

Fifty Years of Newspaper Life.

PRELIMINARY.

THE origin of what follows was an Address given to the Glasgow Branch of the British Typographia, a Society of Compositors who have the laudable ambition of making their workmanship in typography more perfect and beautiful. They asked me to occupy an evening with them in their Course of Lectures; and as the series was meant to be of a practical or informing nature, it was arranged that I should say something on the subject of Newspaper Life, with which I have been in touch during my 50 years' connection with the *Glasgow Herald*. Several of those who heard the Address, and other friends who heard of it, urged that it should be printed; but it seemed to me that if it could interest friends enough to give it such a distinction the subject was entitled to more deliberate and fuller treatment. I therefore venture to deal with it in a more comprehensive form and with kindred material, in the hope that it may form a slight record of the important transition period from long enthrallment to the boundless freedom now enjoyed by what has been called the Fourth Estate of the Realm. As the reminiscences, &c., also are almost all from a Publisher's standpoint, they may supply to some extent matter not contained in Books on Newspapers.

Some of what is given might be said to belong properly to either of the newspaper departments; but a leading newspaper of the present day must have well defined division of labour, and also unity of action. My subject, therefore, involves some commingling of matter in the story, and in consequence becomes rather a thing of shreds and patches. I

am not a *litterateur*, much less a book writer, and at best may try to follow Coleridge's advice to a friend:—"I would inform the dullest author how he might write an interesting book—let him relate the events of his own life with honesty, not disguising his feelings that accompany them." That suggestion, however, involves a little awkwardness in bringing in the element of the autobiographical here and there, but that cannot well be avoided.

The transition time referred to had not quite begun when my connection with the *Herald* was formed in September, 1845. I was then engaged by Mr. Alexander Waters, the managing partner, who, after his death, was succeeded by his brother, Mr. James C. Waters, of Craigton, Stirlingshire, my predecessor.

That transition time was also a transformation period, during which several newspapers which had been published twice or thrice a week developed into "Dailies." The narration of the experience of the *Glasgow Herald* during these changes, although referring chiefly to one paper, may be considered fairly typical of the experience of the leading daily newspapers out of London. While that transformation some years after 1845 was very critical in some cases, the papers gradually took deeper root and grew in character and strength, until, by the evolution and use of the Electric Telegraph and Railway systems, these "Country" papers reached a position somewhat parallel in influence to that of the Metropolitan papers. The chief remaining difference is that the latter give much of their space to foreign news letters, and ignore to a large extent home news, while the ex-London daily papers reverse that method.

The abolition of the Advertisement Duty of 1s. 6d. on each advertisement in 1853, and of the compulsory 1d. stamp in 1855, were both great factors in the making of newspapers; but the latter was supremely important. A few years previous to these events, however, and partly in anticipation of them, the owners of some of the old papers, and many sanguine newcomers, were feeling their way and reconnoitering with

a view to the starting here and there of daily papers. These taxes, with that of 1½d. per lb. upon all kinds of paper, were heavy drags upon enterprise; and they prevented to a large extent the use of what, on the other hand, were the great advantages of prompt conveyance, quick transmission of news, and better processes of newspaper-production, which were taking practical form about that time in Railways, Electric Telegraphs, and rapid Printing Presses, with duplicated stereotyped pages. In 1845 the first two of these were in their infancy, and the last was little more than a dream. Within 16 years thereafter those hindrances had disappeared, while these means of progress were realised beyond the greatest expectations, and the newspaper world came to be like a new creation. As the hindrances and the helps were vital, and as the rise and progress of the latter came more into evidence in connection with the newspaper, it may not be out of place to refer to them separately.

ADVERTISEMENTS, AND THE ADVERTISEMENT TAX.

THE first advertisements in newspapers of this country seem to have appeared in the first half of the seventeenth century. It is stated that papyrus leaves, about three thousand years older, have been found at Thebes, containing an advertisement giving a description of runaway slaves and offering a reward for their capture; and on some walls in Pompeii the remains of advertisements may be seen. But we have no information as to the tax they had to pay, if any! There were various methods of advertising in old times, one of which still lingers in the person of the village or town bellman. He was relied upon from an early period as the recognised official for publishing by bell and voice the advertisements of the locality, from London downward. Glasgow had, for a time prior to any record, its scarlet-coated bellman, for which position there were

generally many candidates, and often men of some peculiarity of character or person. One of them last century was Dougal Graham, a Highlander who was said to have been out at some of the civil war fights, including the finale of '45; and Bellman Geordie thereafter, who was also a "poet," and adapted his gift to occasional announcements. The office was only abolished twenty years ago. Dumbarton had also a quaint Hielan' bellman or drummer last century. The tradition is that, as he could not read, he had to trust to his memory, and when a company of strolling players were there he was asked to advertise their performance of "Catherine and Petruchio; or, The Taming of the Shrew." Donald, however, went through the town with a local female publican "on his mind," and called out that the playactors would give a grand performance of "Kate Macleish; or, The Turning of the Screw," to which rare invitation a crowd would no doubt appear with lively expectations.

