CONTACT

PUBLISHED PERIODICALLY AT 9 EAST 46TH STREET, - TELEPHONE VANDERBILT 0963

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Woo The Public

WALTER Lippmann, in his recently published book, *Men of Destiny* touches on a new type of what he calls "anti-propaganda". We, however, feel that propaganda must call on negative functions with as great a facility as on the positive functions.

"There have been Presidents in our time who knew how to whip up popular enthusiasm. There has never been Mr. Coolidge's equal in the art of deflating interest. This mastery of what might be called the technique of anti-propaganda is worthy of prolonged and profound study by students of public opinion. The naive statesmen of the pre-Coolidge era imagined that it was desirable to interest the people in their government, that public discussion was a good thing, that indignation at evil was useful. Mr. Coolidge is more sophisticated. He has discovered the value of diverting attention from the government, and with an exquisite subtlety that amounts to genius, he has used dullness and boredom as political devices."

* * *

The new co-operation between managers of big corporations and public opinion is brought up in another of his paragraphs:—"There is no doubt that the large corporations are now under the control of a very different kind of man than they were when Roosevelt and Bryan and LaFollette were on the warpath. The new executive has learned a great deal that his predecessor would have thought was tommyrot. His attitude toward labor, toward the public, toward his customers and his stockholders, is different. His behavior is different. His manner is different. His press agents are different. I am far from thinking he is perfect even now, but I am certain that he is vastly more enlightened and that he will take ever so much more trouble to please. He is no doubt as powerful as he ever was, but his bearing is less autocratic. He does not arouse the old antagonism, the old bitter-end fury, the old feeling that he has to be clubbed into a sense of public responsibility. He will listen to an argument where formerly he was deaf to an agitation.

"Whatever may be the intrinsic good and evil of such things as the wide distribution of securities, however questionable may be some of the practices to which Professor Ripley has called attention, the net result of the new attitude on the part of capital has been to create a new attitude on the part of the public. The press agents of the corporations have been told to woo the public, and their wooing has been successful. Suspicion has died down. Yet here again we must recognize that it would not have died down if capitalism as we know it were not making most people feel quite comfortably well off."

"The Art of Ballyhoo"

THE importance of the publicity man as a valuable intermediary between science and the public, is stressed in an article by Silas Bent in *Harpers Magazine*. He too studies the criteria of news evaluation. We quote a few paragraphs:

"It is common newspaper shop talk that big news is bigger now than ever before. This depends, of course, on what one means by bigness. On any basis of authentic valuation the sinking of the Titanic was a bigger story than the Snyder-Gray murder trial in New York; the World War Armistice a bigger story than a transoceanic flight; yet neither got so big a 'play' in the press. The news is no bigger now, but the headlines are; and the volume of space accorded to outstanding events, even though of minor social consequence, is greater. . . .

"Long before scientific news (excepting possibly eclipses of the sun) had a fair showing in our newspapers, the Homeric musings of Henri Fabre on the insect world were being translated and greedily devoured on this side of the water. Outlines of history, of literature, and of philosophy, biographies, and popularized expositions of technical subjects sold on a comparatively large scale long before the daily press awoke to this new appetite.

"Even then the awakening was partly due to the skillful prodding of press agents, who enabled the man of science to meet the newspaper reporter on a common ground, without fear on one side of being made to look ridiculous, on the other side of having the heart cut out of any story submitted for a visé. The publicity man, familiar with news values and familiar from intensive study with the scientist's work, proved in this instance a valuable intermediary. Employed as a rule by a college, university, or research laboratory, he acted as a

necessary reportorial auxiliary. It is about the best thing that can be said for him. The practices of the guild as a whole have been of such doubtful character that there has been a movement to professionalize it and establish a code of ethics: that is, to put upon a higher plane what newspaper men are wont to call space-grabbing, and to sanctify the ballyhoo of commercial commodities."

Fame

STACY Aumonier, essayist, discusses that shy damsel Fame, who, along with the modern flapper, has discarded her Victorian reticences, and now dashes out boldly to meet more than half way, any one who woos her. Here are a few sighing excerpts from an article in the London *Daily Mirror*, in which he tries gently to switch off the spot-light on sports, so that, at least in this field, Fame may blush unseen:

"Nothing has been more striking during the last few years than the metamorphosis in the general nature of Fame. In the old days Fame was reserved almost exclusively for kings, politicians and soldiers, with occasionally a little concession to an artist of some sort, or to a scientist.

"All this has now changed rather violently. Monarchies have become extremely democratic, and their fame depends more upon their domestic virtues than upon the glitter of their sceptres." . . .

"The cinema, the car, the radio, the aeroplane have all presented channels of quick access to the favours of this wayward goddess. Colonel Lindbergh in thirty-five hours achieved fame which any politician would regard as dazzling for the labour of thirty-five years.

"But it is undoubtedly in the realms of sport that the greatest changes are observable. Sport is a newcomer to these attentions. A century ago no one could attain fame through skill at a sport. But now!" . . .

"A Nelson who wished to establish his fame as a seagoing hero would be well advised to start by swimming the Channel." . . .

"If the newspapers appear to display undue attention to the athlete at the expense of the intellectual, it is not the newspapers' fault. It is because people are overwhelmingly more interested in physical activity than they are in intellectual speculation.

"And it is not surprising. Sport is the one thing universally understood.

"But this very universalism and popularity is beginning to have an effect which one can only describe as regrettable. It has made fame temptingly accessible. That which was designed as a relaxation for mind and body, to be modestly enjoyed, is now performed in an arena with the searchlights of the world focussed upon it. The consequence is that the relaxation has become a grim and nerve-wracking business."

"Free and Equal"

LIFE is large and complex, as evidenced by this clipping from *Life:*

" 'What I like about your United States', said the Britisher, 'is that you have no upper and lower classes, as we have in England, or castes, as in India. Every one is free and equal.'

" 'Yeah', replied the American. 'All we have over here is the Four Hundred, the White-Collar Men, Bootleggers, Wall Street Barons, Criminals, the D. A. R., the K. K. K., the Colonial Dames, the Masons, Kiwanis and Rotarians, the K. of C., the Elks, the Censors, the Cognoscenti, the Morons, Heroes like Lindy, the W. C. T. U., Politicians, Menckenites, the Booboisie, Immigrants, Broadcasters and—the Rich and Poor.' "

America is full of classes and groups. He who would appeal to the American public can reach them through all these smooth-worn channels of communication between individuals.

Romantic Wisdom

IT is necessary, in propagandizing an idea, to provide the correct emotional setting. Mussolini is a master in establishing the correct operatic background for what he does, and for what he wants to have others do. Nearer home we have an example culled from *The New Yorker:*

"Our finger ever on the nation's pulse, we report a significant happening of last week. At one of the neighborhood movie theatres we saw a film showing the workings of the prohibition air forces. While the orchestra played 'My Country 'Tis of Thee', 'Dixie', and other patriotic airs, we saw prohibition agents getting their orders by field telephone, leaping into a natty seaplane, darting off into the sunset and, later, swooping down upon a tiny dot in the ocean, which turned out to be a 'rum craft' loaded with wicked bottles of Scotch.

"Is the Prohibition Unit, we wondered, going to be classed with the Army, the Navy and the Marine Corps? Will bands play, flags wave, and enthralled crowds stand at attention and salute when, in the years to come, the agents are shown making an arrest? Will the hearts of fair maidens beat in faster rhythm and young men choke with pride and exclaim, 'That's *my* country's prohibition unit'?

"We suspect that the rum officials have sagaciously adopted this policy of dramatizing their activities. If successful, the obvious result will be the success of enforcement and the discomfiture of a lot of prophets."

"Insuring Insurance"

UNDER that title Earnest Elmo Calkins has written an article appearing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, that we believe should be quoted in this journal. Unfortunately we can print only a few paragraphs:

"Metropolitan Life devotes its space to teaching the value of health. Hartford Fire promotes fire prevention. Each of these campaigns helps all life and all fire insurance. But these two and a few others are too small to create the mighty chorus necessary to inflame the public mind and give to the word 'insurance' the power to penetrate the consciousness and arouse, quicken, and stir the interest that the words 'motor car' have. . . . A hundred campaigns as good as Metropolitan Life or Hartford Fire would do that very thing. With such a body of publicity, insurance would crop up in the news like baseball, radio, or aviation. Nearly every front-page news story has its insurance slant—the Sherry-Netherland fire, the Snyder murder, the transatlantic flight. The insurance slant is not stressed in the news because the topic is of small interest to the public. The insurance companies confirm this state of mind by their destructive silence.

"Things are not talked about because they are intrinsically interesting—they are interesting because they are talked about; because they are brought to our minds daily and hourly, and we are compelled to take account of them." . . .

"They have not learned, for instance, the value of publicity for its own sake, apart from its material benefits.

"The whole world has at the moment been thrilled in contemplating the feat of a gallant young American who flew alone in one continuous flight from New York to Paris. It was one of those happenings which make us proud of the human race. Each of us went about our task with a little more enthusiasm. The world where such things could happen was a pretty good place after all. Suppose it had been possible for Lindbergh to take off without publicity. Suppose for some unimaginable reason the newspapers did not consider the event news. Remember, the Wright brothers' first flight was not considered news. And so there would have been gathered together down there on Curtiss Field a little group of well-wishers, backers, and airmen. All that night, instead of hanging breathlessly on scraps of news while Lindbergh winged his way through night and silence, the civilized world would have gone about its appointed business, not knowing that a great event was in the making. When Lindbergh reached Le Bourget what happened would have been something like what Lindbergh, with his innate modesty, imagined would happen. He would have landed in an empty field, watched by airmen and others who happened to be on the spot; he would have told them what he had done, and they would have been slow to believe him. He would have parked his plane, hunted up a mechanic, got a cab, and set off to Paris to present his letters of introduction and convince another thrilled group that he had really flown across the Atlantic.

"What a loss that would have been to the known world! The feat would be just as fine, just as brave and skillful and wholly admirable, but no one would know it. We should lose all the thrill, the inspiration, the enhanced faith in humanity that the knowledge of it gave us—the take-off, the long night of anxious waiting, the safe arrival, the spontaneous reception; two whole hemispheres warmed and stirred and drawn together, not by what young Lindbergh did, but by the high privilege of knowing what he did, and sharing it. Most of the benefit of that flight would have been lost without publicity. It is not unknown good, but known good, that benefits the world. And so with insurance. The life companies have written $11,000,000,000 new insurance in the last twelve months, and not one of us a whit wiser or better or more uplifted because of that fact. It all happened off stage. Yet the stories behind that vast gain would move and stir us, did we but know them, as did Lindbergh's flight or the Mississippi flood."

Dangerous Propaganda

HOW aeronautics is utilized as a vehicle for propaganda is illustrated by the following article from *Editor and Publisher:*

"FLIGHT TO PUBLICIZE COLOGNE PRESS MEET

"International Press Exhibition Underwrites Trans-Ocean Hop of Lt. Koennecke Set to Start Soon for Philadelphia

"The flight from Cologne to America of Lieutenant Otto Koennecke is now assured as far as the financial question is concerned, according to a *New York Times* dispatch. The City of Cologne and the International Press Exhibition, known as Pressa, in which the United States will participate when it is held next year, have agreed to furnish the necessary funds.

"The flight will serve as propaganda for Pressa. It has been arranged that Lieutenant Koennecke shall carry a number of letters from the Reich Exhibition Commissioner and from the President of the committee to prominent personages in America.

"The flier will also personally transmit the greetings of Pressa to John Clyde Oswald, president of the American Preparatory Committee, and also letters from the Mayor of Cologne to the heads of the city administrations of New York

and Philadelphia. The plane will carry the flags of the city of Cologne and of Pressa.

"Lieutenant Koennecke is prepared to take off as soon as weather conditions permit."

We quote the headlines with the article, since the headlines illustrate the importance of the reason for an aeronautic expedition.

This method is becoming increasingly popular as it is increasingly successful. Certainly the men who fly across the ocean to-day are receiving far greater attention than the pioneers who flew some years ago—Who remembers their names?

Classic Press Agent

AN amusing article on "Martial: A Roman Journalist" by Keith Preston was discovered in *The Bookman*, in which the author makes a jazzy estimate of the ancient Roman "wisecracker", and states that "he has survived every serious poet of his day". Preston says of Martial, "He was the first press agent and professional panegyrist with a long list of fairly profitable accounts." It is our own belief that the art and practice of propaganda originated when the first man wanted the second man to be convinced of an idea, and it is also our belief that propaganda originated as a profession when a third man had to convince a second man that the idea of the first man was worth accepting, for which friendly service the first man gave the third man a piece of fruit or a stone for a weapon.

To quote a little from Mr. Preston:

"He was the first press agent and professional panegyrist with a long list of fairly profitable accounts. The rewards of panegyric then of course were pathetic compared with the pickings in these enlightened days. When Martial needed a new toga, he turned a graceful compliment to some wealthy friend. Sometimes he got the toga, sometimes not. If not he wrote another and a more fulsome epigram. A presentable toga was essential for dining out with possible patrons, a duty which the needy poet confessed but deplored as follows:

> "How can I stand it? How can people wish
> My output cramped so, just for soup and fish?
> Gosh! It's a month now since I wrote a line—
> That comes of asking poets out to dine!

"Some of Martial's press-agenting was on a larger and more profitable scale. A well deserved tribute to that artistic and philanthropic millionaire, the younger Pliny, earned the poet travelling money back to Bilbilis. A whole book of epigrams, the 'Liber Spectaculorum', consists of publicity for the imperial circuses."

Great or Famous?

EMIL Ludwig tries to separate the chaff of fame from the wheat of greatness in an article in *The New York Times Magazine*, wherein he declares that there are four great men: Edison, Einstein, Masaryk and George Bernard Shaw—in an age when "the greatest fame of our day is harvested by screen stars and prizefighters", and when even military leaders fail to reap the harvest of fame that once was gathered by them. To-day, he says "all the nations erected their great monuments of bronze and marble to the Unknown Soldier." Clearly the reasons for fame change throughout the ages, while greatness is an absolute quality.

"Fame is not equivalent to greatness—were this not so Chaplin would be much greater than Bergson—and posterity can correct the overestimation of popular idols and adventurers, the underestimation of neglected artists or defeated statesmen. But, even then, a great name has its ups and downs in history's changes of fashion; and the tale of the vicissitudes undergone by the fame of Rembrandt or Napoleon, Washington or Goethe, is a sort of ghost story about their epochs.

"The fame accorded to the living is no guide to a correct estimate of their greatness—on the contrary, it rather hinders contemporary judgment. Nobody, said the ancients, is to be called happy before his death, for if human life be looked upon as a complete drama, a bad fifth act can extinguish the light shed by four good acts. Moreover, can a living person be extolled as great? Can death extinguish a great deed?

"Rarely is an artist, almost never is a statesman, correctly estimated during his lifetime. Sometimes he is rated too low, usually too high. And this is worse to-day than in former times, since the speed with which all news is spread makes a man famous in the shortest possible time without giving him, so to speak, a chance to present proofs. The name of Lindbergh became known overnight—quite deservedly, to be sure, in his case—to 500,000,000 people; but one must bear in mind that the name of Dr. Cook became equally famous, nor was it until too late that people found out that he who had been hailed as the discoverer of the North Pole was a fraud."

Real Estate Information

"INCORPORATION of the Westchester Information Bureau by a group of real estate owners and bankers of the county marks the first step in what is to be a clearing house where prospective home owners can obtain data on Westchester County. The plan of the organization is to have a central bureau in the Grand Central terminal, where every facility will be given to prospective real estate owners to obtain the kind of property that will suit their needs."

The (New York) *World.*