

## COUNTRY NEWSPAPERS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF A COUNTRY TOWN."



THE one thing about country newspapers that seems to be always true is that they are never satisfactory to the people who support them. Yet there is nothing so hard to kill as a country newspaper, however unpopular it may be. A paper that really does not amount to much ordinarily may amount to a good deal if an intruder comes into its field, and gentlemen looking for locations should be careful of starting new papers in towns for no other reason than that the people encourage them.

An ordinary business is rated a failure if it does not pay. There are plenty of country papers that have not made a dollar in twenty years, but the publishers hold on with foolish stubbornness, though they might succeed in some other calling; they seem to imagine that a little red man will wriggle up through their office floors some day, and make their "good will" as valuable as they believe it to be. I have heard many men say they were certain they could not succeed as doctor, lawyer, merchant, dentist, or what not, but I have never heard one say he could not succeed as an editor, particularly as a country editor. Really good newspaper men are scarce in the country, for a business man and a writer must be combined to insure success; but there is no lack of newspapers, and as half the people seem to be waiting to give the business a trial, I feel certain that the supply will always be considerably greater than the demand.

Although as a nation we are supposed to have unusual confidence in newspapers, I shall always believe that there is a strong undercurrent of opposition to them among our liberty-loving people. If all the papers in a town unite in favoring a measure, a large proportion of the people are sure to oppose it. The three papers of a certain small city once united in opposing a candidate for an important office, but the people elected the candidate by the largest majority ever heard of in that region. The candidate was elected to fill an unexpired term, and when he came up for the same office a year later, the papers all agreed not to mention his name, and the objectionable candidate was defeated. I have known so

many editors to fail in forcing the people into a particular way of thinking, that I am inclined to believe it is safest modestly to follow the best public sentiment. One of the best newspaper men I ever knew, and who had the reputation of being always original, once confessed to me that most of his matter was gleaned from others. He cultivated the bright men in the community, and his note-book was oftener used in taking down opinions and suggestions than in gleaning news items. I have heard of a bright fellow who went to Dakota with a printing outfit, but being unable to find a suitable town, he took up a claim. The crops failed, and he issued a small weekly paper from an imaginary town, giving it a name, and creating men and women, and institutions. His comments were very breezy, as I can well believe, since he was responsible to no one; somehow it is so much easier to say, "It serves him right," than it is to say, "It serves you right." He criticized imaginary plays at imaginary theaters; he criticized imaginary judges of imaginary courts; he ridiculed an imaginary society, and generally hit off popular delusions so well that his paper attracted attention, and a town was finally built on his farm. But this is a very rare case, even if it be true. The newspaper usually follows civilization, and the newspaper usually follows public opinion.

The longer a saying has been accepted and used, the greater the likelihood that it is true; therefore I have great confidence in the saying that "the voice of the people is the voice of God." It will be observed that I have used the English of this quotation, although I am perfectly familiar with the Latin of it, having seen it so much in country papers.

Country editors quarrel with one another too much; too many of them imagine that they are buzz-saws, and long for opportunity to prove it. The people are not interested in these quarrels, and as a rule do not like them. A tilt between editors may be occasionally interesting, but only when the parties to it are exceptionally clever. In a newspaper controversy an editor cannot defend himself; modesty will not permit it: he can only attack the other editor, so that while both are besmirched, neither is championed. There is one name that should be kept out of a newspaper, wherever published, and that is the name of the editor. A really good editor's name is seldom seen in print in the town where he lives, for



he cannot print it himself, and the other papers will not, except in a caricature. In a political controversy one paper attacks a candidate, and the other defends him, so that the character of the candidate is left in the end where it was in the first place, but when editors pummel one another they simply debase themselves in the eyes of the community. Lawyers are the most sensible class of men in the matter of quarreling; the reason probably is that their business throws them together a great deal, while other men nurse their professional hatreds in private.