One account says that in England the first tax was imposed on newspaper advertisements, being a charge of a certain amount upon *each line*. The increase of advertisements was very slow, but few and small though they were, the Government, during 1711, pounced upon them and upon paper, because of "finding it necessary to raise large supplies of money to carry on the present war" with France. This tax began on 1st August, 1712, and was 1s. on each advertisement, and enacted to apply for 32 years after. Unless this duty was paid within 30 days there was a penalty of treble the amount and costs incurred. Some years after, the duty was raised to 3s., in 1815 (Waterloo year) to 3s. 6d. in Britain, and in Ireland to 2s. 6d. These taxes remained till 1833, when they were reduced to 1s. 6d. in England and Scotland, while Irish papers were only charged 1s. After many years of keen fighting, in and outside of Parliament, against what were well called the "Taxes on Knowledge," the first to be abolished was that on advertisements. After a resolution to do this was carried in the House of Commons, Mr. Gladstone, as Chancellor of the

Exchequer, proposed instead a reduction of the tax to 6d.; but an amendment was proposed by Mr. Craufurd, the member for the burghs of Ayr, Irvine, and Campbeltown, and carried by a majority of 9, to substitute in the schedule an 0 (a cypher) for the 6, so that the tax ceased on the 4th August, 1853. In contending for this entire abolition, Mr. Bright argued that the "miserable sixpence" proposed to be retained would be more than made up by the greater postal correspondence arising from untaxed cheaper advertisements. The forecast of John Bright was soon found to be right; since the Advertisement Tax ceased the postal revenue increased. There was a curious parallel experience with the Advertisement Duty and that on Soap: they both began and ended at the same time, and they had somewhat similar rates of taxation.

THE TAX, "SEPARATE INTERESTS," &C.—In 1845 we paid £1,597 13s. to the Government for its tax of 1s. 6d. on each advertisement, representing a total of 21,302 for the year, or over 205 for each publication, an unprecedented number up to that time. That 1s. 6d. would now prepay for three small advertisements, or one advertisement for four days. If it was levied now on all our advertisements, about £40,000 a year would require to be paid on them to Government; and the grand total from the newspapers of the Kingdom would form a nice item in the Budget. The revenue from the three greatest advertising media in the United Kingdom—the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Glasgow Herald* (which are a good way ahead of those that follow), would alone amount to above £130,000 in the year. These figures indicate the vast increase of advertising since "the days of the taxing." I must make an exception and explanation to the rule of 1s. 6d. duty on each advertisement. When pricing the advertisements, we had to read them carefully in case there might appear in any one of them the semblance of the interest of more than one person; because if, for instance, an advertisement referred to more than one property for sale which belonged

to more than one person, the Government official would certainly charge us 1s. 6d. for each owner. When adjusting our accounts monthly with the sharp-eyed official, I had many a tussle as to what was more than "one interest,"—a phrase which occasionally appeared at the end of an advertisement so as to anticipate the official's challenge. But we had occasional trouble also in persuading advertisers that, as we would be charged for more than one, we required to charge them accordingly. On one occasion, for instance, an old house-factor was in this position: as he would not admit that he saw the reason why, I gave him a personal illustration, by saying, that if he and another man each wanted a wife, and stated their wants in one advertisement, it would mean two interests (perhaps I should have said four). He paid down without another word for two interests; but I did not learn till he was gone that I was innocently more personal and apt than I had intended to be, as it turned out that he had recently got his discharge from one wife, and was trying to annex another.

