

## NEWS AND VIEWS

By K. H. ABSHAGEN

*Not long ago, a dozen or so newspaper men in Shanghai met for a discussion of present-day press problems. Dr. Abshagen, special correspondent for East Asia of the Transocean News Agency and an occasional contributor to our magazine, held the introductory speech. This was followed by a lively, at times even heated, discussion. One of the topics around which the conversation crystallized has been made the subject of the following article, in which Dr. Abshagen presents his and some of his colleagues' ideas.—K.M.*

IT was in the twenties. At last my dream had come true. After years of working in Berlin editorial offices, interrupted only now and again by short, reportorial trips to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, I had been given the cherished post of traveling special correspondent for Western Europe for one of Berlin's leading newspapers. And now I was proudly attending to my first reporter's function in London, five minutes from Piccadilly Circus, "the hub of the world." I was listening to a speech by a Minister of the Crown, who was explaining the Government's policy to the Publicity Club, an assembly of publishers, editors, advertising agents, and other leading men of the newspaper world.

Sir Charles H., the Chairman of the meeting, looked me critically up and down when, after the Minister's speech, I was introduced to him as a German newspaper man. He belonged to the small group of fifteen to twenty men who determine the editorial policy of the great London newspapers. "Young man," said Sir Charles, after his appraisal of my outward appearance had lasted long enough to make me feel uncomfortable, "you call yourself a newspaper man, but, look here, you haven't got any 'news'-papers in Germany, you only have 'views'-papers."

This not very friendly comment on the German press somewhat dampened my professional ardor for the moment. At the same time, however, it spurred me on to turn my attention more than ever toward the differences existing among the

newspapers of the various countries. I came to the conclusion that the British press lord's remark, although a trifle exaggerated, was not entirely without foundation. But the longer I studied this problem as the years went by, the more convinced did I become that the contempt which lay in Sir Charles's words for the type of the "views"-paper so strongly represented in the German press was unjustified.

### THE BIRTH OF "VIEWS"-PAPERS

The difference between "news"-papers and "views"-papers is not one of national boundaries: it goes through the press of all Western countries. Originally, the pure "news" press probably predominated everywhere. After the newspapers had shed their character of mere official gazettes, they became interested chiefly in providing their readers with news about events in their town and its environment and, beyond that, in the world at large. The very term "newspaper" points to this fact. But it was not long before, at least in Europe, the newspapers began to grow beyond these narrow confines. Especially during the times of political and spiritual changes which followed upon the French Revolution did the newspapers become the principal platform for discussion of a political and philosophical nature. An entirely new task arose for many newspapers: instead of providing their readers with isolated news items from all over the world, they had now to present them with a *Weltanschauung*.

Editorials and special articles contributed by experts took their place side by side with news items. The cultural and entertainment sections of the newspapers gained in size and importance. The "views"-paper was born. It is this type of newspaper which dominated the press of all European countries up to the turn of the century.

#### AMERICA LIKES "NEWS"

A retrogressive development toward mere news organs spread from the United States of America. Here the type of the "news"-paper had remained popular throughout the nineteenth century. The reasons for this are not immediately obvious. Perhaps the most plausible explanation is that the population of the United States lacked the basis of a uniform national culture. During the nineteenth century, the period in which in Europe a press came into being which endeavored to provide intellectual readers with more than just news, namely, with as complete an idea of the world as possible, North America was still at the stage of pioneering, of settling and opening up the wide open spaces of the West. The pioneers—who at this stage were representative of the population of the United States—were far too much occupied with the practical demands of each day to ask very much of their newspapers in the way of mental stimulus. Thrilling and well told news was to them more important and more interesting than profound articles.

This is probably the reason why the press of America did not participate in the general European evolution toward a "views" press, but instead increased the speed of news reporting and the colorfulness of news presentation. Naturally, this development was furthered by the progress in telegraphic and wireless communication resulting from the rapid technical development of the vast new continent.

With the beginning of the twentieth century, this type of news press began to find imitators in Europe. The greater part of the English dailies, for instance,

underwent a change of that kind. This change was started by Lord Northcliffe, the first of the modern "lords of the press." In the *Daily Mail* he created the first "news"-paper with a circulation of over a million; and his *Daily Mirror* was the Old World's first counterpart to the American "tabloids." Later he was outdone by Lord Beaverbrook, whose *Daily Express* probably resembles the American pattern more closely than any other British newspaper. This is easy to understand if one bears in mind that Beaverbrook is a Canadian (of Scottish descent) and spent his childhood and young manhood in Canada, whose press has developed entirely after the pattern of the newspapers of her great neighbor.

#### IT TAKES ALL KINDS

In studying both types of papers, one should remember that the names "news"-papers and "views"-papers (German: *Nachrichtenpresse* and *Gesinnungspresse*; French: *presse d'information* and *feuilles d'opinion*) by no means fully characterize the existing differences. The border line between both types is not as clear and unequivocal as it may seem after what has been said. Furthermore, it is not the case that in America, for example, there are only "news"-papers and in Germany only pure "views"-papers. North America and Germany are rather the two ends of a scale, a scale in which there are many shadings between the two types.

