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**NEWSPAPER ETHICS**

Accuracy, Regard for Individuals and Observance of Confidential Communications Very Important.

By PAUL M. BRICE, Editor of the Columbia (S. C.) Record.

(Paper read before the South Carolina Press Association.)

The subject assigned me to consider has so many different phases arising from the almost innumerable circumstances incident to the conduct of a newspaper that only a few of the leading ones, in my estimation, may be touched upon, and in the brief time which your indulgence can be asked these can be discussed only in a more or less superficial way, and my only hope can be that some suggestions may be made which will be of some value for future thought and action.

The ethics of journalism have a three-fold application in practice—first, as the newspaper relates to the public; second, as it relates to the individual, and, third, as it relates collectively and separately to those following the profession.

The first great duty of the newspaper is to print the truth as to what is published in the way of news or opinion. It is much to be feared that many newspaper men forget their cardinal principle and their duty and responsibility in reference to it. The newspaper has been characterized as the parent, the school, the college, the pulpit, theater, counselor, all in one, to hundreds of thousands of people. This is not too strongly put. All of these look to the newspapers for information, many for guidance and direction as to their action on public questions, and quite likely many are influenced even in their private affairs by what they read in their papers.

With such a responsibility upon us and with such a powerful lever in our hands for good or evil it becomes highly necessary that every newspaper man be thoroughly imbued with the idea that first of all the truth must be the goal he is to strive for. What the readers of newspapers want is the truth about whatever matters of human interest are printed. It is the one thing they are justly entitled to expect and what the newspaper is under solemn obligation to give them. The principle applies to any matter of news, no matter how insignificant it may be in comparison with others. Many men form their judgment from what they read about questions of intimate concern to society and state, and this being true we ought to realize the ever present duty of giving the public the truth, free from bias, with out tinging or coloring to suit the plans or purposes of a newspaper. To practically deceive is morally if not statutorily criminal, because it is possible thereby in practical effect to work to the great detriment of the moral, social and political welfare of the people.

The generality of newspapers strive to present the truth in fairness. It is not possible always to be strictly accurate, but every honest newspaper will strive to attain accuracy and make its best endeavors to give the facts as they are, whether they are agreeable to the newspaper or not. Honesty is the best policy, not only because it is right, but because only by adhering to it can we secure and hold the confidence and respect of the public and have that influence for

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good which we should always strive to exert.

In these days there is a growing tendency to exaggerate and to magnify even the most ordinary item of news into something sensational. Stories are "played up" with big headlines, the facts distorted or embellished with the imagination and, though not actually indulging in falsehood, perhaps is essentially deception. This practice is held by those indulging in it to be evidences of push, progress and smartness, but nothing is further from the truth, and while some of the public may be deceived into thinking so, the real thoughtful people look to conservative newspapers for accuracy. Sensationalism may sell papers, but you can't fool the people all the time, and in the end they will look to those journals with a reputation for conservatism and reliability for their information and for guidance in so far as they may be influenced by the opinions expressed in them.

The sort of journalism referred to is not only treating the public unfairly, but it is a very dangerous and damaging practice. Once we get the habit of deception in dealing with news it will become difficult to cast it away and editorially it is undertaken to further enlighten the public as to the trend and meaning of public events. The plain, unvarnished truth is often sensational enough—too much so sometimes—and, while it may be dressed up in fine writing, if you will, it is strictly unethical and so recognized by all honest newspapers to deceive intentionally. Accuracy is the first great and urgent demand required of every honest and permanently successful newspaper.

Another great principle of journalistic ethics is that the individual must be treated with consideration and respect. His character and good name must be held sacred, his private affairs inviolate. Ethical considerations require the observance of these principles in the first place, public sentiment demands them in the second, and the individual, in his part of the country, at any rate, is a potent factor in enforcing them if there is any disposition to violate them. As long as a man remains a private individual this treatment of him is not only required in fact, but is just and right. When, however, one becomes a public character through holding office or seeking it, then circumstances and conditions may change.

There is a popular idea that a public man's official acts are legitimate subjects of criticism only. This in some respects is true, but it is not a rule without an exception. Public office is a public trust, and the manner in which any man will fill that trust largely depends upon his private character. A corruptionist will not become corruptible by the mere fact that he is placed in office by public favor or factional politics. Dishonorable, untrustworthy, immoral men do not have their natures changed by the accident of the ballot, and hence when an individual becomes a public character not only his public or official affairs, but his private acts and general conduct, are the subjects of legitimate investigation and criticism.