In connection with this frequent wrangle over the tax, a contemporary in October, 1845, was provoked to write on this subject as follows:—"A system of increased rigour has been commenced in the perusal of advertisements and paragraphs, with the view of detecting what are called 'separate interests.' In this way advertisements which formerly paid a single duty are mulcted in two or three duties. For example: a teacher announces at the foot of his advertisement he has accommodation for two or three boarders—this is charged an additional duty; a steamboat announcement contains, perhaps, an allusion to an excellent hotel, or to an omnibus for conveying passengers, and in both the hotel and omnibus the lynx-eyed officials profess to descry separate interests, and lay claim to an additional 1s. 6d. for each! But more than this, they have the impudence to interfere with our duty as public chroniclers, and to levy an unwarranted tax on paragraphs of ordinary news, provided only

they contain any intimation whereby they allege private interests may be benefited. Critiques on pictures, announcements of early fruit, which newspapers have been accustomed to insert merely as pieces of news and as likely to interest their readers, have been suddenly discovered to be advertisements and charged by the Stamp Office officials accordingly."

RATES, SIZES, &c., OF ADVERTISEMENTS.—It does not appear what prices publishers charged for advertisements during last century, but they were themselves under the necessity of paying for the theatrical announcements which they inserted. In 1721 the *Public Advertiser* stated that theatres were "a great expense to the paper," those of the Drury Lane Theatre costing that paper £64 8s. 6d., and those of Covent Garden £66 11s. It seems, however, that those papers which had the exclusive right to maintain such a connection made a boast of it. That journal also stated that some papers at that time were in the habit of paying £200 per annum to such theatre managers as supplied them with descriptions of new plays, while the messenger who first brought a playbill received half-a-crown. A reversal of that anomalous state of things took place about the close of last century; for it seems from marked files of the *Herald*, at the beginning of this nineteenth century, that Theatre, Concert, and Lottery Advertisements were charged at the rate of 1½d. to 2½d. per line. Newspapers were then compelled by law to publish advertisements relating to Bankrupt Estates, Game Lists, &c., at 3s. each, irrespective of length; and for more than the first half of this century their rate was limited to 3d. per line for Government Notices, Lists of Bank Shareholders (which were then published annually), &c. The injustice of these fixed rates was that they were so much under those considered fair for all other advertisements.

Until the repeal of the Advertisement Tax, our lowest charge for any advertisement was 4s. 6d., covering three lines and under; now the lowest normal rate is 2s. for three lines and

under. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, and probably before that time, almost all newspapers had to some extent discriminating rates,—the lowest being for advertisements the purpose of which was to earn a living, such as Tradesmen's Business Notices; while the higher rates applied to those which usually represented realised wealth in different forms,—such as Prospectuses of Public Companies, Official Notices, &c. Generally newspaper owners do not covet large advertisements if they can get equal revenue from comparatively small ones, on the ground that the latter are of more interest to readers. The tendency now with advertisers is to have long advertisements in order to gain the attention of readers better, so that there appear even page and two page announcements of trade specialties. The longest advertisement on record in Britain was that of a Conservative Address to the King, in the *Times* of 29th December, 1834, which occupied 24 columns (or 4 pages of 6 columns each). A page advertisement appeared there in 1856, in the form of a petition to Parliament by mercantile firms, &c., against the Sunday delivery of letters in London. It cost £108. Some time after, the *Times* had an advertisement exceeding two pages. It was the republication of a pamphlet replying to an attack upon the British and Foreign Bible Society. It cost £250. Several page advertisements have appeared this year (1895) of which the *Herald* has had a good share, at the *Times* prices.

It is not a rarity to learn of some readers who go over their newspaper from beginning to end, the advertisements included, although the size of many newspapers must very severely tax their time and perseverance. Newspapers, however, are now more than ever daily historians, and contain much information and entertainment in their advertisement columns as well as their news. They tell the facts, and show the enterprise, ingenuity, the manners, fashions, customs, and vagaries of Society, exhibiting a vast quantity of human nature in its infinite varieties;

and those who skip the advertisements miss often not a little. But the vast increase and extent of them at higher rates than were paid hitherto form the best proof that they are largely read, and that those who insert them find from the result that they are more than repaid. *

In contrast with the experience of newspaper owners of last century, when instead of being paid for the publication of Theatre programmes they had to pay for them, it may be mentioned that the whole libretto of Macfarren's opera of "Robin Hood," occupying $4\frac{1}{2}$ columns, appeared in the *Times* as an advertisement on 16th October, 1860, for which Mr. Walter and his company were well paid. No doubt, however, the owners of the opera would find themselves more than repaid for their enterprise.

