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GRADUATION THESIS.

THE NEWSPAPER

E.O. Lee.  CLASS OF '78.
THE NEWSPAPER.

The newspaper is the outgrowth of modern civilization. It is comparatively modern in its idea, and its rise is coeval with the growth of the rights of man. It is the great educator of the day; has overthrown ignorance and superstition, and in their place has asserted reason and justice. It has elevated the common people from serfs to kings; and now today the press wields a power over the minds of men, unknown to any other human industry. The "Lords of the Quill" are the monarchs of today. The editor is the medium who looks into the future; sees the great questions, grapples them, puts his stamp upon them, and turns them over to the reading public. Show me in history, any great proposition that the newspaper press have jealously supported and have not carried their day.

Liberty of thought and liberty of speech are the two ideas that distinguish modern civilization from the ancient. It is but recently that man has dared to assert his supremacy; and this has come about chiefly through the columns of the
press. Before it was the crowned despot and the stately knight, that ruled the destinies of men. Now it is the oligarchy of the press. This oligarchy has dethroned monarcho. It turns the fate of nations. It did more towards emancipating our four million negroes than the blood of those one million loyal subjects who fell on the field of battle. Yes the pen today is mightier than the sword. That black fluid, which flows from the writers' quill, has an omnipotence to which everything else must yield. Judges, preachers, lawyers, educators; all bow to its stern decree. A man owes his popularity and his power to the journal. The pampers the newspaper, as of old the knights pampered their kings; knowing that displeasure to the press will cause his overthrow, even more certain than was the arrogant lord who displeased his master.

But why is this newspaper so modern? Why does it exert such an influence today and not in times past? Why was not the press known to the ancients? They certainly, were as highly civilized in some of the departments of life as we; in art they far excelled us. Their orators have probably not been equalled, their buildings are still models for our architects. Our laudations are strong for the civilization of the ancient Greeks. Then why did they not have the newspaper? We think, that if it was
taken from us, the wheels of industry would stop; and so they would. Yet Greece and Rome had its industries, and as flourishing as those of today. Then why not the paper? One may answer that the art of printing had not yet been discovered. That is true, and it is moreover true that there had been as yet no necessity for that art. The civilization of the ancients was confined to the metropolis. Athens was all of Greece. Alexandria was all of Egypt. Rome upon her seven hills was all of the empire; and the high civilization of these was confined to the nobles and aristocrats. The vast majority of mankind were then in servitude. Government was a mere despotism. It is true Athens was a republic, but what was Athens? She was simply a small village that dominated over all Greece, Athens was king and Greece was her slave. Rome was a republic, but not one according to our modern signification. It was the republicanism of the few. The whole world was in bondage that Rome, upon her throne of beauty might be great. The people were buried beneath the sod. Their condition was worse than that of the African negro today. There was no need of the newspaper press. Slave labor was the printing press of the Romans. Books were even cheaper then than now. Rome, in its palmiest days, did however have a
newspaper. The Acta Diurna of the senate of Rome, written by their slave labor, was this paper. This did not instruct the common people; it was written to pamper the wants of a few the nobles outside the realm. This selfishness and ignorance is what ruined Rome. Had the commonality been educated; they would have had the newspaper press, and Roman civilization would have been the civilization of today; but this could not be. Tidal waves ever sweep onward. The barbarians of the north swept down and conquered old Rome.

These barbaric clans held ideas far in advance of the Romans. They were the first to recognize the individual rights of man. They were barbarians; yet they were ever ready to learn, and adopted the manners and customs of the Romans. Among these, of course, they adopted the institution of slavery. This, modified by their progressive ideas, grew into the feudalism of the middle ages, and thus became but a higher phase of the selfishness of the old empire. These people were too progressive for slavery. Feudalism died. The anarchy of the church was overthrown, though not without terrible struggles.

The fifteenth century was marked as the awakening of man from his long lethargy. It was the dawn of that eventful day, in which, at the noontide of the sixteenth century
were fought those mighty battles involving the rights of man, and when this sun of the sixteenth century had set, humanity was left on a higher plain.

At the earliest dawn of this awakening the printing press was invented. Its first publication of note was the Bible. Luther stepped boldly out and defied the domineering church. The printing press became his supporter. This tract was published in violation of all the decrees of Rome. The journal was then bold, as it has been ever since; it at once became the supporter of the rights of man, the educator of the common people. It was then, and has ever been the most powerful landmark of modern civilization; and it was only modern civilization that could develop this, the highest of inventions, to its present magnitude. Only lately has man realized the value of the press; and particularly that portion of the press which gives us periodical literature. The newspaper is comparatively modern in its idea, and in its true capacity belongs particularly to England and the United States.

