be rigidly kept. In all modern American life there is nothing that needs reforming quite as much as does the American newspaper.

We are not alluding especially to "yellow" journalism. It is very common for respectable newspapers to denounce the "yellow" ones, and with great display of virtuous disgust; but in doing so they are in reality only "compounding for sins they are inclined to by damning those they have no mind to." The "yellow" papers are not the worst ones. The worst of all newspapers are those of the respectable order which disregard the golden rule of good journalism—to be intelligible, truthful and candid. "Yellow" journals are at the worst only sewers; and sewers are useful. But liars, whether they lie from indolence or malice, are of no use whatever—not as liars.

The resolutions that newspaper men of the respectable class ought to make and keep, relate to their responsibility to their readers. Their occupation is in character not a mechanical trade; it is a profession. They cannot therefore escape personal responsibility for their acts on the plea that they are under the coercion of superiors (or advertisers if they are proprietors), any more than a lawyer can

escape personal responsibility by pleading the coercion of clients. While a compositor may put into type sentiments against which his manhood revolts, pleading that he is only performing a mechanical act, the newspaper man must be responsible to his own character, and to the readers of his paper, for what he writes and how he writes it. No one is bound to go into journalism; but if he does go into it he assumes certain professional obligations which he ought to perform at all costs—even at the cost of possible bankruptcy.

That these are not the ethics of American journalism, though they ought to be, is evident to all newspaper readers. News reports seldom aim to state facts truly and intelligibly; they aim to catch and magnify the sensational. Editorials seldom expound with knowledge, candor and thoughtfulness; their chief characteristics are indifference, flippancy, pretentious ignorance and cynicism, not to say malevolence when definite purpose does actuate the man behind the pen or the man behind him. Then the paper as a whole. Is it not made with reference less to the needs of its readers than to the demands of a few large advertisers or the commands of some capitalist of the piratical type who owns the establishment "on the side"?

Perhaps we shall be better understood if we refer to an instance or two. Though related to particular persons and to a particular place, as concrete instances must of necessity be, they are distinctly typical the country over. One of these has to do with the report in a Chicago paper of the highest standing, of the socialism-single tax debate of the 20th. Another is connected with the hearings before a committee of the city coun-

cil on the Chicago traction question. A third relates to the editorial treatment accorded a serious effort on the part of the Chicago Federation of Labor to ascertain the effect of trade unionism upon recurring business depressions.

At the socialism-single tax debate, one of the single tax speakers made the point that the single tax would begin to yield beneficent results from the very beginning of its adoption in even a timid and preliminary way, and that these results would increase in degree as the reform advanced; whereas no beneficent results are claimed for socialism until it shall have accomplished a complete revolution. The term "revolution" was not used to imply that physical force is in the programme of socialism, nor was it so understood by the audience. Nothing offensive to socialists was implied or inferred. The socialists in the audience did seem to understand, however, that the speaker was not only asserting that a complete revolution was necessary before any of the benefits claimed for socialism could be enjoyed in any degree, but also that he was conceding that the working classes could not be benefited by any changes short of that revolution. This was in harmony with their own views, and they greeted it with two or three rounds of applause as a concession from an adversary. Inasmuch as most of the demonstrative part of the audience were socialists, the applause was emphatic. But it was entirely good natured, and there were no violent outcries. Yet note the report of the incident from one of the principal papers—not "yellow"—of Chicago:

"The purpose of you socialists is to abolish existing things, root and branch!" An uproar of wild cheers and

violent shouts of affirmation from more than 1,000 intensely excited listeners interrupted the singer taxer when he flung out the foregoing assertion as a reflection on the patriotism of the audience at the socialistic-single tax debate in West Twelfth Street Turner Hall yesterday afternoon. "Yes, socialism is revolution, isn't it?" cried the speaker when the noise had subsided. Again the remarkable demonstration made the rafters of the big hall to shudder, and for several minutes pandemonium seemed on the verge of breaking into violence. "That's what we want!" "Down with capital!" "Hurrah for the red flag!" were cries that could be distinguished.

No one who was present at that meeting could possibly regard the foregoing as a truthful report. It is absolutely false—false in color and false in fact. Other reports indicated that the debaters were at white heat with one another, whereas in fact there was no asperity beyond what may occur in the excitement of any debate and without more than momentarily ruffling anyone's temper.

