

III

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEWSPAPER

THE printing press, the railway, the telegraph, and the wireless have "put a girdle around the earth in forty minutes," as Puck boasted he could do in Shakespeare's day. But even before the discovery of printing, even in the Middle Ages, news sometimes traveled with remarkable rapidity. When Charles the Good of Flanders was murdered in 1127 at Bruges, the fact was known in London on the second day after the deed, being carried thither by merchants who fled the country at once. The same information reached Laon in Champagne by the evening of the second day, in this case through Flemish students resorting to the French schools.

The mediaeval French poet, Chrétien de Troyes, writing about 1150, tells us of a sudden quarrel between two knights which resulted in a challenge, and that word of the forthcoming conflict between them was so rapidly spread that the field was crowded with onlookers from miles around.

The vagrom monk, the wandering friar, but above all, the pilgrim was a great dispenser of news in the Middle Ages.

"The pilgrim was a recognized transmitter of news and letters were written in expectation of one of these stray travellers. The guest-house or *hospitium*, attached to a monastery was one of the chief channels by which intelligence of passing events was disseminated through the more sequestered parts of the country. Jerome in his epitaph on Fabiola observes: 'In one summer Britain has learned what

the Egyptian and Parthian have known in the spring.' Theodoret speaks to a similar purport. So early had the pilgrim distinguished himself as a news-agent. The explanation is easy. The pilgrim enjoyed exceptional facilities for gathering news, either from the concourse of people of all nations, or from flying colloquies with strangers he met on the road." The mediaeval hospitium to some extent supplied the place of a tavern, a club and a local newspaper.

In 1275, the statute later known in the days of Charles II as the "Statute of False News" was passed. This Act of 3 Edw. I. c. 34 enacted:—

"Forasmuch as there have been oftentimes found in the Country devisors of tales, whereby discord or occasion of discord hath many times arisen between the King and his people, or great men of this realm. For the damage that hath and may thereof ensue, it is commanded that from henceforth none be so hardy as to tell or publish any false news or tales, whereby discord or occasion of discord or slander may grow between the King and his people or the great men of the realm. And he that doth so shall be taken and kept in prison until he hath brought him into Court which was first author of the tale."

In 1378 the Statute 2 Rich. II c. 5 extended this by enacting that "devisors of false news and horrible and false lies" about prelates, peers and other dignitaries and crown officials should be punished in like manner. And in 1388 the Statute 12 Rich. II. c. 11 further provided "when any such is taken and imprisoned and cannot find him by whom the speech be moved, as before is said, that he be punished by advice of the Council, notwithstanding the (above mentioned) statutes."

The late Siméon Luce in his *La Jeunesse de Jeanne d'Arc* has proved that the defeat of the English at Mont St. Michel

Early History of Newspapers 143

on the coast of Brittany was quickly known in Lorraine. The news was carried from village to village by common carriers, soldiers, merchants, and travelers.

Before the age of printing, royal edicts, police regulations and important events such as the birth and marriages of princes, war news, treaties of peace or alliance, were communicated to the public by the town crier. The invention of printing did not put the crier out of business, for a large proportion of people in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was unable to read. But the crier now read the ordinances and official news from a printed placard. The archives of Paris and London preserve examples of these placards endorsed by the official crier to the effect that he had duly proclaimed them through the streets.

The invention of printing gave wings to news, although it was nearly two centuries before the newspaper appeared. The sixteenth century was the age of broadsides.

This was the age of the religious wars in Germany, France and the Low Countries, of formidable invasion of the Turks in Eastern Europe; of voyages of discovery or commercial enterprise. Hence news from distant countries was an object of ardent curiosity among all classes and the rapid and regular spread of news became a public necessity. The big books, too long to write and especially too long to be read, gave place to little tracts which it was easy to spread. These in turn were supplemented by manifestos, proclamations, placards, printed upon single leaves and always on one side, which sold cheaply and could be hidden under the cloak if necessary. It was by means of this kind of circular, which could be concealed in a saddle bag or the folds of a cape, that the Protestants of France learned of the victories of their co-religionists in Germany, and they spread their own news in the same way.

