

we know, they may be stupendous frauds. But that is none of our business, nor of the legislature's, nor of anybody's but the depositors and investors—and they do not complain.

OUR REOBEANT PRESS.

In spite of the general diffusion of intelligence it is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the majority of the people of the United States read little or nothing besides the daily newspapers. In their busy lives they find no time and feel small inclination to read from day to day more than the record of current events that the papers place at their disposal for one cent, or two, or at the most, three. From the daily press are derived their political opinions, their knowledge of literature and history, largely their views of life. On its columns must depend the popular preacher, the ambitious politician and all aspirants for fame, lest while they are reaching hundreds by voice their rivals address tens of thousands through the newspapers. Of all the powers of the land, the press to-day is the most mighty. It educates the young, it molds public opinion, it masters legislatures and presidents.

And yet upon what evil days has it, in this age of triumphant commercialism, fallen. No longer can a Greeley or a Bennett start with paltry resources on a great journalistic career. Newspaper proprietors must be men of millions or men with first of all the capacity to make millions. One of the most honorable of professions has become one of the most sordid of businesses. The sanctum has been degraded to a mere counting-room annex. The till yawns ever, esurient, edacious. The pen labors for its repletion.

The daily newspapers of the United States may be roughly divided into two classes—the old line and the new. There are gradations, of course, all the way from the dulllest gray to the brightest yellow, and the two classes are connected by a half-way, nondescript style of journal that belongs to both rather than to neither; but for purposes of characterization the one division will hold.

To glance first at the old-line pa-

pers: Here are dignity, reserve, taste, regard for the proprieties of life. The news is presented with due regard to proportion and coherence. Book reviews and dramatic critiques are able and discriminating. Literary ability is not wanting. But these merits, abundantly though they may satisfy the average prosperous and conservative citizen, are outweighed by the service that these journals render to plutocracy. The writing staff, from editor-in-chief to youngest reporter, are, willingly or not, retainers in the House of Monopoly. Of this every column affords its proof, alike in what it contains and in what, designedly, it does not contain. The demonstration culminates on the editorial page, where is displayed a past-mastership in the art of special pleading, of suppressing the true and suggesting the false, of making the worse appear the better reason. The thoughtful reader can but exclaim with Pope:

See skulking Truth to her old cavern fled,
Mountains of casuistry heaped o'er
her head.

Ever ready to cry "Demagogue!" and "Fanatic!" at those who dissent from their blood-rusted formulas; always seeing in the stone thrown by the striker a graver crime than in the breaking of statutes, the bribery of legislators and the robbery of the public by the corporation that employed him; ever faithful to the cause of unjust privileges and entrenched spoliation, what wonder is it that it is only prosperous and conservative citizens who are now influenced by the utterances of the old-line journals, and that to find utterances that carry weight with the many recourse must be had to journals of the newer, more sensational school?

To turn to these is to be at once repelled. Here vulgarity caters to ignorance, and there results a nightmarish product of freak typography, bad illustrations, slovenly syntax and literary slush. Contempt for private rights, rampant mendacity and truculent flunkeyism are distinguishing features. All sense of proportion is lost, and when a rich woman's lap dog dies the fall of a dynasty fills second place.

As offset there are usually in the news columns a fairer treatment of

radical men and measures than can be found in the old-line papers, and on the editorial page an expression of opinion, which, however crude it may be, is written with one eye at least open to the interests of the people, not with both fixed on the pocket-book of their exploiters.

This is something. Yet it has been proven abundantly that, however loud its protestations, the new journalism cannot be trusted far. It is pitched on too low a plane for uncompromising virtue, and when the crucial moment comes is generally found wanting. Even at its best it will always sidetrack social reform and political progress to revel in the details of the latest Tenderloin murder or Newport wedding.

The newspapers of the United States have twice elected a facile tool of monopoly to the presidential chair; they have deadened the popular conscience to the iniquity of the Philippine war; they have promoted the reaction to tory and imperial ideas that marks the opening of the twentieth century. Their influence is undisguisably undemocratic and un-republican.

What a field there would be in every great city for an unsubsidized, unpurchasable daily paper, which would combine with conservative methods of news gathering and presentation a fair and radical treatment of all public questions from the standpoints alone of truth, public honor and the people's interests; that would stand like a rock for democracy and progress; that would go to the root of everything and show the public just where and how it is plundered, and point the remedy.

Lacking such papers, may the progressive, independent weeklies in both city and country multiply in number and in circulation. In them rests largely hope for the future.

FRANK C. WELLS.

Brooklyn.

NEWS

South African reports of last week left Gen. De Wet and President Steyn in Cape Colony, on their way with 3,000 men to Philipstown, they having on the 10th crossed the Orange river a few miles north of Norval's