If he is found wanting, lacking in that character and those high attributes which would make him the proper custodian of the people's moral and industrial welfare, it is not unethical for a newspaper to publish proved, unquestioned facts as to his private life which will inform the people of the manner of man he is and what they may logically expect should they confer their suffrages upon him. This is not a license, as some are inclined to view it, but rather it is the bounden duty of a conscientious, public serving newspaper so to do. Such so called license is a matter of almost everyday occurrence in metropolitan journals of the highest standing and respectability. No popular indignation is incited thereby, nor do those so "attacked"—that being the word used by the guilty—commit a greater crime because of any false notion that they must maintain their honor at the expense of shedding blood. The people have been trained by the newspapers to realize that their course in this respect is for the public good, and they therefore endorse, sustain and support the papers in that particular.

We have hardly reached that stage of development yet, for even in the case of the vicious and dishonest, if he so happens to be of some prominence and have a veneer of respectability, there yet lurks an idea that to expose him is abusing the liberty of the press and taking unwarranted and unexcusable license with a private individual's affairs. No good man's character can be safer than in the keeping of South Carolina newspaper men, and it ought to be equally certain that no bad man's character, when it becomes a menace to society, or when he aspires to attain public position, shall be free from exposure or lie hidden from public view because of any prominence he may have or of a reputed respectability that may be his because of family connections or social relations.

The individual also has sometimes a closer relation with a newspaper. He desires at times to express his views on public questions to the public, and he should be given a square deal. Of course it all depends upon what he says and how he says it whether this privilege should be allowed, but when granted no advantages should be taken of him in a controversy or an attempt be made to belittle his argument by references calculated to ridicule or degrade him or his ability, because it should be remembered that all the world is the editor's audience, while the individual is confined to that of a comparatively narrow circle composed of friends and acquaintances.

No positive, inviolable rule can be laid down in such cases, but generally the correspondent should be given the most urgent consideration, and certainly no one should be barred from a hearing because his views may differ from those of the editor. As to the value of the contribution as to the news, the interest the public may have in the subject and the spirit of the writer—but ethics require that a man be given a respectful hearing when he asks for it and courteous treatment after it is allowed him.

Applying the ethical code again to ourselves, I should say the first great obligation to the public and to individuals is to sacredly observe and re-

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gard every confidential communication intrusted to us. This is an elementary precept of a moral duty which holds good in all calling. Nothing, however, will so soon destroy all trust in a newspaper as a violation of any agreement not to publish certain matters or to publish them before special times and before they are "released," as the technical term is. The temptation is great sometimes, and newspapers have been known to violate their agreement for the temporary advantage of a "scoop," but besides being morally wrong, and highly so, that sort of work doesn't pay. A newspaper that can't be trusted is a pariah, an outcast, not only among its contemporaries, but with the public. The most successful newspaper men, other things being equal, are those who can be trusted. Those who cannot be trusted, positions and draw salaries, but they will never attain that individual success which is possible. As is the individual so is the paper, and the one in which confidence is lacking will not be respected or successful in the end.

The next ethical precept, which ought to be an inviolate rule, I fear is more honored in the breach than the observance. I refer to the too common practice of clipping from other newspapers without credit. In plain everyday language, this is stealing.

There is a certain class of news which may, in a sense, be considered common property. Those papers taking news service print practically the same thing about a particular occurrence. For a paper not taking this service to clip any article of that character without credit is not strictly right, but because it is somewhat common property its appropriation may possibly be overlooked. When, however, a newspaper, through enterprise, foresight or brain, secures and publishes a special article, whether of news or otherwise, treating it in its own way, stamping it with its own individuality, as if were, certainly that is its own property, and to appropriate it without credit is not different from stealing anything else of value from an individual. The immorality in the one case is the same as in the other, though a great many newspapers do not take that view of it.

