
NEWSPAPERS

A century ago, the publishing of a newspaper tended to develop great men. A number of men famous in the history of our country began life as newspaper men.

We refer not only to Greeley, to Bennett, and that large list of men who published newspapers until they died, and who wielded a tremendous influence in shaping the thought, the sentiment, and the destiny of this country, but we refer also to that galaxy of men who began by publishing newspapers and afterwards became distinguished as orators and statesmen.

As originally conducted, there was something about newspaper work that tended to develop strength of character as well as strength of intellect. The newspaper man not only kept himself informed as to current events, in the discussion of which his mind received a constant drill, but he felt morally responsible to the public for what was pub-

The Cost of Something for Nothing

lished in his paper. The establishment being small, everybody knew who was the author of every article published. A consciousness of this fact developed strength. If a newspaper man attacked private character, he generally had to meet his victim and look him in the face, knowing that he knew what he had said of him. In time, such an experience would make strong characters. It developed men unacquainted with fear, men who could grapple with any problem or confront any situation.

But as the newspaper establishment was enlarged, the sense of a personal responsibility ceased to exist. By degrees the paper became a machine, a great entity that had an existence, a voice and an influence separate and apart from the men who made it. By degrees it swallowed the men who fed it.

From that moment it began to destroy character. It was the newspaper that talked, not the man. Instead of developing strong, open-

The Cost of Something for Nothing

faced men, it tended to develop sneaks. Everything was anonymous. The writer of an article felt no personal or moral responsibility. All the world despises the writer of an anonymous letter. No honorable man would think of writing one; yet, so far as the writers are concerned, the great newspapers of to-day are mostly a collection of anonymous letters, and the writers are reduced to the low level of anonymity.

In the vegetable kingdom, nothing large or wholesome ever grows in the dark. It takes sunlight to develop the healthy plant and ripen the luscious fruit. The same is true of the human plant. The man who lives in darkness and covers up his deeds is doomed.

If we examine the subject, we find that few men have grown great on the large newspapers during the last generation. Many men of excellent ability, fine education, and noble aspirations, have entered the field. They become for

The Cost of Something for Nothing

a time more acute and better able to serve their masters; but they degenerate in character.

No man can hide behind a hedge and throw missiles at the people traveling on life's highway, without deteriorating. He will lose what manhood he may have had at the beginning of his career. He will partake more and more of the nature of the reptile hiding in the grass. The reactionary effect of human conduct will destroy him.

This tells the sad story of a great army of bright men whose careers have been spoiled or destroyed by anonymous work on great newspapers. In smaller cities there are yet to be found newspapers of the old-time character, where the editors grow to be strong men. This is also true of some weekly papers published in large cities. The editors and writers stand out in the sunlight, and look mankind in the face. But the great dailies lay the blight of their con-

The Cost of Something for Nothing

duct upon all who are connected with them.

The newspaper proprietor may wield power for a time, and be sought after by cringing men seeking public favors; but, with rare exceptions, the same dragon of wrong conduct that swallows up the smaller men in his employ will destroy him also.

The man who is wronged by an anonymous article in a newspaper sustains far less injury than the writer of the article or the proprietor of the paper. If the victim will pursue the even tenor of his way, facing the stars, the foul odor of the attack will not cling to him, but it will settle back into the garments of those who made it, and its character will be chiseled upon their faces.