

**THE EDITORIAL; A STUDY
IN EFFECTIVENESS OF
WRITING**

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The editorial; a study in effectiveness of writing by Leon Nelson Flint

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OF WRITING

BY

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TO
MY STUDENTS OF EDITORIAL
WRITING WHO HAVE ASPIRED
TO DO THEIR WORK IN THE
PROFESSIONAL SPIRIT, AND TO
THOSE EDITORS WHOSE ADMIR-
ABLE EXAMPLE HAS POINTED
THE WAY

INTRODUCTION

In order to invite consideration of the editorial in all its aspects this book contains a brief historical sketch, as well as chapters on typography and on editorial responsibility; but the controlling purpose of the discussion has been to achieve practical helpfulness for the editorial writer, or the student, who really tries to carry his message beyond the threshold of his reader's mind, rather than leaving it on the doorstep.

Both the country editor who is trying to climb the ladder of editorial effectiveness, with hands full of distracting duties in the news, advertising, circulation, and printing departments of his paper, and the metropolitan editor who struggles upward, arms bulging with original documents, reference books, and conflicting news reports, would get along better if they took pains to observe the ladder. It behoves ladder climbers to dispense with hobbles and blinders.

This book deals with the ladder. Both the veteran, on the rung near the top, and the college youth, placing a tentative foot on the lowest crosspiece, need to know what they are about. Anything that is worth doing at all—particularly an art such as editorial writing—is worth a preliminary examination as to its purposes, possibilities and methods. And, as the years

of devotion to it lengthen into decades, it is worth frequent reëxaminations for overlooked opportunities and improvement of technique.

There is always another rung waiting for the editor who can see it and get his foot on it.

Several years of experience as an editorial writer, and as many more in work with students ambitious to become editorial writers, have gone into this book. The college student—and anyone, for that matter—will get benefit out of the presentation of a method of doing things that sets him to developing a better one. A college education or its equivalent is about to become a prerequisite for editorial work. And since the equivalent is harder to get than the college education itself, it is safe to say that the editor of the future will be a college graduate—not a raw, unweathered A. B., of course, any more than the chief counsel for a corporation will be an unseasoned LL. B. or the superintendent of a hospital, a green M. D.,—but a man who, from the time he starts out, has a college education working for him.

The experienced editor, while he may be impatient with "methods" in general, has too much interest in his means of livelihood and too much respect for his profession and too keen a vision of his responsibilities, to despise utterly fruits of experience offered by others in the same vocation. The overloaded country editor, tempted to get rid of the weight of an editorial column, welcomes some knack of juggling it in the pack so that it chafes less. The editor in the city, haunted by the ghostly columns of white space to fill, is relieved by

even a weak ray of light that makes it easier to dispel the apparition.

While it is interesting to consider editorial writing historically, and tremendously important that its ethical aspects be regarded, the writer of this study of the editorial admits that for him the greatest fascination lies in the study of technique—materials, aims, organization, style. In short, *results*.

From the news standpoint and the standpoint of broad newspaper policies, ethics is undoubtedly the most vital subject in journalism. The advance of the whole American press hinges on progress at the strategic point where honesty and accuracy and decency and fairness and responsibility and devotion, are confronted by entrenched opposition. But from the point of view of the editorial, this phase of the struggle is relatively less critical. Rather, the ground to be won in the editorial field is that of interest, respect, confidence, influence,—to some degree matters of ethics, but under present conditions, much more to be regarded as matters of psychology and technique.

On these matters emphasis has been placed in this book in the hope that the procedure outlined will be considered in the spirit in which it is offered—as merely suggestive of methods that have helped some young writers in their work and that many successful editors of newspapers and magazines, consciously or unconsciously, deliberately or spontaneously, are using every day.

L. N. F.