The recklessness with which some are guilty in this respect is startling, and the extent of the practice can be hardly realized unless one takes occasion to look into the matter particularly. Examples of it may be seen almost daily. Newspapers, as a rule, have no objection to the publication of special articles by another, provided credit is given, and, considering the fact that they cost money and are the product of brain and enterprise, surely this consideration alone entitles them to the courtesy of credit, to say the least of it. If circumstances compel or justify the republication of special matter, to be honest and give due credit does not detract a particle from the value of interest of the article, nor is there always any reflection upon enter-

prise because we do clip from other papers. I have seen it held that there is no ownership or copyright in news. In some respects this is true, but even if there is no ownership or copyright when matter is used without credit the question will still confront us, is it fair, just and honest? and there can be but one answer to that.

Another well established ethical principle is that the columns of one newspaper ought not to be opened to criticism of another, especially where it is evident that the source of it springs from personal dislike, pique, or malice. Perhaps all of us have had experience with the man who engages in a controversy with us. There must come a time for an end, and when both sides are fully given that is all that can be demanded. Rejected manuscripts after this are often submitted to another paper for publication, accompanied with a denunciation of the other for a refusal to continue the discussion. Unless there has been a flagrant unfairness or an effort made to stifle public discussion that courtesy which ought to exist among all newspapers would dictate that a refusal be given to publish, especially when the effort is made to abuse or injure the paper in which the controversy originated.

It is not well that the avenues of publicity be in the control of one man or particular set of men, but when a fair, honest newspaper rejects a manuscript it must have had good reasons for doing so, and for another to "butt in" and take it up is generally an evidence of envy or malice, neither of which ought to have any place in our dealings with each other. While no unchangeable rule can be laid down as to this matter, the general principle holds good that one newspaper ought not to interfere with the particular affairs of another, although they may relate in some degree to the public.

It is highly unethical, finally to indulge in personalities in editorial commentaries. Invidious or derogatory reflections can add nothing to our argument and indeed are an evidence of weakness. As a rule, the public is little concerned as to the personality of a writer. All of us have our faults and failings, but it does not necessarily follow that we have not a high sense of honor and right. To attempt to belittle an argument by personal reflection is a most reprehensive practice and displays often a paucity of intellect and generally a mean, unenviable disposition.

It adds nothing to the good name and reputation of journalism, and, while it may make some impression on the thoughtless. It does not deceive those of different mental caliber. It tends to destroy respect for newspapers and undermines their influence. There is too much work for all the newspapers to do in the advancement and upbuilding of the people and the state for them to lessen their power by indulgence in vituperation and abuse of each other. It creates bitterness and strife, destroys the solidarity that ought to exist and that mutual confidence, regard and respect without which our work is hampered and our usefulness greatly retarded.

The ideal newspaper in every respect has not yet been printed, but this should not deter us from striving with every effort to attain it as far as possible.

cried down and may at the last moment be selected by some one who has not many spare moments to spend in preparing a Christmas gift.

Chief among the dainty contrivances which might easily be made at home is a book made of six inch strips of wide moire ribbon, opening like a tablet. The outside cover is of delicate pompadour ribbon doubled to form a cover and containing four leaves within of plain colored moire the same width, all being fringed at the bottom to the depth of an inch and a half. In each ribbon "leaf" is stuck a set of pin of all sizes, with heads the color of the ribbon in which they are placed. The pink moire has pink pearl pins; the blue moire, blue pins; the white moire, white pins, and the yellow or green moire, yellow or green headed pins. A loop of ribbon at the top of this attractive little book makes it possible for it to be suspended from a hook at the side of the dressing table.

A ribbon chataigne to hang at the side is another useful gift. Choose a flowered moire about an inch wide and

make into four lengths, hanging from a rosette, in which is fastened a safety pin to secure it to the belt. The longest streamer, about half a yard in length, should have a pair of embroidery scissors fastened to the end. The other lengths may have a glove mender, wax, emery, needlebook or any necessary aids to sewing or embroidery, and the whole when finished is an inducement to tempt even the most reluctant fingers into being industrious.

Many of the younger men take particular interest in their rooms. To such a present of a sofa pillow is always most welcome. One made of satin in his school or college colors may have his school or fraternity shield painted or embroidered in one corner.

Calendars are so useful, and with a little ingenuity very pretty ones may be manufactured at home. Another practical gift for a man away from home is a laundry bag of some kind shade in denim, with the owners monogram worked in large white letters in the corner.

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