Even in America the newspapers are not limited to pages of news; they also contain editorials, leaders, and an entertainment section which in many cases is varied and extensive. On the other hand, even the most pronounced representatives of the "views" press in Germany endeavor to provide as comprehensive and rapid a news service as possible. The emphasis, however, in the "news" press is on news reporting. Its editors do not count on keeping their readers by good leading articles, much less on acquiring new readers by editorial comments. They are fully aware of the fact that they would lose thousands or even tens of thousands of readers from one day to the next, or

at least within a week, to their rivals if the news service of the latter were faster or its presentation more amusing or more sensational. In the case of the "views" press, the emphasis naturally cannot lie on the maximum of speed or sensational presentation of news. Even the objective accuracy of each news item is not enough here: the "views" press has to present it in an environment and before a background which enable its readers really to understand its significance and to appraise it correctly.

In the United States, too, there are some dailies which, besides having a good news service, fulfill the demands one is accustomed to placing on "views"-papers. In Germany, on the other hand, there are also numerous dailies which place their emphasis on news reporting. Moreover, many more or less successful attempts have been made in Europe to imitate the American type of sensation press by the publication of noon and evening papers with large circulations in the cities. In England as well as in France, there are quite a number of pronounced "views"-papers. In Great Britain, the papers of this type—among them especially the *London Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*—exert with their comparatively small circulations a much greater political and intellectual influence than the "news" press with its circulations running into many millions.

#### NEWS AND THE TRUTH

This is hardly surprising; for the "news" press cannot count upon the loyalty of its readers by reason of its political and spiritual attitude but must maintain its circulation by news sensations every day. Consequently, it must as a rule take the wishes and feelings of its readers into account, and very often it cannot undertake to influence its readers in one direction or another without endangering its business prospects.

If one were to believe the enthusiastic champions of a pure "news" press, the latter would repudiate any idea of wanting to influence its readers. For what these champions praise in their type of paper

is its absolute objectivity, which finds expression in the fact that the bare news is presented by it without any editorial comment, thus leaving the reader free to draw his own conclusions. In practice, however, things usually work out quite differently. The desire to make use of the tremendous power of a widely read newspaper to influence the reader almost always leads to a careful sifting of the news which is printed. This sifting process is, of course, carried out from the point of view of whether the news items fit into the political conception of the persons or circles determining the editorial policy of the paper. Even if we disregard the conscious falsification of actual facts in the news reporting of many "news"-papers all over the world, it is undeniable that, by means of skillfully selected true news items, far worse distortions of fact can be achieved than by obvious lies, for the very reason that no evident untruth can be proved. Thus it is an open question, whether the greater measure of honesty toward its readers is, taken as a whole, to be ascribed to the "news" press or to the "views" press, which openly proclaims its political and spiritual attitude.

#### THE INFLUENCE OF EDUCATION

What determines the development of the press in one direction or another is not preponderantly the conscious plans of the publishing world. Newspapers are, after all, not produced in a vacuum or for a vacuum. To serve their purpose they must have readers. In the last analysis, it is the desires and demands and the intellectual level of its readers which determine the contents of a newspaper. This applies just as much to the so-called democracies as to the totalitarian states. It was, for instance, not a coincidence that Northcliffe came out in England at the turn of the century with "news"-papers modeled after the American pattern. The reason was that the educational level of the English industrial population had progressed so far, i.e., the art of reading had become so widespread, that a press for the masses had become necessary, while, on the other hand, the

intelligence of the general public was not sufficient to appreciate dailies of the *Times* and *Westminster Gazette* type, which had held the field until then. In the same way, it is a natural consequence of the widespread thirst for education and knowledge in Germany—and the resulting comparatively high educational level even among the masses—that the German press was the first to develop the type of "views"-papers, a type which it has consistently maintained throughout all political changes.

It is not surprising that the varied requirements of the dailies should have led to the news agencies of the different countries having adjusted the character of their services according to the nature of the countries to which they belong or which they serve. Up to the outbreak of the present war, or rather up to the entry of America into the war, the American "United Press" agency supplied a service to many European countries, including Germany. This service differed in many respects from the service distributed in America by the same agency, as it tried to take into account the special requirements of the predominating "views"-papers in Europe. The German news agency "Europa-press" was able to develop in the period between the two world wars from modest beginnings to an important position in Germany and all Europe because its editorial policy was directed at supplying news reports made intelligible by an appropriate background. In the course of the present war, news agencies have felt a growing demand for news articles which complement the actual news service. The reason for this is to be found in the fact that readers are surfeited with news and want to be informed—not by long editorials but by short, simple articles in immediate conjunction with the news—as to what the news really means.

#### RADIO—THE BOGYMAN

For a number of years, leading circles of the press have been discussing, not without anxiety, the question of whether and how newspapers will be able in the long run to maintain themselves against the radio. In this respect, the "views" press is in a much more favorable position than the "news" press. Even with the utmost perfection in technical equipment, the newspaper will never be able to compete with the radio in the speed of reporting. The hours which are lost even in the most favorable circumstances by printing and transportation from the printing press to the reader can be made up for only in part by skillful presentation of the events. Perhaps the exaggerated sensationalism to be observed in recent times in the case of many "news"-papers is already a phenomenon of their desperate struggle against the competition of radio. Since radio cannot be beaten with regard to the priority of reporting on really important events, the temptation arises to carry off a "scoop"—so essential to the maintenance of circulation figures—by sensationally playing up what are actually events of minor significance, or even by letting free invention have its way.

The "views"-papers do not have to fear the competition of radio. Their readers are only stimulated by what they hear over the radio to inform themselves at their leisure on the background of these events as presented in their paper. Radio and "views"-papers do not compete with each other: they complement each other. Thus it is to be expected that the "views"-papers—about which the British press lord spoke so slightly at a time when radio was still far from its present-day ubiquity and technical perfection—will not only survive but even regain much of the ground lost to the "news" press.