

THE PRESS AND PUBLIC MEN.



HE relations between the press and that ever-changing and evanescent political population known as public men are peculiar. With the press there is unusual permanence of tenure. For the great body of public men there is swift rotation, with a hurried march towards political oblivion.

As every district in the nation is directly represented in Washington both in congressional and executive place, and as every journal of consequence has its correspondent at the national capital, the position affords excellent opportunities for observing the relations which exist between the press of the country and public men. On a smaller scale similar conditions will be found to obtain at the capitals of the States, and so, speaking in the broad sense, the situation at Washington is a representative one.

During the past thirty years there have been four periods within which the relations under consideration have been very different and distinctly marked. These are: first, the war period; secondly, the post-bellum period up to the times of the *Crédit Mobilier* and kindred scandals; next, the long period reaching on through continued friction between Congress and the press representatives, embracing the days of the premature publication of the Treaty of Washington down to recent years; and lastly, the present, which may be designated the era of restoration of friendly relations.

The period before the war may properly be denominated the days of ancient history in American journalism. The telegraph had not introduced its quickening influences, and the mails were slow. Letter-writing from the capital was polished, and editorials in the administration journals at Washington—for there were such journals in those days—were works of political art. Instead of the dash of this later day, and the flavor of the very hour of going to press, they partook more of the deliberation and genius of the sculptor, and when unveiled—a fitting term to use in designating their publication—never failed to partake of the chilling influence of marble. Those were the days when our early orators had time to rewrite and adorn their extempore efforts, quicken the flow of rhetoric when its first movement was sluggish, strengthen faulty logic, and finally send out by the waiting mails the deliberate work of a master. These are now held up as models

of a standard not reached in modern days. But who shall say how many of those old masters would have stood the modern test of the stenographer and the telegraph, whereby the remarks of a speaker are often half in type in the leading cities of the land before he has yielded the floor? This is a test which should not be ignored in comparing the great men of the present day with those of an earlier and more deliberate time. When words, as actually uttered, fly at once to the extremes of the land beyond recall or revision, oratory is dampened to a degree which all must appreciate.

THE press of the country first sent its representatives to Washington in numbers upon the outbreak of the war. Since then there has been a journalistic congress constantly in session considering the doings of the Government. As the main duties of the one have been to originate and carry forward public business of every nature from the exercise of the war power to the smallest details of the public service, and those of the other to inform the people of everything on the surface, and beneath the surface, of public affairs, and freely to criticize the whole, the general situation between these two congresses has of necessity been one of antagonisms. During the first period to which reference has been made, however, these differences were largely held in abeyance by the fact that the press and public men joined hands loyally in the cause of the Union, and the dominant and overshadowing influence of the press in awakening and solidifying patriotism at home, and encouraging the armies in the field, was recognized and cordially appreciated by every public man.

Throughout the war the press of the country held its position at the national capital in high esteem. It sent its ablest men there. Up to the close of the war its correspondents numbered about fifty, but these, by the system of combinations which then prevailed among leading journals, represented all the principal dailies of the North. A few names will show the character of the men. There were Henry Villard, Horace White, Samuel Wilkeson, Joseph Medill, George W. Adams, Whitelaw Reid, James E. Harvey, D. W. Bartlett, Joseph B. McCullagh, Benjamin Perley Poore, and a dozen others of high standing.

The influence of this press congress was pronounced and general, both in the national

capital and in the country at large. Even with less able men this could not have been otherwise, since Washington was in every sense the headquarters of the army and the navy, whence orders proceeded to the various armies and fleets, and to which came all news of battle, and of the attitude of foreign nations—in short, reports of everything which affected the progress of the war. So loyally did all branches of the Government work together for the general good, that it may be said that each of them was upon the staff of the President acting in his constitutional capacity of Commander-in-Chief of the army and navy.

A body of men already trained in journalism, enthusiastic in their work, and intensely loyal in their performance of it, standing thus between the public and all sources of news, for which the country constantly waited with breathless attention, could not but possess an influence which was everywhere felt, and the value of which was everywhere recognized. With their advent came the general use of the telegraph to give still greater impetus to the work of journalism, and thus this body of men was placed in hourly communication with the entire population of the land. It was a time when the condition approached as nearly to universal concord as can ever be possible between the press and public men. So long as active war was waged along the Union front, those who were upholding the hands of the nation, both in the Government and in the press which encouraged the people to its support, stood bound together in common and unceasing effort for the salvation of the country.