In the year 1865 a new feature in advertising was started by several newspapers opening their columns for small advertisements relating to "Vacant Situations," "Wants," "Houses to Let," &c., at 6d. each, prepaid, for a certain number of words, instead of keeping to a minimum of 2s., the normal credit rate. Some years later we extended this offer to 1s. 6d. for four consecutive insertions,—a system that has been largely welcomed by the public,—and adopted by other papers. To many of these advertisements answers are asked, which generally are to be sent to the care of the newspaper publishers. I find that such replies

* After writing this chapter, the following illustration of fruitful advertising happened to come under my notice—a case of frequent occurrence :—Mr. Edward Scott, an extensive Boot and Shoe Maker in Glasgow, when settling a £300 account for the *Herald* and the *Evening Times*, stated to our collector that he never paid an account more willingly, because he had got so much good by it. He also wrote to me as follows :—"I have just had presented to me your charge for two weeks' advertising, which amounts to the sum of £300 5s. 6d., being the largest account I ever paid to any paper for so short a period. It affords me pleasure in giving a cheque for the amount ; and, in doing so, I can assure you that this has been the most successful sale of my business experience. This proves that there is nothing like long-established and tried advertising mediums for announcements, especially if carried out on a large scale."

often fill our letter boxes to the extent of over 6,000 letters at one time, and that there is an average of fully 500 calls per day for them. It is no uncommon case for such advertisers to be humorously alarmed at the quantity they have to carry away, and in consequence to leave many for our waste basket, while their writers are hoping for responses to their applications. Occasionally a disappointed applicant finds consolation in his imagination that he had been replying to bogus advertisements, and has written angrily of somebody somewhere, who tried to befool him.

EDITING OF ADVERTISEMENTS.—It may safely be said that no one outside of newspaper publishing offices knows how the many and various advertisements received have to be watched and considered to prevent a possible fraud upon readers, defamation of character, entangling statements, &c., &c., sometimes by a single word or under a disguise. These might easily involve the proprietors in actions for damages ; but I cannot remember one such case in our experience. Besides these, many fat orders are refused, such as those from quack doctors, indecent or indelicate, baby farming, personal, and “agony” advertisements. These latter, with varying initials, are liable to be misappropriated by susceptible readers to themselves or their friends, and to cause much trouble. It is much more difficult—indeed impossible—for the Editorial department to guard the news columns so effectively, because of their being dependent upon a host of correspondents, not only in the United Kingdom, but at the ends of the earth ; and because the news is of so infinitely varied a character that its bearings cannot be always estimated. Not long ago, for instance, a small paragraph, supplied by one of the News Companies of London, appeared in some 18 daily papers, referring to a case of supposed deliberate and almost habitual wrecking of vessels on the shores of a distant country. For this they were all pounced upon, and had to settle up. Newspapers run more risks in the public interest than the public know.

The editing of advertisements when, as in our case, they are numerous and many of them long, requires to be done, not by one, but by several men—first by the general manager or leading clerk, then by the foreman printer, the compositor, and lastly by the corrector of the press. The first of the two following cases is caught in time, and suspended for examination by the clerk in the public office; and the second, if it escapes there, naturally falls upon the others to correct the punctuation, and prevent it being laughed at:—“How to make £3 a week without any trouble. Enclose eighteen stamps for sample and information to ———.” The other is: “Wanted, an experienced Cook to take charge of the Kitchen, &c., of the Hydropathic at ———. Apply with references and if married to the manager.”

The medical authorities of the United Kingdom forbid their members advertising in any shape, or by “oblique advertisements,” in the form of testimonials to certain compounds. This is in keeping with medical ethics or etiquette, and while it saves newspaper editing of doubtful matter, it prevents advertising by anyone of a large and important class of society. This course would so far suit Leigh Hunt’s brother John, who, when starting the London *Examiner*, refused to have trade advertisements, because they were calculated to lower the dignity of their paper.

PERSONAL RISKS.—Besides the burdens of taxation—which window-glass, soap, &c., representing the blessings of sunshine, health, and cleanliness, had also to bear—newspapers and their owners personally had long been under exceptional treatment, as if they were natural enemies to the State. No paper could be legally started until the names of its proprietors had been registered, and at the same time heavy security given by and for them to Government, and as against claims for damages by the public. The capacity of newspapers was rigidly limited by each successive Act, and penalties in connection with that and several other matters abounded. Their owners and publishers were, until April, 1852, ineligible for membership of Town

Councils, and also, by custom as rigid as special statute, they were habitually regarded as unfit for the position of Justice of the Peace, nor were they in England allowed to sit as members of Public Health Boards until 1855. It may be mentioned also, but only as an unavoidable hardship, that they and advertisers were liable to a penalty of £50 for publishing an offer of a reward for the recovery of lost or stolen goods with the words "no questions asked." That is one of the things we continue to guard against, because of its self-evident necessity in the interests of the public; but the legal penalty is still in force.