There are many comfortably rich men in the country, but few of them are editors. There are many luxurious homes in the country, but few of them are occupied by editors. The fact is, there is little money in the business; for it is a curious fact that it costs more to produce the newspapers of America than the people pay for them. Running a newspaper is like rowing a boat up-stream. A man may pull his boat slowly against the current, if he works steadily, but he dare not rest, and he cannot anchor. Every time a newspaper goes to press the editor has the feeling that his sheet might have contained more news, and more advertisements, without a dollar of additional expense, and in this business more than in any other there is a constant clamor for more work, for harder pulling at the oars. The best weekly paper I know of is edited by an old man who is particularly clever as writer, publisher, and printer, and although he owns his own home and his own office building, he is compelled to work very hard every day. Younger men not half so industrious or capable have made a great deal more money. There may be an impression in cities that country editors might do very much better if they would, but the fact is that many a man has failed to make money at editing in the country who has succeeded in the city.

Although country editors are nearly always poor, there are plenty of persons who believe that half the paragraphs in a country newspaper are paid for with enormous bribes. There are always two sides to every question, and whichever side an editor falls on, the partisans of the other accuse him of being "bought." It is little wonder, therefore, that the editor is seldom a popular man; I never knew one who was, and I never knew one who was not often accused unjustly. Probably the people believe in bribes to editors because it is a very rare editor who does not accuse his opponent of being a bribe-taker, creating a prejudice against themselves and their calling. Lazy and incompetent editors nearly always explain the success of their more vigorous opponents by declaring that they carry on a system of blackmail. I once visited a large city

the newspapers of which I had long admired almost with reverence, and was surprised to hear a citizen say that what the city really needed was better papers; they would bring "eastern capital." Every citizen of a country town wants his locality "boomed," to the end that he may sell his fifty-dollar lot for five hundred; he can appreciate how a really good paper might aid him in this, and because his lot does not advance in value as he thinks it should, he has a grievance against the editor. He longs for an editor with some "snap" in him. I don't know what "snap" means, but I know this is the quality usually thought to be lacking. There are more great men in every country town than really exist in the entire nation, and if they are not recognized, the local papers are of no account. I was once bothered a good deal by a certain man who said he could clean more chickens in an hour than any other chicken-cleaner in the world, and he wanted the fact mentioned. Men who are never suspected of greatness by other people accuse themselves of it to the editors, and when they refuse to mention this greatness, they are told that their columns contain a great deal of stuff not half so interesting. It has occurred to me that when a citizen of a country town becomes drunk, the first thing he does is to hunt up the editor to tell him what is the matter with the community.

Probably the reason every citizen feels at liberty to find fault with the editor, and not with the banker or merchant, is that he regards his contribution to the paper as in some sense a gift. Most of the subscribers and advertisers of a country newspaper are coaxed into it. In some towns it is the rule for the principal merchants to take a half-double-column advertisement, for which they pay a hundred dollars a year, and very often these stand so long without change that in the middle of summer they announce the arrival of new winter goods. Advertising in country papers pays as well as advertising in the city papers, considering the difference in the charge, but country advertisers usually do not know how to use effectively the space they pay for. The merchant also feels that if he advertises in one, he must advertise in all the papers printed in his town, and this idea is so general that an energetic, pushing editor is often held back by his slower competitors. Many business men refrain from advertising in one valuable medium because they fear that the insertion of an advertisement will cause the solicitors of poorer papers to bother them. Many business men seem to be ashamed to have it known that they have been guilty of the weakness of advertising; and some do not believe in legitimate advertising, because they have noticed that most advertise-



ments are given as a sort of duty. They have an unnatural and foolish dread of seeing their names in the papers, regarding it as a system of puffing that modesty does not warrant. Farmers and town people alike are often reminded of their duty to the "local paper," and as a rule they do not do their duty without grumbling. The country newspaper is much like the country church in the matter of support, and the country editor much like the country parson in the particular that he never makes any money and is seldom satisfactory.