According to tradition, the first printed news sheet appeared in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1457. This was called the Gazette. England’s first weekly newspaper was not established till 1622, and was entitled the “Weekly News.” France soon
followed in England's wake, with the "Gazette de France," in 1631. Our own country published its first paper in 1690, under the head of "Publick occurrences, both foreign and Domestick."

What were these earlier papers? Nothing in comparison with those of today. They were simply small folio sheets. They were the outgrowth of the news letter, necessitated by the increased demand for intelligence among the country people. The news was only parliamentary reports. Yet it seems, that as man steps forward in civilization, the more wants he has, the more easily can these wants be satisfied. The Gazette appeared at the right time. The people were rapidly emerging from their servitude. The journal and the rights of man grew together. The newspaper, above all other products of the press, became the supporter and educator of the common people. They in turn supported it, and these two mighty forces have ever won the victory. We have spoken of the reformation in Germany, and the press as its supporter; but it was the periodical press that lent the Reformotion its most powerful aid. France, seething under the tyranny of Richelieu, started its paper that the people might know the affairs of Government; that they might rise from serfs to kings.

But our attention is more with the English speaking people.
We have said that its first regular newspaper was published in 1622. Its editor was Nathaniel Butter, who is thus considered the father of the English press. It appeared when all Europe was alive with the thirty years war of Germany; and England especially was on the "qui vive" as to the results of this war. She too was rapidly approaching the period of her civil war; that powerful struggle of the people, or the Commons, with a king.

Papers then became quite numerous; they assumed a political aspect, and bitter was this political warfare. Mercury sprang up on both sides. There were papers, whose titles we would laugh at today. Their political warfare was bitter; it was sarcasm in the extreme. Yet their influence was potent; it was educating. In them were the germs of that peculiar political feature which is so characteristic of the English press. These papers became quite numerous during the period of the commonwealth, but upon the restoration their progress was somewhat checked by the license put upon printing. Nothing was published lawfully without having first passed through the governmental examiner's hands and be approved by him. This of course somewhat checked the progress of newspaper literature, but not much; might as well undertake to shut up men's mouths as to stop the flow of their utterances through the press. The strong and active
mind will always make its thoughts known regardless of consequences. Hence newspaper supporting the ideas of each party sprang up: in spite of the tyranny of Charles and James. This tyranny could not last long. The people were awakening. It culminated in the Revolution of 1688. Its end was the rise of the people to the ruling power. They had become the power behind the throne. They had already begun to see the necessity for a more wide spread knowledge; and began to feel that they must know something outside of the little world around them. They knew that they must have a knowledge of the workings of government and of the actions of men. They also began to see that nothing could better supply this knowledge than the newspaper. Hence in 1689 full freedom was given to the press.

The newspaper now made rapid strides in its onward trend. Many new papers sprang up in different parts of the kingdom. It seemed that there was nothing to check the flow of the editors' ink. The time seemed to have come for him to assert his supremacy. The common people seemed to have the means of education in their own hands.

The first daily paper appeared in 1702; a meagre sheet of only one page, containing two columns. In these were only five
short paragraphs, translated from a foreign language. This was indeed a small beginning, but it had the backbone, the marrow, and time was only needed for it to grow into the powerful institution of today.

But there was another check which this growing civilization had to receive, before full sway could be given it. "The Tory government in 1712 imposed a stamp tax on newspapers, a half-penny on half a sheet, a penny on a whole sheet, and a shilling on every advertisement," thus taking the paper from the poorer classes. In spite of all these checks however, the newspaper made rapid advancement. Its progress was ever steady and sure, yet it was not till the present century that the newspaper began to attain its most powerful influence.

The obnoxious tax was removed in 1836. The steam printing press, the greatest invention since the discovery of printing itself, was introduced into the "Times" office, London, England, in 1814. This marked the birth of a new era in the history of our periodical literature. The price of papers now became such that all could buy. The printed page could reach every fireside. The circulation of the "Times" soon became doubled, then quadrupled. Other steam presses were used, the old subscription lists filled rapidly, and
new papers were added to the roll. These too receive the public patronage; and now, today, the world publishes over fourteen thousand periodicals, carrying the printed news to nearly every fireside in Christendom.

It is, however, in the United States that the newspaper has achieved its greatest triumph. The peculiar growth of our country, and the character of our institutions, are peculiarly adapted for the high standard of newspaper literature. But first let us take a short view of the rise and growth of American journalism. We have said that the first American newspaper was printed in 1690. Its editor was Benjamin Harris. It appeared in Boston. This project however failed. The provincial authorities had forebade “anything in print without license first obtained from those appointed by government to grant the same.” As this paper contained “reflections of a very high nature” a second number did not appear. This was however a beginning for American journalism.

In the colonial times many papers were started, though most of them were short lived in consequence of their opposition to the English government. In 1733 a paper was started in New York which deserves particular notice. It was called the New York Weekly Journal. Its editor, Zenger, opposed
bitterly the acts of the colonial government, for which he was arrested on the charge of libel and thrown into prison. This paper still appeared and boldly asserted its rights. He was brought before the court in August 1735. This was the first trial for newspaper libel in America. This trial threw the whole country into excitement. Zenger was acquitted of his charges. This has been considered as the dawn of that liberty which afterwards revolutionized America. Zenger, together with the Franklin, thus became the founders of that class of papers afterwards known as the Revolutionary press.

This Revolutionary press did more towards awakening the minds of the people and freeing this country from the tyranny of the British Parliament, than all else combined. The paper, as I have said, ever the supporter of the rights of man, became the first to advocate these ideas on the American continent.

England was afraid of this power of the press; hence the stamp act of 1765. But the journal was not to be thus baffled. It still maintained its rights. Old England had to again declare its freedom.

I would not mar the honor due to the heroic self-devotion of our Revolutionary fathers. I would not take one jot of glory or fame from the names of those who did
heroic deeds on the field of battle, while fighting for the liberty of this nation. They nobly did their duty. But I do say that it was the paper that first inflamed those hearts to that heroic self-sacrifice and to do those noble deeds. It was then, as it has always been where liberty has been the question, the prime mover to educate the masses. There must be leaders in all these movements which so convulse society; but it is through the journal that these leaders impress their thoughts upon the minds of the multitude. In the Revolutionary times, papers vied with each other in publishing those documents that would inflame the patriotism of the people and rouse them against England. It is even said that Thomas Paine with his paper, first the "Common Sense," and afterwards the "Crisis," did more towards freeing America, than the military services of Washington. Hence the power of the press in our first struggle for national life. It carried its day. America was free. The United States was henceforth to become the home of the people, and the home of the newspaper press. From this time the newspaper began to spread widely in America. It was here to have full sway. This country, where "Liberty of Thought and Speech" was to be the foundation principle, had to give the newspaper press its full power. Even in the celebration of their final victory,
our fathers placed the printing press in the most prominent position of the triumphal march, as a symbol of the freedom of this nation. Here, as elsewhere, it has exercised that power for the good of the lower classes.

It did not, however, immediately achieve this power. Its growth, like that of all our institutions, was at first slow. When the present constitution of our country was adopted in 1789, there were printed in the United States each year 76,435 copies of newspapers, or 8,774,776 copies during the year. These were filled with the political excitement of the period and are interesting to us as showing the history and fevered condition of our infant republic. The first daily newspaper had already made its appearance in 1784. It was called the American Daily Advertiser, and was published in Philadelphia by one Claypoole, who was the first to introduce reporting into America. The circulation of these early papers was limited. They were all too high priced, no extra copies were issued. To get the paper one had to become a regular subscriber. The poor could not indulge in such luxuries. Hence the paper was then barred from entering the places where it needed most to go. But these was to be a change. The newspaper must enter the hovel. The poor people and the ignorant are rulers in this nation as much so, as
the millionaire, and as much as the college graduate. The pa-
per must reach these newer classes. It must educate them. Hence
the growth of the cheap press. The first penny newspaper was
issued on September 32, 1833. It was called the New York Sun,
and was published by Benjamin Day. This really marks a new-
era in journalistic enterprise. Previous to this no subscrip-
tion list could boast of more than five thousand names. Soon
these lists doubled, then quadrupled; soon they numbered
fifty thousand, then a hundred thousand; a few reached a
hundred and twenty five thousand, with an occasional spurt
to a hundred and fifty thousand copies.

The circulation and readership of the American newspapers,
today is astounding. Out of the fourteen thousand periodicals
published, the United States publishes over six thousand. These
have a circulation of over 1,500,000,000 copies annually; with
a readership that would correspond to one paper being
read 7,500,000,000 times each year, carrying its message of
good or evil to nearly every fire-side in the nation. Take
away our newspaper press and America’s free institutions
can no longer exist. Then let the press have full sway!
let its power become more potent. She thinks I see in
the near future, a broader field for its influence than it
ever had before. It is still to wield more power than it does today. Never before were the minds of men so aware of the realities of life as now; never did they feel such necessity for wide-spread knowledge, as they do today. They are beginning to see that for forty million kings to live harmoniously in one nation; it is necessary for forty million minds be so trained, that they shall know how to perform aright the duties of that kingly office. There is yet a vast amount of ignorance in our land, but if the newspaper and the common school only do their work; knowledge will soon take the place of superstition; and there will be no more need of the party demagogue and the wrangling politician. If the newspaper but does its duty, then will we have a Republican government where intelligence is the rule and not the exception.