As soon as printed, and while still damp, the leaves were stowed in the pack of some colporteur or peddler who was off at once to the fair of Lyons or Frankfort to circulate them. The French phrase "Nouvelles à la main" graphically characterizes this primitive form of newspaper. Commines said that one-half of the world did not know what the other half was doing. If he had known as much as is known today of the history and literature of colportage he might have qualified the statement.

Venice during the wars with the Turks, in order to pacify the intense curiosity of the public, adopted the practice of issuing a sort of hand-bill of recent news, which was sold for a *gazetta*—whence the name *Gazette*. But these early examples were far removed from the modern journal, with its careful range of information. They were simple sheets of news, appearing at irregular intervals, and were called News-Letters. Their information was almost wholly of wars and the courts. Hence the German name *Zeitungen* given to them.

In the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and James I we find many examples of these "flying leaves," to use the expressive German word *Flügschriften*, and in 1622 a company of London printers pooled their interests in the publication, from time to time, of news-letters entitled "*Weekly news from Italy, Germany, Hungary, and Bohemia.*" This was the time of the beginning of the Thirty Years' War and England had a keen interest in Bohemian affairs owing to the fact that the pretty English princess, to whom courtly Sir Henry Wotton wrote the famous lines:

Ye violets that first appear,
By your purple mantles known
Like the proud virgins of the year
As if the spring were all your own—
What are you when the Rose is blown?

The "Rose" was Elizabeth, Queen of Bohemia.

More famous still was "*The Swedish Intelligencer*, wherein, out of the truest and choysest Informations are the famous Actions of the warlike Prince Gustavus Adolphus historically led along." As the title indicates, this was a news-letter recounting the deeds of Gustavus Adolphus in Germany. It was published in fourteen parts in the years 1632-34. Complete sets are of the utmost rarity. A copy was sold in London some time ago for £12 12 shillings.

Even after the death of Gustavus Adolphus these news-letters out of Germany are found. In 1636-37 we find the two-part "*The Principal Passages of Germany, Italy, France and other places for these last sixe Moneths past, Historically reduced to time, place, and action, till the end of the yeare 1636. London, Printed for Nath. Butter and Nicholas Bourne, 1636.—Num. 2. The Continuation of the Actions, Passages and Occurrences, both Politike and Polemicall, in the upper Germanie. Historically brought downe, from the Period of the last Relation till Aprill. Together with a various and intermixed Historie of what hath been done . . . elsewhere. London, printed by E. P. for Nathaniel Butter and Nicholas Bourne, 1637.*"

It contains many details of the Swedish campaign in Germany, narrates the setting forth for Brazil of the Dutch Fleet under Count Maurice of Nassau, the Turkish invasion of Transylvania, fights between French and Spanish Fleets, etc.

This news-letter terminated with events on the continent in the Spring of 1637. The balance of the year was covered in a similar journal, but one of short title, *Diatelesma*, with the subjoined descriptive passage appended. "The second part of the Moderne History of the World, containing this last Summers actions, in Languedock, Italy, Piemont,

Montferrat, Lorraine, the Dukedom of Burgundy, the Franch County, and generally in France, Holland, the West Indies, and Marine occurrences; With some passages of Rome, and Turkey, brought downe to Novemb. 1637. London, Printed by T. Harper, and are to be sold by Nathaniel Butter, and Nicholas Bourne, 1638. 96 pp. with Table of Contents."

The stirring issues of the time of the Protectorate and the Restoration created an intense interest in political events, and hence it is not surprising to perceive that gradually domestic, home events interested the true-born Englishman more than foreign news. Some of these news-letters were:

"*Special Passages* and certain Informations from severall places, Collected for the use of all that desire to bee truly Informed" (1642). It contains news from Newcastle, Worcester, Barnstaple, Doncaster, Dublin, Bristol, Warwick, and Wolverhampton.

"*The Perfect Diurnall*" (1644). Besides some account of the progress of Archbishop Laud's trial, these numbers contain accounts of the taking of Tickhill Castle, near Doncaster, and of Sheffield Castle by the Earl of Manchester, and also of skirmishes near Lyme Regis, Leicester, and other parts of the country.

"*The Moderate Intelligencer*. London, Printed for R. W., 1645-1646."

"*Mercurius Melancholicus*." Printed in the Yeer 1647.

This last was a royalist complaint, and may hardly be called a news sheet.

"*Mercurius Pragmaticus*." 1648. A satirical commentary on the Commons' debate of a petition from the City of London, and more a series of pamphlets than a news-letter.

From broadsides, circulars and short pamphlets such as these it was a natural transition to a regular weekly or bi-weekly newspaper. In 1663 Sir Roger L'Estrange was

granted by parliament the sole privilege of publication of such a journal. This was *The Intelligencer* and the *Newes* published for the Satisfaction and Information of the People. The complete run comprised one hundred and thirty-seven numbers from August 31, 1663, to December 29, 1664. Issues were twice a week, the *Intelligencer* on Mondays and the *Newes* on Thursdays. They were the only newspapers published in England during the years 1663 and 1664.

Free political discussion first obtained in England after the revolution of 1688. In that year the monthly *Mercury* was founded and continued in existence for fourteen years. A complete set of this newspaper was recently sold in London for £6, 10 s. But the golden era of politics was the reign of Queen Anne, when the famous *Review* was founded in 1704, in which Defoe and Swift invented the "leading article." The liberty enjoyed by the English press is manifested by the fact that England in the eighteenth century possessed four daily papers—the *Daily Courant* (1703), the *Public Advertiser* (1726), the *Morning Chronicle* (1769), and the *Post* (1772), besides various weekly papers, of which the *London Gazette* and the *St. James Chronicle* or *British Evening Post* were the most famous. Political reviewing became an established practice first in the *Political State*, a monthly (1711–25), and later in the *Annual Register*. Reporting first appeared about 1770, but was not definitely organized until the eve of the French Revolution by Parry.

Commercial news was an English creation and dates from the same epoch as the political daily. The tremendous commercial and colonial expansion of England in the second half of the eighteenth century created this new department of news. Yet the value of commercial news was appreciated

much earlier. In Germany, in the seventeenth century, great commercial and banking houses like the Fuggers used to issue commercial news-letters called *Ordinarien Zeitungen* which were sold for four kreutzers each, or distributed at houses for twenty-five florins per year. This is the real beginning of the commercial press.

Paris produced the first regular newspaper on May 30, 1631. It was entitled the *Gazette* and was composed of a double leaf of quarto size printed across the page without columns. It contained news from all countries. The author of this publication and the grandfather of all journalists was a physician named Théophraste Rénaudot. He was born at Loudun in 1584, educated at Paris and the University of Montpellier, one of the great medical schools of the time, and was a practising physician in the capital, where he obtained the title *medicin du roi*. He was intellectually alert and inventive. He established the first public dispensary, where he distributed "remèdes chimiques," and opened the first mont-de-piété, where he loaned money to the poor up to an estimated one-third value of the effects pawned. In 1630 he opened a sort of "intelligence office," where parties could bulletin announcements of articles which they desired to purchase or to sell—the advance type of the modern newspaper's columns of similar advertising. This famous *Bureau d'adresse et de rencontre* stood hard by "The sign of the Great Cock, rue de la Calandre, sortant au marché Neuf, près le Palais."

The *Gazette* was a weekly paper. The first number opens with news from Constantinople and ends with news from Antwerp. News of France was discreetly omitted. The editor had no mind to become compromised with the great Cardinal Richelieu. The next four numbers exhibit the same precaution. It was not until July 4, 1631, in the sixth issue,

that a meagre allusion to the court at St. Germain was inserted. Instead Rénaudot comments upon "la secheresse de la saison"—the weather was a topic thus early—the virtue of the mineral waters at Forges and the prevalence of fever in Paris—here speaks the physician—and the printing of a polyglot Bible. The seventh number ridicules the Spanish ambassador who had just come to France to congratulate Louis XIII upon his recovery ten months before! The issue of Aug. 29 is notable, for it contains a particular account of the King—discreetly praise, not blame. After that information about the King is common, generally about his hunting.

In its second year the *Gazette* doubled the size to eight pages and had two departments, *La Gazette*, which dealt with news of the east and south of Europe and *Nouvelles* which pertained to the northern and western nations. Rénaudot soon had many imitators. The *Official Gazette* of Sweden appeared in 1644 under the patronage of Queen Christina; in Holland the *Haarlemsche Courant* began to be published in 1656; the *Frankfort Gazette* in 1658; the *Leipzig Gazette* in 1660; the *London Gazette* in 1665.

Richelieu, who was keenly alive to the necessity of influencing public opinion, soon deigned to send it official communications. Even Louis XIII contributed to it. Thus imperceptibly the *Gazette* passed into a quasi-official newspaper with inspired information. In the court circles it became a social necessity. Rénaudot died in 1653 but his paper continued. Under Louis XV its name was changed to the *Gazette de France*; it was issued bi-weekly and bore the royal arms upon its first page.

But in the seventeenth century the *Gazette* was read only by nobles, courtiers, and the professional and business class. Owing to lack both of education and of pence, the mass of the people were still dependent for information upon word

of mouth, especially on the continent. This condition created a new profession—that of the professional news vendor. M. Franz Funck-Brentano's interesting little book entitled *Les Nouvellistes* describes these popular purveyors of news, whose profession enriched the French language with a new word (*nouvelliste*), and the civilization of France with a new institution (*nouvellisme*). Indeed, a minor poet of the reign of Louis XIV gained an ephemeral reputation by a long poem in the manner of Boileau's *Art Poétique*, entitled *La Nouvellomanie*. The wide activities of France under Richelieu and Mazarin, and the spontaneous curiosity of the period of the Fronde created this class. The *nouvellistes* merely sought to satisfy the popular curiosity; they did not, and did not seek to, influence public opinion in any appreciable degree. Under Louis XIV the intense interest of all France in the life of the court and the almost continual absenteeism of many provincial families led the *nouvellistes* to widen the sphere of their activities and to reach out into the provinces for news acquired through special correspondents there. Merchants and bankers were solicited to add news items to their commercial letters.

These public gossipers were of three classes: the *nouvellistes d'état*, the *nouvellistes de plein vent*, and the *specialistes*, who dispensed literary, military, or other particular information. Each one of these classes had its especial rendez-vous. The first class, the *politiques*, as they were sometimes called, frequented the corridors and ante-rooms of the Louvre, or hung upon the outer edge of the court at Versailles. Representatives of this class were generally of wealthy bourgeois ancestry, living upon the income of their *rentes*, who found a life of ease and vainglory in what they did. The wars of Louis XIV raised the usefulness and dignity of the *nouvelliste*. Like the modern newspaper pro-

prietor, he prided himself upon the importance, the accuracy, and, above all, the earliness of his information; one such enterprising individual actually had an agent with the army in Italy during the War of the Spanish Succession, and another at Toulon to watch the movement of the fleet. An interesting example of the prototype of a modern despatch "from our special correspondent" is given in the shape of a letter written to Lionne from Cremona on February 4, 1702. This Lionne was the news-magnate of his day, and was a cousin of Hugues de Lionne, the famous diplomatic agent of Louis XIV. He organized a news bureau in the precincts of the Tuilleries; his sources of information were so high as to be semi-official. He had upon his "staff," besides the domestics and servants of every prominent man of affairs, the clerks of the various councils, the Cardinal d'Estrées, and even Hugues de Lionne's own son.

