

Chesterton Likes U. S. Journalists, But Finds 'Head' Writers Cynics

By G. K. CHESTERTON.
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This article is the second of a series appearing in The Washington Times in which Mr. G. K. Chesterton writes about "First Impressions of America." The first article appeared last Sunday.

Among my impressions of America I have deliberately put first the figure of the Irish-American interviewer, standing on the shore more symbolic than the Statue of Liberty.

The Irish interviewer's importance for the English lay in the fact of his being an Irishman, but there was also considerable interest in the circumstance of his being an interviewer.

And as certain wild birds sometimes wing their way far out to sea and are the first signal of the shore, so the first Americans the traveler meets are often American interviewers, and they are generally birds of a feather, and they certainly flock together. In this respect there is a slight difference in the etiquette of the craft in the two countries which I was delighted to discuss with my fellow-craftsmen.

If I could at this moment fly back to Fleet street (I wish I could) I am happy to reflect that nobody in the world would in the least wish to interview me, I should attract no more attention than the stone griffin opposite the law courts; both men and women being grotesque, but also familiar.

COMPARES BAD JOURNALISM TO "STOLEN THUNDER."

But supposing for the sake of argument, that anybody did want to interview me, it is fairly certain that the fact of one paper publishing such an interview would rather prevent the other papers from doing so. The repetition of the same views of the same individual in two places would be considered rather bad journalism; it would have the air of stolen thunder, not to say stage thunders.

But in America the fact of my landing and lecturing was evidently regarded in the same light as a murder or a great fire, or any other terrible but incurable catastrophe, a matter of interest to all pressmen concerned with practical ends.

One of the first questions I was asked was how I should be disposed to explain the wave of crime in New York. Naturally, I replied that it might possibly be due to the number of English lecturers who had recently landed. In the mood of the moment it seemed possible that if they had all been interviewed regrettable incidents might possibly have taken place.

But this was only the mood of the moment, and even as a mood did not last more than a moment. And since it has reference to a rather common and a rather unjust conception of American journalism, I think it well to take it first as a fallacy to be refuted, though the refutation may require a rather longer approach.

I have generally found that the traveler fails to understand a foreign country, through treating it as a tendency and not as a balance. But if a thing were always tending in one direction it would soon tend to destruction. Everything that merely progresses finally perishes.

AMERICAN INTERVIEWERS HAVE GOOD MANNERS.

The American interviewers really have exceedingly good manners for the purpose of their trade, granted that it is necessary to pursue their trade. And even what is called their using method can be said to cut out both ways, for if they hustle in, they also hustle out.

It may not, at first sight, seem the very warmest compliment to a gentleman to congratulate him on the fact that he soon goes away. But it really is a tribute to his perfection in a very delicate social art; and I am quite serious when I say that in this respect the interviewers are artists.

It might be more difficult for an Englishman to come to the point, particularly the sort of point which American journalists are supposed, with some exaggeration, to aim at. It might be more difficult for an

Englishman to ask a total stranger on the spur of the moment for the exact inscription on his mother's grave; but I really think that if an Englishman once got so far as that, he would go very much further, and certainly go on very much longer.

American interviewing is generally very reasonable, and it is always very rapid. Add even to those to whom talking to an intelligent fellow creature is as horrible as having a tooth out, may still admit that American interviewing has many of the qualities of American dentistry.

Another effect that has given rise to this fallacy, this exaggeration of the vulgarity and curiosity of the press, is the distinction between the articles and the headlines; or rather the tendency to ignore that distinction.

The few really untrue and unscrupulous things I have seen in American "stories" have always been in the headlines. And the headlines are written by somebody else—some solitary and savage cynic locked up in the office, hating all mankind and raging and revenging himself at random, while the neat, polite and rational pressman can safely be let loose to wander about the town.

For instance, I talked to two decidedly thoughtful fellow-journalists immediately on my arrival at a town in which there had been some labor troubles. I told them my general view of labor in the very largest and perhaps the vaguest historical outline, pointing out that the one great truth to be taught to the middle classes was that capitalism was itself a crisis, and a passing crisis; that it was not so much that it was breaking down as that it had never really stood up. Slavery could last, and peasantry could last, but wage-earning communities could hardly even live, and were already dying.

MADE TO TAKE SIDES IN TROLLEY STRIKES.

At this moral and even metaphysical generalization was most fairly and most faithfully reproduced by the interviewer, who had actually heard it casually and idly spoken.

But on the top of this column of political philosophy was the extraordinary announcement in enormous letters, "Chesterton Takes Sides in Trolley Strikes."

This was inaccurate. When I spoke I not only did not know that there was any trolley strike, but I did not know what a trolley strike was. I should have had an indistinct idea that a large number of citizens earned their living by carrying things about in wheelbarrows, and that they had desisted from their beneficent activities.

Any one who did not happen to be a journalist, or know a little about journalism, American and English, would have supposed that the same man who wrote the article had suddenly gone mad and written the title. But I know that we have here to do with two different types of journalist, and the man who writes the headlines I will not dare to describe, for I have not seen him except in dreams.

BELGIAN TROOPS CLASH WITH GERMAN REBELS

PARIS, April 2.—Belgian troops clashed with Communists at Moers, Germany, several being killed and a number wounded, according to a Havas dispatch from Mayence.



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