Even today there is something gigantic, about which the wheels of this newspaper press revolve. Go into the interior of Africa and you will find newspaper correspondents. Go to the most distant islands of the sea and representatives of the press will greet you. There is nothing too great or too difficult for their accomplishment. Wherever man dares to go, there will the newspaper have its representatives. The hills are conquered at midnight; a re-
poster is there to catch the news. He sends it with lightning speed over the civilized world. At home the editor sits beside his midnight oil, ready to catch the news from off the tumbling wires. He transcribes it. In the composing room set at work a busy thing, soon the type is up, the wheels of the mighty press revolve, and ere breakfast is eaten, the news is spread before the masses, even in the most distant portions of the civilized world.

The newspaper and the telegraph unite, as it were in to one village all the nations of the earth. Our nation is but a family in this community. We watch and guard each other, as do members of one family. The preacher talks, not so much to his congregation, as to the eager multitude who clutch the next morning's paper. Congress holds a midnight session, and their acts are discussed, at thousands of firesides, before the morning meal. If these movements are but potent enough, the whole world turns out to see and hear. Gladstone rises upon his feet in the English Parliament; not only do its members listen, but the whole world open their mouths and ears that they may hear what the honorable gentleman has to say. Joseph Cook preaches, not to the Boston people alone, but to
the English speaking world. MacMahan deposes his cabinet, and the whole world watches the next move of France.

In times past, the country could scarcely know the doings of the city, or the actions at the seat of government. Now, the knowledge of these is almost instantaneous. We live, as it were, an age in a day. Man now with his three score years and ten, lines, in reference to the actions of men, to a greater age, than did Methuselah with his nine hundred and sixty-nine years. What has brought about this rapid advancement, these gigantic strides, which are so inwoven with the modern idea; but the newspaper press. The newspaper, the telegraph, and the steam engine, have infused the idea of their rapid workings into all the departments of life. The slaughter can no more exist. The nation that falls behind, in the march, will be trampled under foot by its more powerful competitors.

But there have been numerous charges brought against newspapers. First, that it has lowered the standard of literature; second, that it is gossipy in character; third, that it gives a ready circulation to vice. The first of these accusations we deny. We say that it has built up literature, the author today receives compensation...
for his work. It was not so one hundred years ago. Then it was only a few that could drink their coffee and enjoy their repast in the saloons of the great, while the large majority of authors staved in their loathsome garrets. Now, instead of the few, who tower head and shoulders above their compatries, we have a long line of authors, all deserving the name of great. Their names are not known because of the numbers, but authorship today is liberally rewarded. This is a book making age, an age in which literature has reached a higher standard than ever before, and all this has come about chiefly through the workings of the newspaper press.

The second of these accusations, we will admit as somewhat true. But as Bascom expresses it “Village gossip is better than family gossip, town gossip is better than village gossip, state gossip than town gossip, and national gossip than either.” Gossip loses somewhat of its banefulness and sting at every remove from the object aimed at. Anything to get people away from the trite personalities; to get them out of doors, is good for the advancement of the people. Hence these are not just objections to the newspaper. They are rather arguments why the journal should continue to exist and
It has also been urged against the paper, that it gives a ready circulation to vice, making known things that should not be known. This is most true; but is it not best that it should be so? Vice does not seek publicity. It loves rather the dark and secluded places. To declare evil, but as this evil is made known, it then acts as a lesson upon the people. Those that would be tempted to vice see the evil and thus avoid it. They also are afraid that the newspapers will find them out, and publish their actions; and thus they be put to shame before the entire community. The newspapers then act as a preventative, rather than as an encouragement to vice.

From the census of 1860, we find that the ratio of periodicals in the United States, according to their avowed purpose, was as follows. Eighty per cent, were devoted to politics, seven per cent to religion, seven to literature, and six to miscellaneous objects. We thus see that nearly all the papers of this country have entered the political arena. This is not strange when we consider the free character of our institutions. We have already shown that the first object of the newspaper was to advocate "Liberty of thought and speech," and we have also seen that these are the two foundation principles of our government. Then
is it not but just that so many of our papers are devoted to politics. That field which embraces the most vital questions concerning the welfare of men; the field in which man has so long struggled, and the paper has helped him so to gain his political power. But our political papers are the general news sheets of the county. It is them that keep the country alive. The religious, literary, and miscellaneous papers have each an important mission, and well do they perform that work. It is however to the political press that we owe our very existence as a nation.

Then let the newspaper live! Let the ink flow freely from the editors pen: Let his articles be spicy, incisive, and to the point, Let them be instructive. Let this power of the press grow stronger. May the newspaper have a still higher destiny. It has missions to accomplish as yet unthought of. Never was there such a bright prospect for the future of the newspaper, as there is today. Twenty years hence and the editor will wield an influence over the minds of men, untold of today. There is to be something godlike in this power of the newspaper press. Then let only noble men enter the profession, tall men, high minded men; men who know their duty and knowing
dare maintain it: men who can look out upon humanity, see its wants and needs, can take them unto themselves and administer the remedy: men who can and will lead mankind to a higher good.