TRICKS OF THE PRESS; A LECTURE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649739547

Tricks of the Press; A Lecture by H. G. Creel

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

H. G. CREEL

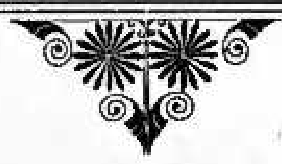
TRICKS OF THE PRESS; A LECTURE

Trieste

Tricks of the Press

A LECTURE

By **H. G. CREEL**, *Author of*
PROSTITUTION FOR PROFIT,
NEWSPAPER FRAUDS, ETC.



COPYRIGHT 1911

The National Rip-Saw Publishing Co.
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

Rip-Saw Series No. 5, Price 10c

PN
4756
C74

Tricks of the Press

Report of an Address Delivered at City Park, Kansas City, Kan., Sept. 10, 1910.

BY H. G. CREEL

Comrade Chairman, Comrades and Friends: Three or four times a year it falls to my lot to lay aside my newspaper work and take to the platform. On such occasions I am forcibly reminded of the experience of a little girl friend of mine. Jennie was an excellent speller. Her written examinations never failed to bring grades of 100. It was with her oral spelling that she had trouble. She persisted in pronouncing a letter twice when it succeeded itself in a word. For instance, she spelled "little" l-i-t-t-l-e and "apple" a-p-p-l-e. Her teacher said, "Jennie, you musn't do that. You must say l-i-double-t-l-e and a-double-p-l-e." She impressed this so firmly on the little girl's mind that later when arising to give a recitation beginning, "The sun is in the sky, Mary. Up! up!" Jennie arose and in all seriousness said, "The sun is in the sky, Mary. Double up!"

Jennie's trouble was that she recited rather than wrote what she had to say. And that's the difficulty with the average newspaper man. As I go along, I'll be obliged to refer to notes to keep from "doubling up" on my words.

If, in your opinion, I make too frequent use of the personal pronoun "I," it is not because I'm overly fond of talking about myself, but, as you'll see as I progress, somebody must stand sponsor for what I have to say. And so I shall tell you of some of the things that I, personally, know about the newspaper business.

So far as possible I will refrain from the use of technical terms. There is one, though, that I'll be obliged to use and let us get clear on that. That is the word "story." In the newspaper world everything that is not an editorial or an advertisement is a "story." If I were to witness the accidental killing of a man on the street today and write it up for my paper, that would be a "story." A "story" is not necessarily a piece of fiction. I shall use the word in the newspaper sense, referring to actual happenings—not to fictitious ones.

In the same way, when I employ the word "newspaper," I shall have to mind the large newspapers, the news agencies and the press associations. For all matter not of local character, the small newspaper is dependent upon this source for its news. This applies in the same way that the small or local merchant is dependent upon the wholesale houses or factories for his supplies. Everything appearing in the columns of your local papers, that does not concern the immediate vicinity, comes from the news or press associations, by mail or telegraph, or is clipped from other papers. We shall consider the source of this news rather than its outlet.

Here's something that's true of all newspapers: When a cub starts to work—a cub is a young man or young woman just breaking into the business—he is taken before his managing editor and told this: "Your business here is to write the truth, the strict truth and all of it. If we catch you in ever so slight a deviation from the strict line of veracity, off comes your journalistic head." And they mean it. Practically every reporter starts to work with that admonition.

But now let's see: Few newspapers are owned by men or coteries of men who have not other business interests. I don't know about your local papers. You do. Run over them mentally and see if this applies. We'll assume that the publisher of a newspaper is interested in traction stock. And this cub, who has been hired to tell the truth, comes in with a story of over-crowding, or

under heating, or lack of safety appliances on the street cars. Mind you, now, everything a reporter writes is read three times before it goes into the paper. It is read first by a copy reader, next by a proof reader and again by the managing editor. If it passes these three people it goes into the paper.

This cub's story comes to the managing editor. He is in touch with the publisher. He knows the publisher does not wish such a story in the columns. So he promptly lays it aside. And at the close of that day's business he calls this young cub to his desk and tells him, as gently as possible, "In the future put the soft pedal on traction stories. We can't use 'em. The old man's in it." That's a frequent remark in a newspaper office, "The old man's in this thing." After a few experiences of this sort the cub begins to understand. And the "truth" to him comes to mean: "Those things which do not conflict with the business interests back of my newspaper." He becomes a mental reflection of the economic interests with which his paper is identified. And yet he's hired to tell the truth!

On the old "Chicago Chronicle," every copy reader's desk contained a list of twenty-two corporations regarding which nothing derogatory could appear in that paper. The publisher of the "Chronicle," John R. Walsh, was sentenced to Leavenworth prison. He was interested in each of these corporations. Among them were three banks. He wrecked those banks. You remember that the crash swept away the savings of thousands of small depositors, though the clearing house association afterward made good the amount to all who were caught in the crash. The banks accepted money after those on the inside knew they were insolvent. But the "Chronicle" was silent. Yet you know that John R. Walsh, publisher, knew what John R. Walsh, banker, was doing. Practically every man on the Walsh paper knew that the crash was impending. But that was the "truth" to none of them. It was a business interest back of the paper. It applies to a greater or lesser degree on all newspapers. Remember this

in the future. You'll be better able to interpret the stories you read.