The Washington press contingent was also a flying force for field service, and upon the occasions of great battles in the region about Washington some of its members were always upon the field in the service of their journals. The work of many of them as war correspondents stands out as the best and most brilliant of their careers. Among the latter there was one who enjoyed the confidence of Secretary Stanton, that unbending man of iron purpose, to a degree greater than that attained by most of those in the highest civil and military positions. This was the war correspondent of the Philadelphia "Inquirer," Mr. U. H. Painter. He had under his direction in all the Eastern armies probably a larger force of correspondents than was employed by any other journal. He early secured the confidence of Mr. Stanton. He was constantly along the front in all times of active movement, and by use of the skilful methods of obtaining news and reaching correct conclusions known to those well versed in the work of reliable correspondence, he often became informed of the intentions and movements of the enemy before these were unfolded

at headquarters in the field and transmitted to Washington. By several remarkable successes of this kind he established himself in the confidence of Mr. Stanton, and thereafter the use of military telegraph lines and of the Secretary's cipher were open to him. There was probably no other man in the field, and no other man in Washington in any department of public life, in whose statements the Secretary placed more implicit reliance and by whose information he was more frequently guided. On one occasion, after Mr. Painter had partly secured this standing at the War Department, his relations were put to a test which for the moment seemed to end them. He sent a despatch from the Virginia front, immediately after the battle of Chantilly, that Lee's army would shortly invade Maryland. Secretary Seward insisted that Mr. Stanton should arrest the author of the despatch, as it was evidently intended for effect abroad, and was therefore treasonable. Mr. Stanton sent for Mr. Painter, explained the situation, and said he must stay in Washington. The Secretary of War could not believe the report, since none of the officers of the army had even surmised that such a movement of Lee's army as Mr. Painter had announced, and still insisted upon, was in progress. The latter thereupon started an assistant to Edward's Ferry on the upper Potomac with instructions to watch for the head of the rebel column at that ford, and, when it crossed, to telegraph him in care of the Secretary of War. The next day a despatch came that the rebels were crossing the Potomac, and thus the War Department received the first positive news of the invasion of Maryland previous to the battle of Antietam.

Thereafter there was much official correspondence which took rank after Painter's with the Secretary of War. Several others of the journalists named, though in less degree, were constantly relied upon by the authorities for early news from the armies, and these facts well illustrate the importance of their work and its consequent influence.

Mr. Lincoln himself, and the leading men of his Administration, and those powerful leaders in Congress whose exertions and whose accomplished labors should take rank in their general results with the best services of the great commanders in the field, each maintained close and friendly relations with these representatives of the press, and looked upon the facilities of the latter for reaching the whole loyal public of the land as scarcely second to any other appliance under the control of the Government for securing support in the war.

Throughout the first years of Mr. Lincoln's term the leading press influences at Washington, without regard to party, gave strong and

active support to all war measures of the Administration. The attempt to nominate Mr. Chase in place of Mr. Lincoln, the military and political controversy over General McClellan, and his final appearance in the political field as a presidential candidate, somewhat disturbed this journalistic unanimity. The defection of President Johnson from the Republican party caused still further divisions, and while the millions from the field were quietly reëntering the walks of private life, and presenting such a spectacle in this regard as the world had never seen before, the situation at Washington, both among journalists and public men, became one of many divisions and most excited controversies. The general relations of friendship between the two classes continued, however, without marked interruption to the days of the explosions over *Crédit Mobilier* and kindred scandals. Up to that time Newspaper Row was daily and nightly visited by the ablest and most prominent men in public affairs. Vice-presidents, the heads of departments, heads of bureaus, the presiding officers of the two houses of Congress, and the strongest and most noted men of the Senate and of the House in this grandest period of the Republic's life, were frequent and welcome visitors in the Washington offices of the leading journals of the land. Suddenly, with the *Crédit Mobilier* outbreak, and others of its kind which followed it, these pleasant relations began to dissolve under the sharp and deserved criticisms of the correspondents.

To this situation succeeded long years of estrangement. Newspaper Row was gradually deserted by the class named. Intercourse between the press and the legislative branches of the Government became more formal, and each assumed relations bordering upon a warlike attitude towards the other. The executive branches of the Government shared this feeling, though in less degree, except where the scandals exposed by the press reached into some of these departments of the public service.

This condition of affairs at Washington caused corresponding changes to be gradually effected in the home offices of the leading journals, until these, upon their editorial pages, became almost as critical as their representatives in Washington felt obliged to be, and could not but be, with any regard to their duty to furnish the public with truthful news.

The climax was reached in the contest which the whole press, through its representatives at the capital, waged upon the Senate at the time of the premature publication of the Treaty of Washington. Upon this occasion the press and the Senate first joined issue in a battle over the inviolability of the executive session. It must be confessed that the Senate had as good

a case as could possibly arise in such a controversy, and the press was at a corresponding disadvantage, except that the Department of State desired to have the text of the treaty made public in order that the opinion of the country upon it might be obtained. As the representative of the President in the negotiation of the treaty, this claim of the Department to a control over its text had great weight. It was, in fact, this position which made possible the procurement of the treaty for advance publication. But, as will be remembered, the press joined hands without regard to party, both in Washington and throughout the country, and drove the Senate, by mere force of bitter fighting, to abandon its case through a formal vote by yeas and nays in the presence of the nation. The victory was as if the presiding officer of the Senate had passed the venerated emblems of Senatorial prerogative into the press gallery over his head.

The bitterness engendered so many years ago was long in passing. In fact its effects remain to the present day, chiefly, however, as scars, and not any longer as irritating wounds.

There have been two rebellions on the part of the Senate against this victory for the freedom of the press in dealing with executive business, one led by Mr. Salisbury of Delaware, which ended in defeat, and a more recent one, which brought its originator and his handful of supporters something much worse than disaster; namely, failure and unmeasured ridicule. But, of recent years, the old order of things is being rapidly restored. The press congress has tripled the number of its representatives. The newspaper press of the country, without regard to party, has become, in the main, thoroughly independent in its criticisms of all public affairs and public men. In case of unjust attacks, and inaccurate news concerning matters of any moment, there are so many channels of correction open to every one that increased care is observed in the collection and dissemination of news by all journals claiming respectability.

This restoration of relations between Congress and the press began a few years since with the undertaking of regular entertainments given frequently by a club of the leading correspondents, at which, in turn, the most influential men in public life were the guests. These entertainments have now become a prominent feature of the season in the national capital. The invitations of this club to the highest in power and influence are seldom declined. This has brought about social relations which are of mutual benefit to each of these influential parties in public affairs. To be plain about the situation, public men, or rather those who control among them, are coming to their senses again.

It has been for many years a singular fact that comparatively so few of the able men of the land, in spite of their moving in daily contact with the work of the press, acquire an adequate knowledge of its machinery, and, above all, of the proper methods by which it can be used to promote their interests, by giving them the prominence before the public which they really deserve, both in their general work and in those countless minor matters which concern their immediate constituency. It seems almost incredible that this can be so, in view of the fact that there is never a day in the year when a public man cannot through Washington despatches secure the attention of the entire reading public of the land for anything which he may do which is worthy of national notice. Yet, with a machine at their command which gathers the intelligence of the Republic into one vast daily audience, not one in fifty of that unending column of public men which marches continuously through Washington—and, for the most part, on and on to political forgetfulness—ever apprehends the advantages freely extended by the press. In this respect public men are probably more ignorant than upon any other subject which so intimately concerns their political welfare. An excellent illustration of this want of ordinary knowledge will be found in the following incident. During General Grant's administration there was a senator of several years' service who had been the governor of his State, a successful general in the field, and a member of the House of Representatives. He was acquainted with many correspondents, but had never taken the trouble to familiarize himself with press methods, or the relation of specials to the Associated Press reports. The question of his reelection was coming on, and it seemed to him that a general public notice would do him good. So he went to his old commander, the President, and obtained a very valuable interview upon a live subject of international affairs. He spent the next day in making the circuit of Newspaper Row, giving each correspondent notice, in the strictest confidence, of course, of the choice news he would bring the next day. He ended his tramp by promising the same matter to the Associated Press and its rival association. True to his promise, he made his second rounds, and dictated his interview in the same language to each. That evening the Associated Press and the specials sent the interesting matter to all parts of the country. As a result, every correspondent duplicated the matter of the Associated Press. As telegraph tolls were then three cents a word, and each newspaper had an extra bill for about twenty-five dollars for this special, the private despatches of the next morning from the home offices to the corre-

spondents in Washington were very emphatic, but not of a complimentary character. While this is an extreme case, it well illustrates a kind of ignorance which, though not epidemic, is still prevalent.

There is a widespread idea among those in the public service that cultivating the press, as they are pleased to term it, is something very far beneath their notice. On the other hand they seem to think it the special business of the press to cultivate them, and when they find themselves left to the pale vegetation which belongs to the shadows into which they withdraw, they deem themselves ill used, and declare favoritism to be one of the most glaring faults of the press. These gentlemen of narrow vision never appreciate the fact that the field of journalistic work is far too wide to admit of many visits to individuals, and when the mountain does not come to them they never avail themselves of the plainest alternative.

In going to the mountain lies what has been referred to as the proper use of the press. If a man in the public service does anything which interests his constituents, it is to his advantage and to theirs that they should know it. The press stands ready to make it known, and finds itself repaid in having the news. If the act performed is of national interest, the Associated Press will carry it to every corner of the land. If it is local or needs comment, the specials will use it. If it is partizan, the specials of the party press will take it. In all this there is mutual advantage. One side desires the publication, the other wishes the news. But if the public prophet, in his suicidal pride, waits till his news is found by gleaners, and habitually refuses to go to the mountain, he becomes the only sufferer, since the world will manage in some way to wag on without any information about him, and meantime he will remain in comparative obscurity.

Of that small body of public men who make up the most successful class, it may, however, be said that, with few exceptions, they have made the closest study of the machinery of the press and the facilities which it offers. It is also true that this appreciation of the press, and this knowledge of its methods and advantages for communication with the entire nation, are rapidly growing among the public men of the day. This is perhaps best illustrated in the universal use of the interview by those in most prominent positions. As a general rule this is no longer the haphazard affair which it has often been. The interviews of the present, if upon subjects of any moment, are almost invariably prepared with care by those from whom they purport to come. In the rush of Congressional business, and of public affairs in general, the difficulties of obtaining hearings in the regu-

lar order are continually increasing. This has turned attention to the ease with which the country can be reached upon any subject of importance. Thus every man whose abilities give him power to command public attention finds the means of securing it at his disposal, and so the value and importance of the press are beginning to be better understood by men in the public service, and its power and influence are correspondingly increasing.

The wisest politicians are beginning to see that the old method of standing together shoulder to shoulder for the protection of those who chanced to be exposed by the press was short-sighted in a party sense and of serious injury to their own personal interests. When the party press first began its exposures of party men the serious blunder was very widely committed by the latter of rallying their forces to every possible effort in shielding and defending those whom the public had promptly adjudged guilty. From this sprang that almost universal sneering at the press on the part of public men, and especially those whose shortcomings formed the subject of criticism. To sneer at newspapers as sensational, and at truthful reports as newspaper lies, was the common form of defense for the guilty. This rapidly became the sole defense which politicians felt called upon to make even to the most specific charges. From this, in turn, arose the idea which became far too common in the land, that public men, as a class, were corrupt. While they bitterly complained of this, they failed to see that it was the legitimate result of their own prompt defense of the few whom the press justly exposed. The public reached the natural and logical conclusion that, since the majority of public men saw little to criticize in these flagrant shortcomings, and were even ready to defend them, the mass could be no better than those who had been detected and exposed. But for this mistaken policy the country never would have been misled as to the general wholesomeness of public life. An observation in Washington of more than a quarter of a century warrants the declaration that a very large majority of public men of all parties, and in all branches and grades of the public service, are strictly honest, and that the public business in all of its divisions, and under each party management, has been as honestly, as promptly, and as efficiently conducted as the most respectable private business in the land. The excuses pleaded and the defenses made for the few exceptions to this rule, on the part of political associates, have caused the opposite opinion to prevail. Public men, therefore, and not the press, have been mainly and justly responsible for any erroneous opinions which the country may have formed upon the subject.

The usual criticism of the average public man upon the newspaper press is that it is both inaccurate and sensational. As to the sensational in journalism — what the representatives of the press know in regard to the inside of national affairs and the doings of public men, and do not print, would constitute the real sensations. If any half dozen of the older correspondents in Washington should agree to sit down and send to the country upon any given night their knowledge of such affairs as are here alluded to, their narratives, which should not vary from the truth in any particular, or be in any sense exaggerated, would come as near pulling down the very pillars of the temple as anything that could be put in print. It is because of the confidence placed in men of this class of long standing and influence here that these things have never been allowed to go to the American public to shake its beliefs in men of high position, and to bring mortification and shame where it has not been necessary to inflict these in the proper discharge of duty to the public. At times party loyalty has had much to do with these suppressions; but in respect to many things known to those whose daily duties give them an insight into affairs closely hidden from the public at large, a regard for the public welfare, proper respect for exalted public office, if not for the incumbent, and pride in republican government, have each and all at times held back the hands of those who with the scratch of a pen could have unmade administrations, cabinet officers, party leaders, diplomatists in high stations, and soldiers of renown.

It is within the experience of every correspondent that many of the solemn denials made to meet charges which in their essentials were true, and which have contributed largely to the prevailing idea of inaccuracy in the press, were false denials, verging in their falsity upon moral perjury. Denials are a matter of course. Their truthfulness in a majority of cases is a matter of doubt. A large proportion of the denials to which the public is treated are themselves inaccurate, many more are quibbles, and many are false. Witness every one of the *Crédit Mobilier* denials. And yet, from time to time, those journalists acquainted with the facts where true statements in regard to important matters have been denied, and who were in position to establish them before the public, have for various reasons — embraced in those presented above — allowed such denials to pass without putting them to the proof.

The press makes many mistakes. The wonder is that in the rush of its presenting an epitome of the world's daily doings at each breakfast-table it does not make a thousand errors for one. It makes very few deliberately.

And many of those statements concerning which loud-mouthed and quibbling denials are often accepted are true in their essentials.

Three examples will serve to throw light on this branch of the subject. Said a man of national fame who had commanded one of the Union armies, and had been the governor of his State, and had served with distinction in Congress, in furnishing some sensational but true statements for publication: "This is exact; but if you ever give me as authority I will publicly deny your despatch."

Said a former dean of the Diplomatic Corps, in presenting a story of deep interest: "If you allow this to be traced to me, I will promptly deny any connection with it over my official signature, and leave you in the lurch."

Said a senator of many years' service both in and out of Congress, after talking at length for publication: "Yes; write it up, and print it. But be careful. If I don't like it, I will deny the whole of it."

False denials contribute quite as much to the impression which many share of the inaccuracy of journalistic work as its actual errors. The press is not immaculate, but it has as few unworthy men in its prominent positions as any other profession or occupation in the land. The work of no other is so open to publicity. There is no veil, as there is for all others, under which the press can hide its shortcomings. The sunlight by day and the search-light by night illumine the paths of all its known workers.

Instead of public men, as a body, having to complain of the inaccuracies of the press, they are, as a whole, constantly under obligation to those representatives of the press whose positions are the most prominent and best established here for the painstaking efforts to secure accuracy which characterize the greater part of journalistic work performed at the national capital.

The flippancy with which a large class of public men dismiss what they call the attacks of the press, and the superciliousness with which so many are accustomed to announce in their places, or declare in their interviews, that it is not their habit to take notice of what the newspapers may say, is but another form of the only defense which very many of them are able to make against just criticism. There is nothing truer in regard to public life in Washington, as is known to all who have facilities for closely observing it, than this, that, as a general rule, those who protest to the public the oftenest and the loudest that they pay no attention to the press are the very ones who watch its utterances most closely, and generally with more nervousness and with more cause for apprehension than any others. As a general rule, the best men,

the ablest men, and all men of all parties who are straightforward in their purposes and in their lives, who perform their duties with due regard to their responsibilities and their oaths of office, are those who trust the representatives of the press the most implicitly. These, as a class, never suffer from the criticisms of the press, and it would be very difficult to point to a single man among them who has ever been persistently and unjustly misrepresented, or to whose defense the great majority of Washington writers have not constantly rallied whenever his public acts have been untruthfully assailed. As a rule, and a rule with few exceptions, those whose course will not bear the light, and who cannot stand upon their real records, are the sole ones in public life who either dread the press or suffer from it.

In the face of a very wide belief that the press observes no confidences, and that it is necessary to keep everything from its representatives with most scrupulous care, lest the public should become informed in cases where such information would be most embarrassing, it is scarcely too much to say that the only class of men in Washington who year after year are trusted implicitly, and who year after year become acquainted with matters of the greatest moment upon the condition that this knowledge shall only be used as a guide and shall not go beyond them, are the journalists.

The best illustration of the known observance of confidences of public men in high position is well illustrated by the farce of executive session. Here the Senate of the United States as a body is bound by the solemn individual oaths of its members, and by its rules, which provide expulsion as a punishment for any violation of them, not to disclose the secrets of executive session. And yet, as every correspondent of experience knows, any fact of importance can be readily and easily obtained, and no such fact has ever been divulged from the executive session except through the intentional or indiscreet talk of the Senators themselves. All efforts, and they have been many and persistent, to make it appear that the press obtains its news of executive sessions by surreptitious methods, by eavesdropping, or through the officers of the Senate, are absolutely misleading. Whatever becomes known—and, as the public is well aware, everything of consequence becomes known—escapes through the Senators in spite of the fact that they are bound by their oaths, and by the severe rules of the body, to abstain from communicating executive business to outsiders.

There is scarcely an exception to the rule that party secrets of the higher order are known to the leading representatives of the party papers, and it is a rare thing that any of

these are ever communicated beyond the circles which are the proper custodians of them. A striking example can be given to illustrate this fact.

Since the contest over the election of President Hayes was decided in his favor there have been four journalists in the United States, whose names are prominently known, who have been fully possessed of all the facts connected with the real negotiations which settled that controversy in his favor.

They have had in their possession not only what might be called the verbal knowledge of this case but documents which contain the exact propositions which led to the result then reached. No intimation of these things has ever reached the public, though there has never been a day since the decision of the matter when any one of the four could not have given all the facts to the public, and could have done this without the least violation of good faith towards the others who acted with him. It will be seen that this is a matter of no ordinary moment, and it is not too much to say in regard to it that the result finally reached in the counting of the electoral votes would surely have been attained if there had been no electoral commission, and if the much-talked-of Wormley Hotel conference had not been held. These are grave statements, but they are made with great deliberation, and with a fair knowledge of the ordinary meanings of words, and, furthermore, they are not exaggerated.

While many other striking illustrations of this branch of the subject could be given by any press representative of long service in Washington, no better one than this perhaps could be cited to prove the truth of the assertion that what the press knows and does not print infolds and veils the real sensations in American public life.

Another instance to illustrate this branch of the subject presented itself in Secretary Bristow's able and crushing campaign against the gigantic Western Whisky Ring. Fortunately, just before he undertook it, he discovered that the cipher of the department had been betrayed to members of this ring. It was impossible to fix the responsibility, and this uncertainty caused both uneasiness and perplexity. The remedy devised was to limit the knowledge of what was intended, and of all preliminary movements, to the Secretary himself and his solicitor, Major Bluford Wilson. It was further agreed that the despatches of the Department to and from St. Louis should pass in an arbitrary cipher prepared and held by two journalists, one in Washington and the other in St. Louis, and that no copy of that cipher should be furnished to any one, not even

to the Secretary or the solicitor. And so it came to pass that all orders and directions which were given by the Treasury Department in regard to preparations for surprising the Whisky Ring at its work, and all information received by it from St. Louis up to the moment that the Government was ready to make seizures, were first sent to the journalists for translation and transmission in their cipher. As a result, a ring of immense proportions and influence was broken, millions were recovered by the Government, and other millions saved. Later in the case guilty men escaped because a President and Cabinet officials did not observe confidence in regard to vital points of the Government evidence.

To those unacquainted with the Washington situation it may seem strange that all matters of public concern drift with rapidity and great certainty into the hands of the press. The explanation is simple. No question can arise, even of ordinary importance, which does not affect two parties, one of them bent upon success in the matter in hand, and the other equally interested in opposition. It is almost always the case that one party or the other regards it as important to conceal the character of the transaction from the public until results are assured. On the other hand, there is generally a stage at which publicity will either insure delay or defeat, and at this point in the negotiations or proceedings the representatives of the press are almost certain to receive such portions of the case at least as will best serve the purpose of those imparting it. If the case happens to be one of moment these early and incomplete communications in regard to the matter are promptly given to the public. They cannot, of necessity, in the first instance be full, and they are not likely to be either accurate or unexaggerated. It often happens that even these partial presentations of the case secure the ends of those who are attempting to defeat proceedings, and the whole matter falls. In such case it is easily seen how such results give those who have been defeated the opportunity to make great outcry against the inaccuracies of the press, and this illustration will serve to indicate how easy it is to create impressions against its reliability.

Many public men talk glibly of the attacks of the press, as if merely to mention the matter were ample defense. The least reflection will show this use of the term to be a misnomer. Public men, through a variety of shortcomings, attack themselves. Whenever these departures from duty are accurately made known, the press is simply the mouthpiece of what the public has a right to know, and what the press is in duty bound to communicate. The so-called attacks are by public men themselves, and are

directed against themselves. The press simply records the varied attempts which these men make upon their own political lives and fortunes.

One of the most curious institutions with which the press has to deal, and with which it is continually annoyed beyond endurance, is that nondescript conglomeration in Washington which calls itself "Society." This is something entirely apart, and, generally speaking, far beneath that large number of intelligent people of common sense and permanent standing, both within and without official circles, with which the capital is more than ordinarily blessed. The small men and women who attain temporary position in the various orders of this kaleidoscopic conglomeration are perhaps those who are most deeply sensitive of the shortcomings, the exaggerations, and the inaccuracies, of the press. With these, belaboring the press is one of its callisthenics. The whole body is an auxiliary force for the common defense against the press by the use of that weapon heretofore referred to; namely, universal and persistent sneering. And so Mr. and Mrs. Fresh, glorifying themselves throughout the few months of their public existence, rapidly marching the while towards the shadows of that oblivion from which voters unexpectedly raised them, and into which voters so speedily replunge the majority of them, are often heard to remark sneeringly upon the absence of the representatives of the press from noted social occasions. The favorite form of shielding themselves is to be continually asking, whenever the paragraphs which they have written in regard to their dresses, and eyes, and hair, and general beauty, appear in the local prints, why there cannot be some decency on the part of those who conduct the press, and why people cannot be let alone, and not be given this unpleasant notoriety. It will probably never come to the knowledge of the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Fresh that the representatives of the press whose duty it is to see everything have long since been through this dismal round, and long since abandoned its pathways as the most senseless use of time to which it can be put even in the national capital. These worthies will never believe that the scrap-baskets of the representatives of the press contain each month throughout the season more invitations to what is most prominent in desirable society than those who are loudest in their sneers at the press see throughout the entire term of their butterfly existence. That which gives the most curious aspect to all these outbreaks from these lower orders of society's habitués is the fact that the very large proportion of the personal notices, of which they are sure to complain in public to their friends with the air of those whose pri-

vacy has been invaded, are prepared in the handwriting of those to whom they relate. There is not a newspaper office in Washington that has not voluminous collections of this sort, wherein the only changes made before their appearance in print have been the necessary corrections in orthography and grammar. There is scarcely ever an exception to the statement that the descriptions of prominent social occasions are prepared in advance down to the minutest details of dresses, trousseaus, and presents. These paragraphs, thus furnished, are generally a wondrous alchemy which transforms everything into forms of beauty. Ordinary costumes become superb, corpse-like complexions take on the auroral glow, non-classical noses are reduced to at least bewitching retroussé forms, and generally to Grecian outlines, red hair becomes the golden auburn of ideal painters, and so down the list the various commonplace features of professional society habitués become smooth, and beautiful, and altogether lovely.

There is one class of public men who deserve especial notice. They are always numerous, though generally the least influential. They came into public position through the sufferance of their fellow men, either as elective or appointive officers, and their duties are to perform the business of the public. They immediately withdraw themselves from their creators, and in their discharge of the business assigned them proceed upon the false theory, a theory natural enough to small minds, that they are conducting their own affairs; that any inquiries in regard to the matters with which they are charged are as much an impertinence as if one should walk into a private business man's office and ask about his transactions. These look upon any knowledge communicated to the public in regard to their official duties as a sort of sacrilege, and they can never be persuaded that the public, and those who seek news for it, are not impudent to the last degree when they ask to be informed in regard to public affairs. While this is a very considerable class both in legislative and executive circles, it is fair to say that it seldom includes those in chief charge of the public business, or those who originate and shape it. It is rather confined to those who seldom have any other opportunity to make known to such as approach them that they are revolving on the wheel of the government machine. Speaking generally, the higher the rank of public men in any field of public duty, and the abler those who hold place in its various branches, the closer, more cordial, and more confidential are their relations with the public through the representatives of the press. As a rule, presidents, cabinet officers, chief clerks, the heads of important bureaus, and the

fifty or sixty men in Congress who originate and carry forward the great business of the nation, are men who at all times are approachable in the interests of the public, and who communicate, with little or no reserve, all that is proper for the public to know, and give most of the rest in confidence to all trusted representatives of the press for their personal guidance. Of late years this intimacy between those most prominent in public life and the representatives of the press has been steadily strengthening.

Through the last quarter of a century the relations of the press to the various administrations have greatly varied. While Mr. Lincoln's term was one requiring the greatest watchfulness in regard to its daily operations, and while the war, of necessity, imposed restraint of no ordinary character upon news, it is probably true that there has never been an administration which more thoroughly appreciated the advantages of the press, which confided more fully in its patriotism and its discretion, than did this Administration of the war days of the Republic. Its policy on the vital national questions then pending was generally made known in advance to those whose trustworthiness had been proved, in order that the public might be prepared for what lay in the immediate future. Often undecided questions of policy were placed before the public, in order that the Administration, before reaching its final decision, might be made aware of the sentiment of the people, and so be able to judge of the degree of support which could be depended upon if the policy in contemplation should finally be adopted. It is probably true that this wise and constant use of the press as a valuable adjunct in the conduct of public affairs was more common during Mr. Lincoln's Administration than during any one which has followed it.

As to Mr. Johnson's term, there was little cause for a definite policy on his part in regard to the treatment of the press, as there was no attempt to conceal anything. It was a rough-and-tumble, hurly-burly time, in which each day's events and each day's contests with Congress presented a mass of interesting facts which gave the press an endless variety of material from which it was free to choose the particular dishes which it would daily set before its readers. The fierce conflict between this Administration and the Republican Congress, in which the latter mainly occupied its time in attempts to chain the former securely, was as public in all its features as the struggle of the gladiators in the Roman arenas. It is, however, fair and just to the Johnson Administration to say that the press was always treated with consideration, and there was a frankness

and fullness in response to all proper inquiries that left little to be desired on the part of seekers after information.

Of General Grant's long term, while it is true that a large representation of the press in Washington began its experiences with his Administration with those sentiments of high regard and patriotic pride which could not but attach to the man who had led the Union armies to final victory, it is further true that the respect of the press steadily and constantly diminished under the treatment which its representatives received, until during the closing year of his Administration there was only one Washington representative of the press, out of the hundred or more who resided permanently in the capital, who maintained cordial personal relations at the White House, or even visited it except when it became necessary.

The Administration of President Hayes in all its dealings with the press of the country was courteous and free to the last degree. There has never been a President who was more willing to furnish information upon questions of his public policy, and upon matters which he designed to communicate to Congress, than he. And while it does not follow that other administrations which were more reticent were so because of the fear that the public might learn too much of their inside transactions, it is true of Mr. Hayes that this freedom arose from the knowledge on his part that there was nothing connected with his administration of public affairs which he had any desire to conceal from the country.

General Garfield was not spared long enough to give any indications of what his policy in dealing with the public would have been.

Of President Arthur it can be said that he was always accessible, and that his relations were cordial, and in many instances extremely friendly, with the representatives of the press, and that he was credited among all of them, without regard to party, with being a faithful and excellent executive.

It is but just to President Cleveland to say that he always received its representatives with dignity and courtesy, and that there were no questions connected with his policy, or the management of public affairs in the various departments of the Government, concerning which he was not always ready to give free and full information up to the last limit of proper regard for the efficient conduct of the particular affair which might be pending.

Of President Harrison it is emphatically true that he has seriously suffered from his reluctance to have the prominent and influential part which he has exercised over public affairs from the first days of his Administration made known through the press. While no question

of public policy has engaged the attention of Congress since he took the oath of office in which he has not taken personal and active interest, and in which he has not been signally influential in shaping results, this fact, throughout the first two years of his Administration, was known to but few, and these never felt themselves at liberty to comment freely upon the subject. Hence it resulted that, until a very recent date, the impression has been widespread in the country—an impression which dissatisfied public men have not been slow to encourage—that President Harrison simply sat quietly in his office exercising the routine duties of an executive, without much further effort in the direction of originating and shaping the public policy on those grave questions of national concern which have been so numerous throughout his Administration. This false impression, shared so widely by the press of the country, has not resulted from any reticence on his part in talking with its representatives, for they always find ready access to him, and such as he has learned to trust invariably find him a free talker upon all questions of public policy, but it has arisen from the undue reluctance which he has exhibited from the first to have his own part in public affairs made the subject of free discussion. Of late there has been a wholesome change in this respect, which has resulted at once in its becoming generally known that in every prominent question of party policy President Harrison has been from the beginning of his Administration a most active, intelligent, and influential promoter of the results that have been attained.

Is the press immaculate? By no means. Do all connected with it appreciate the grave responsibilities which their limitless facilities for reaching the public should impose upon them? Again the answer must be an emphatic no. Have public men no reasonable grounds of complaint? Undoubtedly they have. But the sweeping judgment which too many of them pass upon the representatives of the press as a body has in it the same elements of unfairness and injustice as exist in the wide opinion that public men as a class are corrupt. With the latter the exact opposite is true. As a class they are honest. So with journalists; as a class they are careful and conscientious.

The erroneous judgments of public men and of members of the press spring from the same cause; namely, visiting the shortcomings of the few upon the many. In the one case the fact that party men, as a rule, unite to shield those detected in wrong creates a general opinion that the class is corrupt. In the other the fact that there is too much toleration by the

press of its libelers and sensation-mongers gives excuse to public men for their sweeping charges. In a word, the most effective foes of the press are those of its own household. It is fully able to deal successfully with all others; it should be abundantly able to crush these.

It is not fair to judge the great mass of faithful, honest, and patriotic public servants by the shortcomings of the few. It is equally unjust that the body of able, painstaking, and conscientious journalists should have imposed upon it the stamp of its despicable orders. This would be as unfair as to judge the legal fraternity by its shysters, the pulpit by those who dishonor it, the earnest and honest leaders of parties by their criminals, or the magnificent courage of great armies by their cowards.

The journalistic situation in Washington is doubtless fairly representative in character. Aside from the great news associations, about a hundred leading newspapers of the country have special representatives at the national capital. As a body they have attained and deserve enviable rank for ability, for wide knowledge in the intricacies of public affairs, for high purpose, and for honest and courageous work. Unfortunately, in their ranks are a few shysters, lobbyists, and sensationalists. The latter are mainly cheap scribblers for a class of cheap newspapers whose managers regard cheapness and sensation as the chief essentials of journalism. While the general standards of correspondence are constantly improving, this latter element, which is of recent growth, is demoralizing to the last degree. Because this handful of men is tolerated by second-class newspapers, journalism as a whole is lowered in the estimation of public men. The press has the remedy in its own hands, and it should remorselessly apply the caustic which will cleanse this ulcer.

The press is constantly improving its facilities for dealing with national topics. Very little Washington correspondence in regard to live matters any longer goes by mail. The number of journals which lease special wires is increasing. The leading cities are now thus connected with the capital. This brings the editor's rooms at home and the Washington offices into as convenient relations as if they were adjoining. Editorials on national subjects now go by wire to many journals as fully as news. Thus the field of journalism and the springs of its influence are rapidly enlarging. Its daily audience embraces the readers of the Republic. To these, year after year, it carries a daily message. It does the thinking for many millions of them. With all its imperfections, who shall calculate its vast influence for good?