The open-air *nouvellistes* (*de plein vent*), as their name implies, were not the privileged few who had access to the Louvre and the Tuilleries, but humbler folk who frequented the street corners or other points of meeting. This class was not unlike the *improvisatori* of Italy. "They spoke of everything with admirable assurance, and with the greatest volubility," we are told, from which it may be inferred that the line drawn by them between real and imaginary news was not always a clear one. The Pont Neuf was their favorite resort. The author has a vivid description of the scene, as it must have been when the famous bridge was the foyer of Parisian life. Other rendez-vous of the *nouvellistes* were the cloisters of the Celestins and the Cordeliers, the shaded alleys of the Luxembourg, and the Quai des Grands Augustins between the Pont Neuf and the Pont Saint Michel, the popularity of which as a headquarters for information went back to the days of the Ligue. In the eighteenth

century the gardens of the Palais Royal, where the Duke of Orleans, during the Regency, and Philippe Egalité during the Revolution purchased public favor, became popular. In this century too, when imitation of things English became fashionable, the English coffee-house crept into favor. Then came the great Revolution and the birth of a host of daily newspapers.

In 1762 the *Gazette* became a four-page, double-column paper and was issued twice a week, on Tuesday and Friday. The effect of competition is visible by this time and it had to receive government subsidy. Louis XV made it an adjunct of the French Foreign Office and government officials contributed extended articles upon foreign politics. When the Revolution broke it tried to weather the storm and sought to placate the new democracy by inserting "liberty and equality" upon its title-page and inserting the word "national." Its price, however, was always too high for the lower classes of Paris and the provinces, and it could not live down the reproach of royalist attachment.

In the feverish years just preceding the Revolution Paris wanted a daily newspaper. England had possessed several since the reign of Anne. The first Paris daily was the *Journal de Paris* which appeared on Jan. 1, 1777. An article upon the Almanach des Muses, a letter of Voltaire, a book-seller's announcement, three or four details about the government, two events, a bon-mot and news of the theatres make up the first number.

The great competitor of the *Gazette* was the famous *Mercure Galant*, founded in 1672, which enjoyed immense popularity. The founder, Donneau de Vizé (1632-1710) unfolded his plan in the initial number :

"I propose," he said, "to write every week a long and interesting account of everything that I have learned in the

preceding week. . . . The least events shall not escape my pen. You will learn of the marriages and deaths that are of importance. I will make it my task to enlarge upon the conspicuous deeds of those whose valor is remarkable in the armies" (This was the time of Louis XIV's war with Holland).

"From time to time I will speak of such extraordinary happenings and such replete adventures that nothing in fiction approaches them. . . . Paris is great enough to furnish new adventures continually, for every day important and extraordinary things happen here."

Donneau de Vizé kept his word. The *Mercure Galant* was a complex journal. It contained news of promotions and appointments, baptisms, marriages, deaths, theatrical news, society news, short sermons, verse, comic songs, puzzles, and occasional learned essays. At first the *Mercure* appeared irregularly, but after 1678 it became a monthly with a total annual aggregate of three to four hundred pages. In course of time its name was changed to the *Mercure de France*, and as such survived the French Revolution. Its last issue, number 667, appeared in Jan. 1815.

The palmy days of the French newspaper were during the French Revolution. Liberty of the press was decreed after the fall of the Bastille on a motion made by Mirabeau in the National Assembly and the newspapers became the mirror of ideas, passions, and interest in public life. They multiplied over night. In 1779 France had but twenty-seven periodicals of all sorts and but three newspapers of importance. Between 1789 and 1793 there were fourteen hundred. "They fall from the sky like manna every morning," said a contemporary. Most of them were dailies. Their picturesque names are known to every student of the Revolution—*Ami de la Loi*, *Ami de la Constitution*, *Ami du*

Roi, Ami du Peuple, Ami de l'Ordre, Ami de la Verité, Echo de Paris, Courrier de Paris, Courrier de l'Europe, la Sentinelle, le Patriote Francais, edited by Brissot, the *Gazette Universelle*, edited by Mounier and Lally-Tollendal, the *Vieux Cordelier* of Camille Desmoulins, the *Courrier de Provence* of Mirabeau, the *Actes des Apotres*, the *Père Gérard*, the notorious journal of Collot d'Herbois, and the no less infamous *Père Duchesne* of Hébert.