It is surprising to note how nearly alike all country newspapers are; likewise how nearly alike all country towns are. Take the average county-seat town in almost any State, and the population is nearly always the same. In the eastern portion of Kansas and Nebraska, for example, the average population in the county-seat towns is from fifteen to eighteen hundred. They usually have the same number of stores, the same number of banks, the same number of newspapers (almost invariably two), the same number of mills and elevators, the same number of railroads (almost invariably two), the same number of grain and stock buyers, the same number of doctors, hotels, dentists, etc. And it is also worth noting that the population of the counties in the eastern portions of Kansas and Nebraska is nearly always the same. This is true in most States, the exceptions being in counties where large cities make a difference.

In the average State dozens of papers published at different county-seat towns can be found that look almost exactly alike; every editor who looks over exchanges must have remarked this. Usually they are of four eight-column pages, with "patent outside." The same kinds of dashes separate the editorial paragraphs on the second page; the local news is arranged in about the same way on the third page; and the editorial and local paragraphs often concern the same topics. The weather is excessively hot in one county, and the editor remarks it; the weather is excessively hot in another county, and the editor remarks it. There is good sleighing in a certain district, and you will find mention of it in all the papers, very often in connection with the liverymen taking the editors out for a "spin." There is the same similarity in the editorial columns, for most editors, as well as most men, pay too much attention to politics, and in most political discussions the difference is that one man says yes, while the other says no.

You will find about the same class of advertisements in all the papers printed in towns of the same size. The bankers always advertise, and then in the list of probabilities come the storekeepers, the implement-dealers, the law-

yers, the doctors, the liverymen, the organ-dealer, and the blacksmiths, in about the order named; and another peculiar thing is that the advertisements are worded about the same. The papers all exchange, and every new idea in advertising goes the rounds.

Before "patents" were invented there was an individuality about most country papers that does not exist now. I am almost tempted to say that the country weeklies of twenty years ago averaged better than they do now; certainly in appearance, if not in ability. The influence of the country papers is more extensive at this writing than ever before, for they are constantly increasing in numbers, but certainly many strong, influential country papers of twenty years ago have lately lost prestige; it has been divided with new papers in their field, and with the big city publications, which are constantly increasing their circulation in the country.

The circulation of each country paper is about the same—usually less than a "bundle," or nine hundred and sixty, rarely fifteen hundred. The average circulation of six thousand of the country newspapers of America is not six hundred copies. Many of the patent medicine concerns in the east make their advertising contracts through experts, who travel from town to town. If these men understand their business, and they usually do, they know the circulation of the papers in a town before they reach the hotel; they get the information by looking at the town. When the agents call at the newspaper offices, the editors usually make a claim for their circulation that the agents know is ridiculous, but it always ends in the same way; the editors agree to the price offered by the agents, or no contracts are signed. The men who travel in advance of circuses have the same knowledge of the circulation of newspapers, but they are unable to use it, for they always pay at least treble prices for their advertising. Many editors demand a hundred dollars for a circus advertisement, whether the agent desires an inch or two columns, and the editors get their price, or no picture of an elephant goes in. But no editor exaggerates his circulation so much as the circus man exaggerates the attractions in his show, and the circus man knows it, so the difficulty is usually arranged. The circus advertising agent announces regularly every season that he is instructed to reduce the advertising expense at least one half; but he never does it.

There are four classes of men who usually own country papers: 1. Farmers' sons who think they are a little too good for farming, and not quite good enough to do nothing. 2. School-teachers. 3. Lawyers who have made a failure of the law. 4. Professional printers who have "worked their way." In nearly every case the



best country papers are conducted by the latter class, although they seldom have "backing," like the other three classes. You are always hearing men longing for "backing," though I believe it is usually a bad thing to have. Very few of the successful men ever had it; men worthy of "backing" usually do not need it; a man who has "backing" does not depend upon himself, and, after all, a man must make his own way. There are few city printers occupying the best places in the country. There are many country printers occupying the best places in the cities. The country seems to be the training-school of the profession. In most of the great newspaper offices there is a growing tendency to employ men who have had a training in the country, because they have a higher sense of duty and better habits than the city contingency. The demand in every newspaper office is for "all 'round men"; by this is meant men who know something of the business office, the press-room, and the composing-room: if they have no occasion to use this knowledge in any other way, they may use it in being fair with the other departments.

Very many of our noted publishers, writers, and editors are printers; I know of no class that has so much to say, and I believe that most of the printers who have amounted to a good deal began in the country towns, where a printer may become a publisher after he has saved a few hundred dollars. The town in which he buys an insignificant paper may become a city, and he may grow with it. In the larger cities there are few opportunities for printers to engage in business for themselves, whereas more than half of those in the country finally try it. Of noted men more have been printers than lawyers, or practitioners of any other profession or trade. Most of the unsuccessful newspapers are owned by inexperienced men; few practical men hold on to a failing paper long, for they do not believe much in "good will." If there are many poor papers in the country, it is because of the disposition of inexperienced men to rush into the business. Take a hundred of the poorest papers in any given region, and it will be found that ninety-five of them are owned by men of no practical knowledge, who believe that anybody can run a paper.

So many country papers are published by inexperienced men that there are numerous advertising agencies devoted to fleecing them. The usual method adopted is to offer them a trade. An article is priced at more than its actual value, and then the agent offers to take out one half or one third of its stated value in advertising, the publisher to pay the remainder in cash. I once knew a young lawyer who bought a paper, and soon after he received a propo-

sition from an advertising agent, offering in large, bold, honest-looking type to give him a \$300 fire-and-burglar-proof safe for half a column for one year. The advertisement was inserted, and the lawyer has confessed to me that in the darkness of his room at night he could see that safe, with his name over the door in plain but neat gilt letters. He could see visions of the door carelessly swung open, displaying to customers not only his full name at the top of the safe, but also the drawers inside, one of which bore his initials and the word "Private." Finally he thought of sending for the safe, the contract having about expired, so he looked up the original papers to get the necessary address. Then he noticed a lot of printing in small type, which he had never noticed before, which read as follows: "Providing the order is accompanied by \$200 in cash." This cash balance usually represents the wholesale value of the article, and while a good many publishers do this class of advertising, very few of them complete the trade by paying the cash difference.

This same lawyer-editor in his salutatory said something about mounting the editorial tripod. Now I have been connected with printing offices since I was ten years old, a period of twenty-six years, but I have never seen a tripod, although so many editors claim to mount them; nor have I ever heard of a man who has seen one. There may have been a three-legged stool in the temple of Apollo, and an oracle may have occupied it, but there are no three-legged stools in the offices of editors; even the stools used by the printer always have four legs, and consequently are not tripods.

Many country papers are largely controlled by the printers employed by the inexperienced editors. The only monument ever erected at public expense in Bethany, Missouri, was unveiled last year in memory of Edwin R. Martin, an old-fashioned printer who never owned a newspaper; but he had worked in the same town for thirty years. At no time did his pay exceed \$12 a week; sometimes it was only \$6 a week. During that time the paper he served had many owners, most of whom knew nothing of newspapers, but this old veteran was a fixture in the place, and had "boarded" with the family where he died for certainly twenty years. Every week he wrote for its columns, and he never wrote anything unkind. He was fond of the cherished idols of the people, and complimented them in a quiet way. For years his paragraphs were credited to the farmer who had last traded for the paper, but in time his kindly hand was recognized, and when he died the people expressed their appreciation of his honest service to the community. Of verses alone he wrote so many that they were



collected not long ago, and printed in book-form by another old-fashioned country printer of almost equal cleverness. I "learned my trade" with Mr. Martin, and though I left him when a very young man, and went to work elsewhere, I can trace in his poems the history of the town as I remember it. A pretty girl ran away with a dissolute fellow and married him; in a few years she was dead from worry and trouble. The story was gently disguised, and printed in the home paper in verse by the old printer. In every verse there was a moral, as there was in every other line he ever wrote. All the local events that touched the hearts of the people were celebrated by him, but he never wrote of the political or other broils that were nearly always going on in the columns of the paper. He was an old man when he died, but in his time he was the social leader of the town, and excellent social customs still exist there for which he was responsible. No social affair was satisfactory without his presence. He was the leader in dramatic and musical entertainments, and was always as gentle and pure as a good woman. Behind a curtain in the room in which the printing office was located he had his bed, and those apprentices who found his favor were permitted to spend occasional evenings with him, when they learned all sorts of astonishing secrets. One of them was that some of the stories and poems in the "New York Mercury" and "Godey's Lady's Book" were from his pen, and the extra money he thus earned was spent in helping his less fortunate friends. Judging him by his opportunities, he was the best printer I ever knew; I have learned little of his art since I left him that he did not know twenty years ago. He would have been helpless in one of the great offices, but a printer from the city would have been equally helpless in his modest position. The two press-days of the week—one for each side of the paper—were great events. The temperature of the room had to be exactly right, and cold draughts were avoided as in a sick-room. The inking roller had to be washed and softened by a certain formula, and making the tympan ready was a work of the greatest care and delicacy. Although he had old type, and a hand-press so old-fashioned that I never saw another like it, he printed a marvelously neat paper; the perfecting presses of to-day do not understand the art of printing better than he understood it, though they print 20,000 complete papers in an hour where he printed 400 sheets on one side in the same length of time.

Printers have greatly improved as a class. Peter Bartlett Lee, who was famous as a "tramp printer," is dead, and he has no suc-

cessor. It was said of Lee that he could name every county seat in the United States, and the papers published therein. It is probable that he had worked in every State in the Union, but during the latter years of his life he was not popular with his craft; his sort of printers had gone out of fashion, and came to be more and more unpopular. The printers gave their "subbing" to more industrious men, and Lee was supported by the reporters and editors, who wrote him up every time he appeared. The modern printer has an ambition above being a tramp; thousands of clever paragraphs are composed and set up every day by printers; for copy is always short in country offices, and editors are glad to accept these contributions. Printers are always handing the editor contributions, and many printers contribute regularly to the city papers, for which they receive good pay. In my experience as an editor I am often told interesting things by the printers, and I usually ask them to "set it up," which they do with good taste.

There is a musical strain in country printers; most of them belong to the town brass band or sing in a choir. Many printers play guitars, some of them flutes, and belong to serenading clubs, but for some reason they do not take to fiddles. Shoemakers seem to be fiddle-players naturally, and a fiddle can always be found for the serenading parties at some of the shoe shops; but a clarionet-player is rare, and if I were starting in the printer's trade again, I should learn to play a clarionet.

Boys seem to drift into printing offices naturally. I have seen hundreds of them learning the trade, but it seems to me that in all the towns in which I have lived I never knew any boys who were learning to be tailors, or blacksmiths, or painters. There are always boys around a printing office, and there is usually fairness in their promotion. In most of the offices where I have worked there has been a particularly good boy of whom all sorts of good things were predicted, but I never knew one to fulfil expectations. The best boy I ever knew is still setting type, aged forty-two.

It is possible for local papers to succeed if there is a possibility of success; the most energetic man in the world could not make money in the arctic regions putting up ice to sell to explorers. There are papers almost entirely local in their character which have a greater circulation in proportion to the population of the towns in which they are published than the best New York dailies. I personally know of a small daily that has a local circulation of 2500 in a town of 15,000 inhabitants. The commonly accepted estimate is that five persons see every paper that is printed. This country paper, therefore, is read by 87½ per cent.



of the townspeople; excluding the children who cannot read, but who are enumerated in the census, the paper would appear to be read by every person in the town able to read. I believe most editors understand that next to energy and intelligence, their success must depend upon honesty and fairness; therefore this influence must be for good. Of course there are many careless editors, but the disposition of the people to criticize them severely will generally reform them.

The best country papers are usually owned by one man; I do not believe partnerships are desirable in small ventures of any kind. In the best country papers you will find few railroad advertisements, which mean free passes, for it takes time to use passes, and certain expenses are inevitable in traveling that may be avoided at home. Whenever you find a successful country newspaper, you will usually find the editor at home, and busy. Working is becoming eminently respectable; it is those who do not work who are objects of suspicion; a genius is simply an industrious man who tries so many ways that he finally finds a good one. Wherever you find a failing paper you will find an editor who does not attend to his business. There was a time when many papers were supported almost entirely by legal advertisements, but there are few such papers now; their proprietors have either gone to work or into politics.

In estimating the number of newspapers in the United States, which is something like eighteen thousand, the "Big City Thunderer," published in a village of four or five hundred people, counts for as much as the best New York daily. The "Thunderer" is responsible for most of the bad habits credited to country newspapers and to the craft in general. There are sharp writers on most of the better class of country papers, and writers of good sense and judgment. It is the editor of the "Thunderer" who says his latch-string is always out. He is the person who extends his hand to people and calls for turnips, and potatoes, and corn in the shock on subscription. I have spent fifteen years of my life in the offices of small weekly papers, but I believe I could carry on my back all the produce and wood I have seen taken in on subscription; there is really very little traffic of this kind. The editor of the "Thunderer" is also the person who returns thanks for a bouquet of flowers sent "our wife." He belongs to a mutual admiration society. When the other members refer to him as "a genial, warm-hearted gentleman, and about the best editor on earth," he reprints the notices, to the disgust of his readers, and to the disgrace of his profession. The poorest editor of the "Thunderer" class can get a living, for he has accounts to

"trade out" at the stores, and he can usually trade "orders" to his help, but the "patent outside" sheets on which he prints his paper must be paid for in actual money every week, for when the editor is poor they are sent C. O. D. These "patents" are usually sheets ready printed on two outside or inside pages; sometimes in cases of eight-page papers six pages are "patent." Most of them are printed on a sheet 26x40, which is an eight-column folio, or a five-column quarto. Ready-printed sheets are furnished from twenty-eight cities and towns in different parts of the country. The same forms were at one time used for hundreds of papers, the heads, names of publishers, mottos, etc., being changed for each customer, but of late it does not often occur that any two papers use ready-printed sheets that are exactly alike. The larger ready-print companies print one hundred editions weekly, so that publishers have a large list to select from. These sheets are furnished at about the actual cost of white paper and printing, the ready-print companies making their profit from the one hundred inches of advertising space reserved. Sheets without advertising may be obtained at an additional expense of about two dollars a week, but they are rarely used. It is said that "patent outsides" were in vogue in England in 1850, and in a solitary instance in the United States in 1851, but the father of the business was A. N. Kellogg, whose name is still at the head of one of the two principal ready-print concerns. In 1861 Mr. Kellogg was printing a weekly paper at Baraboo, Wisconsin, and his patriotic printers having enlisted in the army he was unable to print his usual paper, therefore he ordered of the "Daily Journal," at Madison, half-sheet supplements containing war news to fold with his own half-sheets. He soon saw that the two pages of his paper coming from Madison would look better printed on one side of a full sheet, and thus the ready-print idea was established. The Madison "Journal" received orders for similar sheets until it printed for thirty different offices; then the business went to Milwaukee and Chicago, and finally all over the country. Eight years after Mr. Kellogg's venture there were five hundred ready-printed papers in the country; to-day the company bearing his name prints nearly two thousand, and there are six thousand altogether. The Kellogg Company alone has eight different houses and sends ready-printed sheets into twenty-nine different States and Territories, the east and south being represented quite as well as the west and north.

It would be difficult to decide just when a country weekly becomes a country daily, though I believe it is a rule that when a town obtains a population of three thousand one of the weekly newspaper publishers attempts a



daily, and fails. Most towns in the west of ten thousand population have daily newspapers; in the east the case is different, for the proximity of large cities and fast trains is fatal to provincial dailies. Even in the west the big St. Louis dailies are delivered three hundred miles away by ten o'clock on the morning of publication. This ruins the business for hundreds of miles around St. Louis, and no creditable dailies are found until Kansas City is reached. The Chicago dailies are delivered on the Mississippi River by breakfast time, and except in the case of Milwaukee, there are no really creditable dailies within two hundred miles of Chicago. There are good newspapers in Omaha, Kansas City, St. Paul, and Minneapolis, but with an occasional exception, they ruin the field around them. The exceptions I think of are at State capitals, which usually afford at least one good paper. As a rule the great papers of a big city are issued in the morning; but evening papers do best in the smaller towns. A large majority of the country dailies appear at four o'clock in the afternoon, when there is no competition from the city.

In the smaller country dailies there is a tremendous amount of "padding," although the same thing may be found in the best metropolitan papers, and in magazines and books. Indeed, good "padding" is better than indifferent news, but when a man learns to "pad" well he is almost a genius, and it is difficult to keep him in the country. I have seen many small provincial dailies that did not contain on certain days a single paragraph of real local news, although there were several columns of alleged local news. It was all "padded," and read very well. A good local editor is a man who can make a good page when there is no local news, and there are many such. Every country newspaper office may be referred to as a manufacturing establishment, for much of the matter printed is manufactured, and much of it is good and useful. As a general proposition, it may be stated that a man cannot make a country daily a success unless he understands the art of "padding"; he must have padding, and if he cannot employ men who can furnish it, he must be able to furnish it himself. The modern system of plates makes it possible to run a very good evening paper with two printers, a foreman to set the advertisements, and a boy, but there should be two or three reporters, and all of them should be able to "pad" well. The reporters are also expected to look out for advertising, and if the publisher also does job printing they often solicit that. The most useless man on such a paper is the man who writes the editorials; in the country the demand is for good local news. I know one reporter who also collects and solicits; when

there is a rush, he sets type in the afternoon; when the pressman is sick, he goes down into the basement, and runs the press and engine. This young man is responsible for the following actual example of "padding" in the personal column:

*December 8.*—Miss Mary Smith, of Bevier, is visiting Miss Sarah Jones, at 108 North Adams street.

*December 9.*—Miss Sarah Jones will entertain at 108 North Adams street, this evening, in honor of her guest, Miss Mary Smith, of Bevier.

*December 10.*—A gay party of young folks went to the lake to-day, skating, to entertain Miss Mary Smith, of Bevier, who is the guest of Miss Sarah Jones, at 108 North Adams street.

*December 11.*—Miss Mary Smith, who has been the guest of Miss Sarah Jones, at 108 North Adams street, returned to her home in Bevier to-day.

In most small cities there is a "committee of safety" composed of a number of men who are always suggesting what the other citizens should do to help the town. The papers print these suggestions, and very often hundreds of columns are printed concerning an enterprise that is finally forgotten. In a town where I once worked the editors wrote every dull day about the necessity of mending the "Doniphan Road," the bad condition of which seriously interfered with the trade from a very important region, but I am lately informed that the "Doniphan Road" is still in wretched condition, although the papers have been inquiring who is responsible for at least twenty years.

All this is "padding," and it is so well received that the reporters look for it. In my own experience I have often gone out on the streets, not to find news, but to find suggestions for "padding." The never-failing source of it is the man with complaints.

A majority of the evening dailies printed in the country do not have much, if any, telegraph news sent to them direct; they have as a substitute a "plate telegraph," which service is supplied from most of the large cities. Of the six columns of "plate telegraph" usually printed in an evening paper to-day, three columns may have been set up from the city papers of the night before; the other three columns being set up at 5 or 6 A. M., from the morning papers. Stereotype plates of these six columns are then made, and sent out on the express trains, reaching their destinations in ample time for the provincial evening papers, which, as a rule, could not have had the information by any other means except the use of the telegraph, direct. The plates are made to fit metal bases kept in the office of each customer; the plate and base are exactly type-high, and as the plates come in column lengths, they may be cut in any way desired.



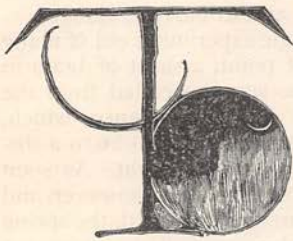
This service costs \$13.50 per week; \$12 for the plates, and \$1.50 for a week's expressage. Many head printers "make up" these plates as neatly as could be done with type, and while no pressman can disguise the fact that his is a "plate" paper, the reader does not seem to remark the difference. Five years ago there were many sneering remarks about this sort of matter, and it was claimed that the line between city and country papers could be drawn at "plates," but some very creditable morning papers now use them. The use of plates is an old newspaper principle. A paper that costs thousands of dollars to produce is sold for a penny, and the paper sold at this low price, in spite of the enormous original cost, is read by at least four persons who pay nothing at all for it. The reader in California does not find his paper less interesting because a copy of the same printing is being enjoyed also in New York.

It costs several hundred dollars to produce six columns of the best plates; yet a country publisher may buy stereotype duplicates of the six columns for two dollars. And the matter is not less interesting to his readers because many other publishers in many other States are using the same articles. The surprise is that, although stereotyping is an old process, stereotype plates have only been generally used eight or ten years. I sometimes doubt that ready-printed sheets have been of any great service to country newspapers, but the invention of plates was a long stride forward. By their use country newspapers may secure at small expense the services of the very best writers; by their use every country publisher may secure a great staff of special writers and artists. Every field except the local field is covered by the plates, and it is almost certain that the service will steadily improve.

*E. W. Howe.*

## THE POSSIBILITY OF MECHANICAL FLIGHT.

BY THE SECRETARY OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.



THE publication by the press of a memoir I lately read to the National Academy of Sciences on the power required for mechanical flight has caused so much misapprehension, but also so much interest and inquiry, that I willingly accept the invitation of THE CENTURY to give here at least such an explanation as consists with the imperfection of a brief account in untechnical terms.<sup>1</sup>

In the first place, let me explain that I have in no way said that man can fly by his own strength, nor have I ever described the details of any particular "flying-machine." What has been done is to demonstrate by actual experiment that we have now acquired the mechanical power to sustain in the air (and at great speeds) bodies thousands of times heavier than the air itself, and that as soon as we have the skill to direct this power we shall be able actually to fly.

As the distinction between the possession of sufficient mechanical power and the skill to use

it may not be clear, let us observe that an ordinary balloon is essentially lighter than the air and will float in it, moving only with it, at the mercy of the wind, like a log in moving water; while the flying-machine of the future that we now speak of is to be heavier than the air, and, being designed to glide on it somewhat like a skater on thin ice, will sink if it has not power to keep moving rapidly enough to make the air support it.

It seems at first incredible that any practically obtainable power can make the viewless air at the same time support a dense body like brass or steel, and cause it to run rapidly and securely along upon the thin element. Nevertheless I have seen it done; and for this best of reasons it has seemed to me that it can be done again, and that such a matter as mechanical flight ought not to be left to the opprobrium which past mistaken efforts and consequent failure have brought on it, but that it should be reinvestigated by scientific methods.

The distinctive mark of such methods is the primary importance attached in them to obtaining definite ideas about quantity, in order to state everything in number, weight, and measure, so that we may be able to prove, for instance, just how much power is demanded for such aerial transport, and if this be beyond the ability of a man's muscles to furnish, to prove definitely whether we can or cannot build an

<sup>1</sup> For fuller and exacter statement the reader is referred to a recent publication by the Smithsonian Institution, "Experiments in Aërodynamics."