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Editorial

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EDITORIAL

CRIME NEWS AND ENDOWED JOURNALISM

The American Bar Association has a Special Committee on "Cooperation between the Press, the Radio, and the Bar, against Publicity interfering with Fair Trial of Judicial and Quasi-Judicial Proceedings." The Chairman of the Committee is Hon. Newton Baker of Cleveland. The Committee cooperates with Committees of two other national associations, the American Society of Newspaper Editors and the American Newspaper Publishers Association. These Committees have been earnestly cooperating to secure a solution which shall be both fair to all parties and effective against the current abuses.

But can we ever expect, for a press that is dependent upon circulation for its income, to accomplish more than a partial diminution of those blemishes? They are due to its very source of prosperity. That source is responsible for the prominence of crime news, the popularized treatment of judicial proceedings, and all other forms of sensationalism. The practice of catering to the weak elements of human nature rests on motives which will always prevail, to some degree, wherever circulation-figures are the basis of a journal's income. Advertising charges pay for circulation, and circulation determines advertising receipts. It is a circle which repeats itself, and there is no escape from it.

The current clamor invoking "freedom of the press" is mostly a superficial sentimentalism. The press needs to be free from governmental control? Yes, indeed. But does it not equally need to be free from the control of circulation figures? Does it not equally need to be free from the control of advertising receipts? Does it not equally need to be free from the control of the profit motive dominating the owner?

There have been, from time to time, a few daily journals which in certain courageous and determined hands have for a while maintained their service free from the pressure of these motives. But as times have changed the management has changed, and with that change the ideals also. There can be no promise of perpetuity or permanence or independence for such institutions.

But the Harvard College Tercentenary, and the coming centenaries of other universities, show what can take place under other conditions.

There is only one escape from these deleterious controls. That escape will be found in Endowed Journalism.

Is it not strange that Endowed Education and Endowed Science and Endowed Religion and Endowed Fine Arts are the only forms of moral and intellectual guidance that have thus far attracted our active support?

Why not an Endowed Press?

Why not an Endowed Theatre?

Why not an Endowed Radio-Broadcast?

These three are today equally important with the others, for the guidance and entertainment and uplift of the mass-citizenship.

Our people have long been completely devoted to the idea of an Endowed University. It is independent. It is progressive. It caters to the public. It abides by high standards. It is influential and esteemed for its influence.

There is nothing in the service and the status and the need for an Endowed University that is not paralleled in the case of the Press. The same is true of the Theatre and the Radio-Broadcast.

However, one thing at a time. Let a benefactor give ten million dollars to endow a costless or cost-cheap daily newspaper, with a self-coöpted board of trustees chosen from varied walks in life, with a competent administrator as managing editor, with the cleverest journalists on its staff, and with the objective of competing against the commercial newspaper but without the commercial motive. Then, after that first success, let the day come when there will be in every metropolis one Endowed Daily, in every State one Endowed Weekly Magazine, and in the nation a dozen Endowed Monthlies.

Then the present problem of commercialized news by a commercial press will have become a minor one,—just as the problem of commercialized education has become a minor one.

JOHN H. WIGMORE.