IMPOSITIONS ON AND BY NEWSPAPERS.—There are many artful dodgers, and "respectable" dodgers too, who attempt to get free advertising, or better than what is paid for, by means of so-called news paragraphs or letters—"A Lieutenant-Colonel home from India," for instance, writing on the extraordinary healing virtue of a special herb used by all the natives. It is rarely they are so frank as one innocent who wrote us lately, enclosing a paragraph for insertion, and saying—"As we do not intend to spend in advertising, we are appealing to the Press to notice our movement in their news columns." There are also attempts to be guarded against in the shape of disguised official, semi-official, and seeming disinterested information; and another kind by those who give an occasional or short advertisement, and make that a plea for getting puffing matter in as news, from a paragraph up to a column in length, on the plan of "give an inch, take an ell."

At the anniversary dinner of the Newspaper Society, in May of this year, Mr. Arthur J. Balfour, leader of the Conservative side of the House of Commons, asserted that "Blackmailing by the Press was absolutely unknown in this country." This is too sweeping, for it is only justice to the clever fellows who impose *on* the Press to state that there are also a few cases of imposition *by* newspapers. These are very exceptional to the upright and honourable character of the Press of the United Kingdom. The method of these papers—all or almost all "weeklies"—is to

blackmail those who have an interest in certain advertisements, such as Prospectuses of Companies, by defaming them when they are withheld or puffing them if orders for insertion are given. This threat is well enough understood, although not expressed in such a form as to convict those who try to victimise advertisers. The editor of *Vanity Fair* recently stated that an advertisement in praise of certain mining shares which had appeared in his paper reappeared as editorial news in some thirteen different papers, which was no doubt paid for,—thereby misleading their own readers. This case is somewhat kindred to a very objectionable feature that seems to be growing of giving advertisement paragraphs amongst the news without showing that they are advertisements.

METHODS OF ADVERTISING.—The ingenuity of advertisers to get at the best methods of securing attention of likely customers has taken innumerable forms in matter and style of setting. Many are content with honest simplicity and directness of statements, others believe in the most lavish word pictures of their boundless stores, and “poets” have been employed to tickle the fancy of the public; while there is a tendency to have some advertisements in such prominent type as to make papers very much like placards. It is said that one of the largest London advertisers deliberately misstated in his announcements well-known points in history, with the desired result of getting from 300 to 400 letters per week for a time, expressing surprise that such an ignorant idiot should be kept to write the advertisements; but it paid well.

During the agitation for the repeal of the Advertisement Duty, a good argument urged against it was: Why tax such announcements in a newspaper, and allow those upon walls, hoardings, and advertising vans to escape entirely—the one does not obtrude itself, nor obstruct the streets, &c., as the others do? But when Parliament abolished it on newspaper advertisements, the members recognised the arguments so far as to pass an Act, which came

into force within a month of the other, to prevent advertising by means of vehicles, on horseback, or on foot, in the form of pictures, placards, notices, &c. This Act is very sweeping, and if enforced would have cleared the streets not only of the obstructing advertising vans, but such as the sandwich man, singly or in perambulating troupes; but except perhaps in London it is almost entirely neglected. London, however, is much disfigured by sky-signs, which were not covered by that Act because they were not invented till afterwards; but the Glasgow Town Council put a stop to this dangerous method by getting a clause into their Further Powers Act of 1892, which enabled the authorities to prevent them in future, and to cause two to disappear which had been erected previous to the passing of the local Act.

LOTTERY ADVERTISEMENTS.—The 2½d. a line Lottery Advertisements referred to State Lotteries, which were brought to an end by Parliament on the 18th October, 1826. By means of them the Government Treasury had a revenue of from £250,000 to £300,000 per annum; but the evil consequences to Society were so great, that even a Parliamentary Committee declared that “idleness, dissipation, and poverty were increased, the most sacred and confidential trusts were betrayed, domestic comfort was destroyed, madness was often created, suicide itself was produced, and crimes, subjecting the perpetrators of them to death, were committed.” On the morning after the last lottery, the *Times* said,—“Yesterday terminated the lotteries in this country—may we say for ever? Looking at the Stock Exchange, at the time bargains, and at all the iniquities practised there, we have only to hope that the place of the lotteries may not be supplied by some more mischievous system of knavery.” State Lottery Advertisements from the Continent of Europe are still sent for insertion in newspapers in this country; gambling and swindling advertisements in numerous disguises are also offered at the highest prices, but self-respecting newspapers, even without legal obligation, prefer to guard their readers by putting them in the waste basket.