The French political newspaper was imitated by other countries as fast as constitutional forms of government and liberty of the press was established. Spain's first daily dates from 1812, the year of the Cortes; in Germany three appeared between 1814 and 1819. The *Allgemeine Zeitung* was founded in 1798 and is the oldest German newspaper. The interims of "lean years" in the history of many early nineteenth century newspapers are explained by the reactionary repressive power of the governments under the sinister influence of Metternich and the Holy Alliance; years of rigid censorship punctured by the revolutions of 1830 and 1848.

The London *Times* has ever been the model newspaper for organization, honesty, and influence. When it first appeared, on Jan. 1, 1788, it did not essentially differ from other newspapers of the time. Foreign news naturally lacked freshness. In the first number that of Rotterdam and Paris was a week old; that of Frankfort over two weeks old and that of Warsaw almost a month old. Theatrical notices included an appreciation of *Hamlet* at the Drury Lane Theatre and of *Henry IV* at Covent Garden. A column singularly entitled "Cuckoo" included news of the day, accounts of accidents, rumors, etc. The independence of its great editor, John Walter, is manifested by the fact that he once was imprisoned for speaking of the king and queen

Early History of Newspapers 155

in derogatory terms. In 1810 a great strike among the London printers threatened the discontinuance of the *Times*, but John Walter's energy within thirty-six hours equipped an entirely new plant and the *Times* appeared as usual, to the amazement of both its friends and its enemies. During the Napoleonic wars Pitt, the English prime minister, ordered the arrest of all newspaper correspondents endeavoring to anticipate the government's means of information. At that time Walter had established a great system of foreign correspondence which extended clear to India and covered all Europe and far surpassed the government's own means of information.

English conservatism is apparent in certain immutable characteristics of the *Times* which long obtained. Page 1 was devoted to marriages, births, and deaths; pages 5 and 6 to foreign telegraph news; page 9 to news of the court and the leading article. The "Cuckoo" column long since disappeared, not without the regret of many. Page 5 has become of exceptional importance owing to the fact that the letters from foreign correspondents there appear. Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Madrid, New York, and Calcutta have each a special day. One of the greatest early "hits" of the London *Times* was its careful and complete account of the debates in Parliament.

Before the rise of the *New York Herald* no newspaper ever excelled the *Times* in enterprise. On February 24, 1848, its Paris correspondent, O'Reilly, crossed the channel in an open boat in order to carry the first news of the Paris Revolution to London.

Early American newspapers naturally followed English traditions. In almost every town of importance the printing office was a local institution like the church and the school, and the printer eked out a living by printing a local news-

sheet. An English clergyman, Joseph Glover, has the honor of having introduced the art of printing into America. In order to carry out his project he went from England to Holland and there purchased his type and press and was followed to America by an English printer named Stephen Daye. Unfortunately Glover died during the voyage to America, but his widow carried out his plan and established the first printing press at Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1704 the first American newspaper, the *Boston News Letter*, was established by Bartholomew Green. It was from Green's brother James that Benjamin Franklin learned the printer's trade. Printing was established in Baltimore by Nicholas Hasselbaugh, a Philadelphia German, and at New York in 1693 by William Bradford. A second press was established in New York in 1726 by John Peter who, in 1733, began the publication of the *New York Weekly Journal*, which was the first American newspaper of importance.

The American Revolution, like the French Revolution later, increased the number of newspapers in America, converted them into political journals, and established that domination of politics over American journalism which has ever since obtained.

The famous *Journal des Debats* created the *feuilleton*, originally a survey of the politics of the week or the month, which gradually developed into a literary essay. The last element of the modern newspaper is of American extraction and typical of America's scant respect for personal or individual privacy. This is the "interview," which was born of the *New York Herald*, was imitated by every other American newspaper, and has come to obtain in Europe, especially in France. I omit from this category the current comic page—for the "funnies" are not news, but vulgar graphic fiction.



