

THE JOURNALIST'S POINT OF VIEW

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WAYNE GILLILAND ANSWERS STANSELL'S CRITICISM.

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I was very much interest in Prof Charles V Stansell's article criticising the newspaper published in a recent issue of the Nation magazine and re-printed in the Campus. This letter in the Nation embodies in a nutshell the ideas of all of those who criticise the American newspaper as it is today. A great deal that Prof Stansell writes is true, but I believe most of the ideas set forth are fundamentally wrong.

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The theory of discriminating in printing news is nothing more nor less than the old idea of censorship. Russian method of government censorship of administration news has always been decried in the United States. Prof Stansell's idea of discrimination is just as fundamentally opposed to the principles of truth and justice as a royal censorship. If Prof Stansell's idea of a reformation of the press comprehends a "trust" of college "intellectuals" who shall lay down some cardinal principles for determining what is fit and what is not fit news to publish, the suggestion is one of grave concern for the fundamental principles of freedom in thought and action. But if he means only that the censorship of the newspaper shall be left to the individual trained in college journalistic schools to believe that reactionary policy of discriminating in the matter of news is just, then his ideas must be criticised on the ground that if put into practice they would serve to augment rather than to eliminate the evil of suppression of facts. If he would not have a combination of theorizing professors lay down the elements of what is not news, but would leave the question of suppression to the individual, he is not improving on the present condition of affairs.

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Prof Stansell is fundamentally wrong when he asserts that "crime is not made odious by constant exposure, but it is made to appear common." This applies to crime of all kinds. Close analysis shows that every crime is a social crime. Theory and practice will back up the statement, that publicity does not in the long run make social evils common. This would be true if the newspaper did not assume an editorial attitude on all criminal actions. The fact that newspapers in general condemn criminal actions makes it all the more true that publicity makes the practice of crime unpopular. How can Prof Stansell harmonize his theory that publicity makes crime common in light of the fact that newspaper publicity is largely responsible for the modern public attitude as regards the white slave evil? This is a form of social evil that has existed from time immemorial. Reformers in times past have condemned it and condoned for the segregated district in the same breath. Newspaper publicity on the worst criminal aspects of the question has convinced a large per cent of the public spirited thinking people that the "Red Light" district is unnecessary and ought to be abolished. Senator Kenyon of Iowa recently asserted on the floor of the Senate that he believed the newspaper had more to do with stirring the people to demand the enactment of the "Red Light" bill than anything else. Four years ago the "playing up" of the disgusting scenes in "Hookers Division" during inauguration week opened the eyes of the public. Today every senator and congressman is flooded with petitions for the enactment of the Kenyon "Red Light" law. John D Rockefeller, Jr., an active worker for the cause says that he was first interested in the work by newspaper stories of evils of the traffic.

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And yet Prof Stansell makes the assertion that "crime is not made odious by constant exposure!"

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If Lillian Russell's fourth or fifth marriage is heralded far and wide, it may result in stricter marriage and divorce laws. At least Prof Stansell can not deny that there is a greater clamor now than there ever was before for more uniform divorce laws, for statutes that will make impossible such disgusting facts as the fourth or fifth marriage of Miss Russell, or the flagrant violation of principles of common decency that made possible sensational headlines about John Jacob Astor's marriage.

When Governor Blease shouted, "To hell with the constitution!" at the recent conference of governors at Richmond, he did not popularize "cussing," nor make "common" a contempt for such a sacred thing as the constitution. What he did more than anything else was to hurt Governor Blease. The newspaper should be praised and not censored for holding up to public gaze such political asses as Blease and Tillman, who pose as statesmen. If an enterprising newspaper reporter had not made a "story" out of Blease's silly remark, it is more than likely that the nation would only half believe some of the charges that have been made against him as governor of South Carolina.

I have admitted that Prof Stansell is partly right, but I have attempted to show how he is fundamentally wrong. Now for the facts in the case as I see them. A conscientious editor can not publish a newspaper according to any policy

other than that of printing "all of the news all of the time" Or stated another way which means the same thing, he must print "all of the facts all of the time" This means that he can not suppress essential details, no matter how revolting If publication of crime has brought about legislation that protects the masses from being wronged by the few, it is not right to make a crime appear to be any less of a crime by suppression of actual detailed facts I disagree with Prof Stansell that the public devours "unwholesome news and swill-tainted fiction" published in the newspaper The public generally reads only enough of a disgusting fact to get at the truth, and its perception of the truth has been so sharpened by newspaper reading that it is generally able to detect a "swill-tainted" fabrication clothed with a semblance of truth. The newspaper story of a crime only adds fuel to the hatred of crime that is becoming more and more popular and resulting in beneficial legislation

All good newspaper editors caution reporters to print only the truth, and a "faked" story generally leads to a summary dismissal of a reporter

In defense of the newspaper and in justice to the public, which Prof Stansell has chosen to compare to a "big baby," it must be said that the evils that exist in the press, and it cannot be denied that they do exist, are not common with the great mass of newspapers Whenever an editor permits a story to be garnished by an untruth he breaks the cardinal principle of justice and sears his conscience, but he is no more guilty than any other individual engaged in any other kind of business or profession In addition he violates the ethics of the newspaper profession We can no more think of reforming the press by suppressing the facts than we can hope for social justice without first developing higher ideals of citizenship in the individual The kind of reformation of the press that Prof Stansell pleads for will not be accomplished by suppression, it will be accomplished in the exact degree that society itself reforms

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