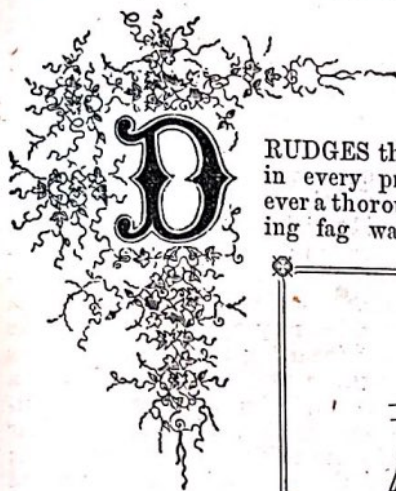


PEN AND PENCIL

SKETCHES OF PRESS CHARACTERS



DRUDGES there will always be in every profession ; but if ever a thorough-going, drudging fag was embodied and

personified, it must have been in the living form of a newspaper Sub-editor. This is a position which cannot be held by a fool, and it is one that no clever, able man will hold a day longer than he can help. Whoever thinks of appreciating or praising the painstaking mind which has winnowed so much chaff from the grain as to make the latter readable and amusing? What newspaper reader—except those professionally in the secret—ever compares the long, dry, prosy article of two or more columns with the neat little paragraph of some forty lines, which contains the whole pith of the matter, and remarks upon its clever terseness, and the condensed comprehensiveness of the whole case? Scissors and

paste, when used *alone*, may be the mechanical manipulators of the slovenly Sub-editor ; but the man who takes a pride in his work, and makes it his object to cram just as much news as it is possible into his columns, derives but very little help from such articles ; which, unassisted by anything in the shape of literary talent, present a rough specimen of literary slaughtering that is as clumsy in the reading as it is inartistic in its preparation. Newspapers which are made up of matter carelessly culled from daily papers present but a sorry specimen of literary

composition. In fact, it may be safely stated that nothing can be worse done in this respect than the casual paragraphs of the general Daily Press, which appear to be inserted and published as they come rough and crude from the unpolished pens of uneducated men, who have but one object in view, viz., that of making as many words as possible out of the matter in hand ; and when paragraphs of this description are pitchforked, as it were, into the columns of a weekly journal, with the simple excision of a few lines here and there by way of an easy abbreviating process, they will be found to read something after this fashion :—

“On Thursday last, a fatal accident occurred to the 6.45 down express train from London, on its arrival at the Rush and - Crush Station, on the Break - neck line, near the Smashem junction. The goods train, above alluded to, was just being shunted as Watson signalled for danger, and the consequence was, that Smith, the man previously mentioned, failed in his object, whilst poor Collins and Brown were crushed to death by the timber-truck which caused the first collision !”

Now, the above is an every-day specimen of the scissors and paste work which is to be found in all carelessly - prepared papers. Several lines have been slashed out to reduce space, but nothing of an explanatory or cementing process has been inserted instead, and the rough ends caused by the chopping and slaughtering process have been jumbled together to fit in as they best may. The

reader is left to his own imagination to find out who “Watson” is, and where “Smith, the man previously alluded to,” came from, whilst “poor Collins and Brown,” who are unceremoniously introduced into the case without any explanatory description, only add to the confusion of the whole, and assist to make the unreadable mystery more puzzling than ever ; while the “timber-trucks” and the “first collision” are also matters for general speculation, according the inquisitiveness of the reader.

Amongst the many unseen, unknown, and conse-



No. 2.—THE SUB-EDITOR.

quently unappreciated labours of a Sub-editor, the general embellishment and re-modelling of stuff like that just quoted forms a principal feature; and it is in the pursuit of such unthankful drudgery that he daily qualifies himself for a superior position. But the man who relies on, and remains satisfied with, his scissors and paste alone, is doomed for ever to such botchery, being utterly incapable of improving the raw material which comes to his hand. Hundreds of cases occur daily on the Weekly Press where articles of a column in length are doomed to the waste-paper basket, however important and interesting they may be, simply for the reason that they are too long. "Want of space, &c.," cause them to be cast out, while an artistic condensation, giving all the facts and leading points of the case in a paragraph of about 20 lines, is an undertaking past the capabilities of Mr. Scissors. To cut out a lump from the middle and join the beginning and the end together he can easily do; but to re-write the whole, and make it intelligible, is not to be thought of for a moment.

Seeing, then, by what is here shown, that a competent Sub-editor must be a man of some tolerable literary pretensions, it is clear that to retain such an acquisition on any journal must be of considerable advantage to its reputation; and this cannot be done unless his position is made a good one, according to his merits. Even with the inducement of good pay, it is next to impossible to keep a clever and aspiring man to the drudgery of sub-editing; for as his general abilities and professional knowledge increase, so will his taste for his semi-mechanical duties as regularly decrease; and when once a man finds he possesses the required ability for original composition, he will never permanently settle down to the cobbler task of mending other people's bad work. The position, therefore, must always be looked upon as probationary, and introductory to the higher grades of Press penmanship; but their due and proper performance is indispensable to the general acquirements of a principal editor. A commonplace newspaper writer may be moulded out of any literary scribe who can handle his pen, and who makes himself conversant with the special question he undertakes; but to qualify a man for the position of general and managing editor, he must begin as the liner, advance to the reporter, and rusticate for some time as a Sub-editor. After going through these useful but laborious qualifications, he competent for anything, and to such hands may the fortunes of a newspaper be safely confided.

The general Weekly Press may be taken as the world-wide school for Sub-editors; as in most, if not all of them, the process of condensed condensation is the main point of the duty. On the Daily Press, where space is not quite so much an object, except in Parliamentary time, the duties of Sub-editors consist more in selecting and reading over MSS. than in epitomising them; and very little, if any, of the literary drudgery so essential to the weekly is found to exist on a daily journal. On the Metropolitan Press, the salaries of these persons vary from four to six guineas per week; and some of the best of them have been Correctors of the Press, which says something favourable for the aspirations and future movements of the Readers' Association in their efforts to organise a school for Sub-editors from their own members. Many of the Sub-editors of the Metropolitan Press are very clever leader writers, and considerably augment their incomes by contributing to the Provincial Press in that capacity; and, strange as it may appear, some of the best leaders in the London dailies are contributed by Sub-editors of rival journals, simply

because their abilities in the same capacity cannot be recognised by their own people. This curious fact of a man having to go to strangers to be appreciated and rewarded is by no means singular on the News-paper Press of the United Kingdom; and it arises from the petty jealousies of editors, who would rather advance any other person than their own sub., lest he in turn might be the means of their own displacement. This system, brought about and perpetuated by the want of that fraternising cordiality which is too common with Men of the Press, is anything but commendable and honourable, and is frequently but means of special important intelligence oozing out from the precincts of the journal, the proprietors of which may have paid a high price for its early arrival.

In addition to no mean literary abilities, the auxiliary requirements necessary to make an efficient Sub-editor are numerous. He should be lawyer enough to know how close he may approach a libellous insinuation without incurring any of the penalties attending that dangerous practice; he should have a head possessing the capabilities of a museum, a university, and an encyclopædia combined; be familiar with the name of every nobleman in the peerage; and be able to trace the genealogical derivation and origin of the family title; the members of the House of Commons, and the constituency each one represents must be as easy of reply to him as the names of his own children or family; the Law List, the Court Guide, the families of every reigning sovereign, and the career and politics of every popular man of the day should be as familiar and well-known to a Sub-editor as the name of the street in which he resides. Besides all this, he should be half a printer, and know how to calculate his copy to a line, instead of giving the compositors a column when only half a one is asked for to fill up; he must be expected to find room for everything, and yet omit nothing important; and is sometimes held responsible for the morality and respectability of the advertisements which adorn his columns. In the sudden absence of the editor he would be expected to take his place in such a way that the transfer would not be apparent to his readers; and thus, while proving himself equal to the chief position, must be content to stagnate on half the salary. It is, therefore, clearly evident from these acquirements that the post of Sub-editor must ever be a changeable one; as proficiency in the performance of its duties qualifies the person holding the appointment to a higher position, which, as aspiring men, Press-labourers are not slow to avail themselves of, and thus make the sub-editorial chair the stepping stone to that of editor in chief.

Taking the average of Press appointments, the instances are very few where Sub-editors go through the necessary professional probation to acquire the proficiency requisite for the various and onerous duties of their office. If an editor requires an assistant he expects to have him ready made to hand. The idea of training any one to the duties never enters his head, and, therefore, if a competent person is not to be had, the first that comes is taken; and too often the unfortunate wight is left to scramble through his duties as he best can, deriving much more real, practical advice from the printers than from any one else. Many cases could be quoted where medical students and unemployed curates have been turned loose on to the Press as sub-editors without the least preparation whatever, beyond the cool remark that "the printers will let them know what is required." Again: Sub-editors on small provincial papers are expected to fill up their spare time in proof-reading, and other similar duties which fall to

the lot of the literary fag; and it is not surprising that this constant "collar" work causes a little occasional jibbing, which, in most cases, ends in the man of all-work edging himself into a better position.

Legal or clerical men seldom make good general Sub-editors, from the very fact that they consider there is nothing like leather, or, in other words, no news like that which concerns the professions which they once adorned. Your legal Sub. would fill his journal with the news of the various law-courts, if left to himself, in the same way as the ex-parson would go deep into Church matters and theological controversies, for the benefit of his readers, if left to his own uncurbed fancies. Such Sub-editors as those here alluded to may always be known by their work, which generally presents anything but a professional appearance. Classification is seldom or ever resorted to by such men, because of its trouble; therefore, the easier but more unsightly plan is adopted of putting glaring head-lines to all the paragraphs, and allowing them to stand in the paper just as the compositors emptied them on the galley. Whenever so glaring an instance occurs of departure from the more artistic and tasteful plan of placing every paragraph under a proper head, and thus affording the reader the ready opportunity of turning to the right place for the news sought for, it may always be understood that a man of scissors and paste is at the bottom of it all, and that he is one who takes no pride in his work, but merely fills up his paper as speedily and as easily as possible.

Amongst the many papers which emanate from the Metropolitan Press, the "Pall Mall Gazette" and "Illustrated London News" may be mentioned as the most perfect specimens of neat and intelligible condensation. In these journals it is evident that everything is most carefully written down by men well up to their work, and, what is more, who take a pride in having it done well. There is no paper in England more greedily seized upon by the men of scissors and paste than the "Pall Mall Gazette," which seldom or ever gets any credit from the pilferers, who mainly depend upon its style and ability for the means of getting through their work. The transfer of paragraphs from these journals may safely be performed by the scissors alone; for, with the exception of altering dates, it is seldom that a word can be either omitted or added to their clear and perfect style of condensed narration.

We have gone somewhat fully into the case of the Sub-editor because there is every reason to believe that an idea has grown up in the minds of newspaper proprietors that any one can do the work who can simply read and write. This idea will prove an egregious error whenever it is put into practice; for, while it is admitted that any person can easily fill the paper, it cannot be denied that it requires a man of taste, judgment, much clear discernment, and no small share of literary ability to make one interesting, and thus well and extensively patronised. Yet it must be admitted, with truth and regret, that the school for this useful class of Press-men is fast fading away; and that the pressure of the competition upon the Provincial Weekly Press by the cheap London and other dailies is gradually reducing the editorial staff of such journals to the paragraph writer and advertisement collector in one person, and the press reader and literary fag in another; who, with the assistance of a leader-writer at a distance, and the columns of the "Pall Mall Gazette," in many instances succeed in producing a very fair paper without an editor or sub-editor being required in their full personal efficiency and position. It

may, therefore, be looked upon as a very appropriate movement and a happy thought of the London Correctors of the Press to amalgamate their duties and position with those of the Sub-editor; for certain it is that in the whole round of the Press no two men are less appreciated or more slighted for the skilful performance of the numerous plodding, brain-racking, and painstaking items of Press drudgery which fall to their lot than the the SUB-EDITOR and READER.

Letters addressed to the Editor.

TROUBLESOME APPRENTICES.

SIR,—I was foolish enough, some eighteen months ago, to take two parish apprentices to my business, as a printer and bookbinder, with each of whom I am to get £10 premium; and now I wish I was clear of my bargains. One don't like presswork, and only spoils the work when I put him to it; the other only takes to binding, and is too much of a dunce ever to make a compositor of. The parish authorities complain if I send them out on errands, and threaten a prosecution if I do not learn the boys their business. I am half inclined to cancel their indentures, but wish to know if I can do so with the mutual concurrence of both the boys, who, I find, would willingly allow me to turn them over to a wheelwright and a packing-case maker, to which trades they seem to take. I may add that I have only received half the premium with each boy, the parish officers refusing to pay any more until they perceive some signs of proficiency in their charges. Please tell me what I had best do in such a case, as these boys nearly worry my life out.—ARTHUR.—[We certainly sympathise with you in your difficulties, but are quite certain that you cannot cancel the indentures unless all parties are agreeable to do so. If the new masters are willing to take the boys off your hands for £5 each, and the lads are ready to go, there ought not to be much difficulty in the matter; but parish apprentices are often terrible bores.—ED. P.N.]

OVER WEIGHTED FOUNTS

SIR,—Last month, I ordered a fount of three cwt. of brevier roman, with an average supply of italic to it; and, to my surprise, when I came to lay the new type in the case, found that I had got nearly as much italic as roman. Upon remonstrating with the type-founder as to what he calls an average weight of italic to a fount of three cwt. of roman, and complaining of being over-weighted in this instance, he shows me a note, written by my foreman (as my order was only verbal, or taken down in writing by his agent, and of which I have no copy), which reads thus:—"3 cwt. of brevier roman, upper and lower; ditto, ditto, italic ditto." Type-founder refuses to take back the italic, and what am I to do?—[To our reading, the mistake is certainly your foreman's, for whom, as he is your servant, you are liable. The best way to get out of the difficulty will be to arrange with your type-founder to let you have the same value of some other type, which, we imagine, he will not object to. In ordering type printers cannot be too careful, and should always arrange for all surplus sorts to be exchanged for others of the same weight. Some type-founders supply their founts very evenly; others send them in anyhow, as if to promote a continual casting up; but the saving clause, here mentioned, would always remedy such an evil as that. Some printers have been known to be so exact in ordering a fount as to give the precise weight to each letter; but it is not every one who will take the trouble. For a roman fount of three cwt., we should say 50 lbs. of italic would be ample; unless