The second instance relates to the traction hearing before the city council. At the hearing on the 21st John Z. White, representing the Henry George Association, made an able analysis of the proposed ordinance the council committee is considering (p. 584). In the course of his argument, he referred to the fact, now coming to be understood, that in proposing this ordinance the committee are acting under coercion, the Chicago City Railway Company holding over them threats of endless and appalling litigation and forcing from them an ordinance which the committee do not want but which they are powerless to improve. Recognizing this dilemma of the committee, Mr. White proposed a basis of settlement for them to offer the company as being in the nature of a compromise in which each side gives and takes, instead of one in which the city does the giving and the company the taking. Yet the newspaper readers not present at that hearing might fairly suppose that Mr. White had done nothing before the committee but propose

another franchise; and as to the nature of his offer, brief and intelligible as was the form in which he put it, the newspaper reader might keep on guessing to the day of his death if he went no further for information than the local newspapers. If the matter was worth reporting at all it was worth reporting intelligibly.

The editorial instance appeared in one of the leading Chicago papers of the 22d. It was nominally a discussion of a recent report of a committee of the Chicago Federation of Labor on the causes of hard times. The writer had evidently never seen the report. He evidently knew nothing about it except a few extracts culled by reporters, and a list of the contributors. But this was material enough for a sneering, class-contemptuous editorial, which craftily misrepresented without flat perjury, owlishly assumed to instruct without knowledge, and cynically condemned without fair consideration.

Although newspaper men cannot escape responsibility for such breaches of professional obligation, it is to be noted that they are, nevertheless, not wholly without excuse. The reporter may be excused because no standards are held up to him but the lowest. Does he fail to catch a speaker's meaning and to reduce the speech to the allowed space while preserving its substance? That is because reports that do not fail in that respect do fail to get published. What the city editor wants is something exciting, and the reporter tries to "make good" by culling sensational features without much regard for general subject matter. And all the way up some such lack of journalistic ideal exercises its influence until you come to the editor-in-chief, who in turn is controlled by the counting room, which in turn is controlled by the big merchant who threatens a withdrawal of patronage, or by the piratical capitalist who owns the whole concern, from publisher to office boy,

from editor to cub reporter. This is the season to reform.

Another exemplification of an official tendency to violate the law in the name of the law, is furnished by the police authorities of Paterson, N. J. A meeting was to have been held there a few days ago, similar to that in New York city (p. 563), to protest against the act of Congress under which John Turner (p. 584) is held for deportation—an act which excludes foreigners for "disbelieving in organized government" and makes it a crime for Americans to invite such foreigners to this country. This perfectly lawful meeting was forcibly prevented from assembling. A body of police barred the way to the hall.

One of the speakers advertised to address that meeting was Bolton Hall, a son of the late Rev. John Hall, the distinguished Presbyterian clergyman. Bolton Hall is a lawyer of standing and an author of note. He is withal a man of peace, who respects the law and upholds public order. His account of the lawlessness of the Paterson police is reported by the New York Herald of the 12th as follows:

Mr. Hall protested, saying that the hall had been hired, the meeting all arranged, that it would be orderly and had been advertised. The policeman in charge said he had orders from the chief of police not to allow any meeting and that the chief had his orders from Mayor Hinchliffe. Mr. Hall said he and his party went to see the chief of police at headquarters. He told them no meeting should take place and that the Mayor had ordered it stopped. The Mayor was appealed to. "He was hot," said Mr. Hall. "He refused to let the meeting go on." Mr. Hall wrote a letter to the editor of the Paterson Guardian in regard to the refusal to allow the meeting to be held. In the letter he wrote:—

The meeting was not called to spread Turner's doctrine or in favor of Turner, but to protest against a law which can be easily extended to threaten the liberty of every one, alien or native. This law has been condemned by such papers as the Outlook, the Independent, the Evening Post and the Brooklyn Eagle, and by such men as Senator Hoar, the Rev. Dr. Thomas C. Hall and Carl Schurz. An appeal to the chief of police personally elicited only the information that the Chief was powerless and that we must see the Mayor, which we did. The Mayor was excited and refused to listen to argument or even to reason.