No cartoonist is allowed to draw a cartoon which will interfere with the business, or arouse the antagonism, of a large advertiser. In his chalk talks, John T. McCutcheon, cartoonist for the "Chicago Tribune," frankly admits the fact.

You remember, in reading your history, of the great Moon Hoax of the "New York Sun." I want to review that briefly so we can compare it with the present-day newspaper methods. This, you remember, was during the period of 1835. It was known that Sir John Herschel had gone to the Cape of Good Hope for the purpose of erecting an observatory. The "Sun" appeared on the streets one day with what purported to be an extract from the Edinburg "Journal of Science." This stated that by means of a powerful telescope Herschel had found the moon to be inhabited by human beings with wings. Great flocks of them had been seen flying about. The telescope had also revealed a most intelligent race of beavers. Pictures of these and of moon scenery were published. The story ran through several issues. Thousands of extra papers were sold. As the stages drove into outlying towns they were surrounded by crowds of excited people who refused to disperse until each had paid for and secured copies of the fake edition. This was before the day of cables. The deception was not discovered until the arrival of authentic advices from Edinburg.

Of course, in our day and age, nothing of this sort could happen. The fast mail train, the telegraph and cable are protection against such gross news frauds. But this did happen during the period mentioned. Now compare it with a more recent trick of the press.

The "Chicago Tribune" occupies school land in the heart of Chicago. By means of an illegal lease, signed at midnight, the "Tribune" is robbing the school fund of about $48,000 a year. When Edward Dunne was mayor of Chicago he attempted to annul that lease. Of course

the "Tribune" fought him. Among other things, Dunne said that the "Tribune" was not acting in the best interests of the city. To this the "Tribune" replied with a lengthy editorial in which it said:

> When Mayor Dunne fills the school board with scare-brains, anarchists and fools, he is not acting in the best interests of the city. When he packs the police department with ex-convicts, crooks and gamblers, he is not acting in the best interests of the city.

Dunne had been a judge on the bench. He thought he knew law. To him this clearly spelled libel. And he actually started suit against the "Chicago Tribune" for $100,000. But before he'd gone very far some of his good newspaper friends took him to one side and said. "Edward, don't make a fool of yourself." And he asked why. Then they quickly pointed out to him that the offending editorial said: "WHEN Mayor Dunne fills the school board with scare-brains, anarchists and fools; and WHEN he packs the police department with ex-convicts, crooks and gamblers." It didn't say he had done it at all. What it did say was that when he DID act in this way—should he ever be guilty of such conduct—he would not be acting in the city's best interests. And Dunne had to agree with the "Tribune." He dropped the case. The "Tribune" did not go into court. That was a modern trick of the press.

When reading your newspaper you sometimes come across headlines after this fashion:

**STATE BANK CASHIER
ABSCONDS WITH FUNDS?**

But few of you notice the interrogation point at the end of that sentence. That takes all the sting out of the libel—so far as the newspaper is concerned. In reality the paper states something; it can prove in court that it merely asked a question. Here are some samples:

I hold in my hand the "Kansas City Times" for Monday, July 25, 1910. On the first page are five declaratory headlines—each followed by an interrogation point. I'll read two of them:

HE WAS CRUEL TO CHICKENS?

The ''Times'' has accused an express wagon driver of cruelty to animals. But not having time or inclination to verify the story, the paper uses the handy little interrogation point. That releases it from all responsibility. Here's another:

THE INTERESTS BEHIND WILSON?

This is clearly a case of libel—if Wilson can prove that he is not backed or dominated by what we call ''the interests''—the trusts. But the sentence is clear. There's no misunderstanding its meaning. It states, without a pause, ''The Interests Behind Wilson.'' Again the interrogation point is brought into use and the gentle art of newspaper trickery goes merrily onward.

Here's another from the ''Kansas City Star'' for Sunday, July 31, 1910:

COAL CONFERENCE FAILS?

As a matter of fact the coal conference between the miners and the operators did not fail. You know positively that on the 31st day of last July negotiations were not even broken off. In the light of later events you know that there was no justification for that story when the ''Star'' went to press on July 31st. This was printed on the first page. It was sent out to dishearten the miners in the district. It is an old newspaper trick to break the ranks of a union on strike. But to clear itself, to prove in court if necessary, that it intended no misinformation at all, the ''Star'' places an interrogation point after a declaratory sentence.

In newspaper stories you read you frequently come across the word ''alleged,'' or the phrase ''it is said,'' ''it is believed,'' ''it is reported,'' etc. I want to read you something else from this same ''Kansas City Star'' July 31, 1910. I want you to see that these things are not isolated cases, accidents or typographical errors. They are carefully thought out and published with intent to deceive. This is on the first page, sixth column: