

rated when the litigation before mentioned put a stop to the entire system. It was as follows: A small perforating machine (a perspective view of which is shown in Fig. 7), having three keys, could be purchased from the company at a small cost. With this instrument any person might, after a few hours' practice, punch the dots and dashes of his message in a strip of paper. When thus perforated he could send the paper to the telegraph office for transmission. At the telegraph office the strip would merely have to run between the contact rollers of the wire, and in a twinkling the message was at the distant end of the line. For thus transmitting, the

company proposed to charge not as is now the custom, so much per word, but so much per yard, the sender being at liberty to crowd a volume, if he could, within that space.

Whether this new system of telegraphy will supplant the old or not, time alone can tell. During the brief period of its practical operation it gained many warm advocates, not the least among whom was the then postmaster-general, who strongly urged its adoption by Congress as a national system of telegraphy. Sir William Thomson called the attention of the British Association, in words of high praise, to the system as one of the wonders of the Centennial Exhibition.

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#### JOURNALISM AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE LATE MR. BAGEHOT.

I HAVE recently read the "Literary Studies" of Mr. Walter Bagehot, published since his death. I was curious to see this book, not so much on account of what I should learn about the subjects which it discusses, as of what I should learn about the author. One is interested to observe the steps by which a man, attracted by many and diverse subjects, at last finds his way to the kind of work which he can do best. The essays are pleasant and amusing reading, but somewhat disappointing. The fault of them is that they are too theoretical and not sufficiently immediate. Instead of looking directly at his subject and describing it as he perceives it to be, he argues, infers, etc. The true critic, having looked intently at the matter, asserts that the poet A possesses the quality  $x$ . Mr. Bagehot's way is to prove the truth of this proposition by showing that all persons of the class A possess the quality  $x$ ; he is thus compelled to start backward and devote three or four pages to analogies. But he is not always theoretical; the best things which occur in his far more valuable political works and his writings in the "Economist" are the results of a profound and subtle intuition. He had a singularly exact apprehension of sentiments shared by masses of men. In his books on the British Constitution, he makes this remark, that the reason why the press in the United States at ordinary times is able to attack the government with so little effect is that the government must be in power till the end of its term of four years, and can-

not at any time be turned out, as in England. This remark shows how clearly he had the state of our public sentiment before his eyes. The fact that Mr. Bagehot had never been in this country makes all the more remarkable his direct apprehension of our ways of thinking.

But it is as a journalist that Mr. Bagehot seems to me to have been particularly admirable and worthy of imitation. Among the admirable qualities of his writings in the "Economist" that which ought especially to be imitated was his respect for business and public action. He seemed always to be saying with reference to any great public question, "What should I myself do, had I the matter to decide?" His manner was that of a man who sits down among a number of friends, as honorable and intelligent as himself, to discuss *things* and not to make a vain and ineffectual display of *words*. His especial title to praise and imitation is that he looked upon journalism as action rather than literature, and upon himself as a partaker in the public business of the day, rather than as a man of letters.

Literature and journalism are not only very distinct, they are very far apart; they are in some particulars almost irreconcilable. The one point which they have in common is that the professors of both express ideas by means of alphabetic writing. Authors usually write short articles before they write books, and these are printed in newspapers. It thus happens that there are few men of letters, particularly in this country, who

have not written in newspapers. This is about the sum of the connections between the two pursuits. In almost all respects they are separate. The success of a man of letters depends upon the high excellence of his few productions. The success of the journalist depends upon the average excellence of his many writings. One, or ten, or a hundred good articles no more make a good journalist than one swallow makes a summer. In the next place literature is written to last. But in writing for newspapers it should never be forgotten that that which is written to-day must be printed to-morrow, and will have been turned into wrapping paper by the day following. The truth is that very fine writing is out of place in newspapers. The capacity for doing and writing is rather a disadvantage than an advantage for the journalist. The journalists who possess this ability succeed rather in spite of it than on account of it. A strong desire to say things perfectly is a hindrance to a newspaper writer. There is not apt to be more than one perfect expression of a thought, and a writer who has, or who thinks he has, achieved this does not care to express it in another and a cheaper way. Now if there is one thing in which a journalist must excel it is in the capacity for incessant and infinitely varied repetition. The journalist should not, therefore, think of himself as a literary man. But he should think of himself as a man of affairs. He should write as if he were counseling the public as to what they should do in the business of the day, and he should give to that council the best reflection which the well-known and understood limitations of his business will allow. A newspaper writer should not make the writing of pleasing articles the object of his life. The sole aim of the literary artist, like other artists, is, very properly, to please. But it will not do for the journalist to make a pursuit of tickling men's ears; he must seek to *affect things*. If the journalist's object is merely to write pleasing articles, his is one of the poorest businesses in the world. This is almost the only trade in which the worker does not improve as he grows older. The writer of pleasing articles is no better at fifty than at thirty; indeed he is not so good, for at fifty he has lost the zest in ink and paper and a fresh proof which he had at thirty. In almost all callings the mind is constantly getting new thoughts, which instruct it for the future, and the judgment is undergoing, from day to day, a process

of education which never pauses. "Shall I do this or that?" the worker asks himself almost hourly, and in his own mind argues the "pros" and "cons" of the case with thoughts which are scarcely ever turned into language; which, indeed, most men would be incapable of turning into language. It is only the journalist who takes the right view of his business who gains with years this education of the judgment. His facts increase rapidly; his studiously formed ideas have been corrected and re-corrected by the observation of events which have taken place under his own eyes; his opinion, therefore, is worth more at fifty than at thirty; his judgment is stronger and he is an abler man. Not only will his writing be more profiting and instructing to the reader: to serious readers it will even be more pleasing.

There is one change which must take place before subordinate contributors to newspapers can write as freely and seriously as Mr. Bagehot wrote: they must cease to write anonymously. How this change is to be brought about, or whether it can be brought about at all, I do not now stop to ask. I am sure, however, that the change must take place before newspapers can be so written. Such writing must be perfectly candid and, as between writer and reader, intimate; must state the "cons" as well as the "pros," and must "give the devil his due." It is impossible to write thus if the contributor must be on the lookout to suppress opinions which may conflict with those of his associates. He is writing for the information of a reader who wants to meet with the exactly true opinion, and who cares nothing about the agreement of the contributor's opinions with those of other persons.

There is no doubting the advantages of the anonymous method. The unity and positiveness of expression which characterize anonymous journals produce on the minds of readers a notion of strength which is satisfactory and agreeable. The positive way of writing appears to have been suited to the peculiar nature of our political history. Our questions have been simpler than those which the English have had to consider. The subjects which Mr. Bagehot has had to discuss, such as those which relate to the Eastern question and to the internal affairs of England, were complex and recondite, and it was natural to treat of them in a cautious, scrutinizing and somewhat hesitating manner. In our own re-

cent history, however, there has been little to divide the opinions of educated men. The better things have been sufficiently known and agreed upon; our misfortune is that the worse have been followed. A decided and even violent manner of writing was, therefore, to be expected in this country and it has not been without its uses. So accustomed had we become to the sight of successful corruption and vulgarity that it was something to have them called by their right names. In the future, let us hope that our politics may get without the region of the minor moralities and become concerned with experiments and enterprises which will demand the most respectful study. This new character of our political life may call for a nicer and more critical consideration of public questions from newspaper writers.

There is little doubt that the opinion of a great newspaper must have more weight than that of an individual. But it may be that an error is often made in attributing to the newspaper a weight which really belongs to the opinion itself. The utterance has weight, not because it is an opinion of the newspaper, but because it is the sentiment of a large mass of a community. If the paper is a party paper, it is the sentiment of the party which is expressed; if the paper is an independent paper, it is often the dominant sentiment of the hour which is expressed. Then, if there is an undoubted advantage in anonymous writing, there is also an advantage in personal writing. Great popular journalists, like Cobbett and Greeley, have succeeded, mainly because they were able to make themselves known to many men. The power of making themselves known has also been possessed by certain writers who, like Mr. Bagehot, have addressed a small number of readers. There must be many thousands of people in any great community who desire to form correct opinions upon political subjects, and who would read studiously the writing of a man who had zealously sought to form those opinions. So few people have the time or the ability to gain definite and thorough views upon current public questions, that one who has such opinions will have only too much influence with his fellows. And why should not a journalist have, like other men of business, the advantage of his reputation? The reader will say, "I have often tried this writer; he seems to labor to form a true idea of things, and to point out the proper course; I

should like to see what he has to say now." Such a writer would, no doubt, stimulate curiosity and active thinking in the minds of his readers. It seems to me that all the considerations of improvement to the writer, and profit to the reader, and of inherent value in the things written, favor the plan of signed articles. There are, no doubt, grave reasons why it will not seem possible to adopt it, but I believe that the most that may be said is that no great newspaper with signed editorials has yet appeared. We have seen the once prized and lauded anonymous method abandoned by reviews and magazines; it is not impossible that the same change may come to pass with newspapers.

Mr. Bagehot's style was very conversational and cautious and was, therefore, well suited to express the thoughts of one who was first of all an inquirer, who was rather a judge than an advocate, though he was capable of advocating effectively views which he had accepted with circumspection. It is a style suited to the discussion of complex and delicate subjects and is one which should be more widely practiced. But style, as has often been said, is a matter of character. The *pace* of some minds is swifter than that of others; the pace of the style which expresses them is, therefore, swift. Mr. Bagehot's style moves with the caution of his thoughts. His mind scrutinizes the subject and from its careful way of proceeding adopts a language which is cautious and has but little motion. There are other minds, however, to whom it is natural to express thoughts formed with the greatest deliberation with rapidity and rhythm. Both styles are true, but of the two, the first is the less liable to exaggeration and affected imitation. A deep respect for, and a solicitude about, public action is as necessary to the rapid and eloquent writers as to the cautious and conversational ones. The vigorous writers are also to be men of action, rather than men of letters. To them applies the answer of Demosthenes when asked what were the conditions of eloquence, that the first was action and the second was action and the third was action. Demosthenes meant that an orator should be very reluctant to make a speech the sole object of which was the display of his own powers; but were anything about to be done by some great assembly upon the issue of which the orator's words would have effect, he might then speak with eloquence.