

CHAPTER 3

NEWS

You see lads walk the street
Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?
You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;
Him you must watch—he's sure to fall, yet stands!
Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things.
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demirep
That loves and saves her soul in new French books—
We watch while these in equilibrium keep
The giddy line midway: one step aside,
They're classed and done with.

—*Browning, Bishop Blougram's Apology.*

THE primary function of journalism is to convey information. Journalism is an expression, as every living and acting element of civilization must be, of a need. It has its being—its excuse for being—in the answering of that need, in the performing of a function which civilization has found necessary or desirable.

Journalism performs subsidiary—and sometimes parasitic—functions, but its essential excuse for being today, as throughout its history, is the bringing to people, by means of its organization and technique of news gathering and writing, information which they need or desire.

Forerunners of journalism: The Greek runner who bore to Athens the news of the victory at Marathon was a reporter—in a literal sense of the word—performing a function comparable to that of the modern newspaper. His memory, his voice, and his sturdy legs were the ancient equivalents of paper, press, telegraph, radio, and postal service.

The bulletins which Caesar posted in the forum were an answer to the same demand which drives the giant presses of the modern day. In the same line of descent are the Roman news letters, the yearbooks and chapbooks of the medieval years, the first periodicals in Italy, France, Germany, England, and that abortive attempt

in 1690 of Benjamin Harris to start a newspaper in the uncongenial environment of Puritan New England.

Function in a democracy: The especial function of journalism in a democracy has been clearly discussed in recent years, particularly by Walter Lippmann in his book called "Public Opinion" and by Nelson Antrim Crawford in his "Ethics of Journalism." The journalistic function is enhanced and intensified in a democracy because of the fundamental conception of democracy that all who have the suffrage may pass judgments on public affairs and public men. If a man is to exercise his right of suffrage intelligently, he must have the data for the forming of intelligent judgments. These the journals attempt—and must attempt if they are to be "live" and "acting"—to give him. That they do it imperfectly or that the reader is unable always to assimilate the data presented does not invalidate the essential importance of the function: It merely points the direction which more competent journalism must take.

But the function of journalism is not so simple as this more or less diagrammatic exposition would imply. Journals are not the fulfillment of a "finished" sociological or economic or political need. They are intrinsically a device which society has invented for the satisfaction of a very deep human want—a device which works imperfectly and incompletely, but which has evolved and is evolving a more and more competent technique.

Fundamental service of journalism: This human craving which journals attempt to satisfy grows out of the most fundamental qualities of human nature. Perhaps the greatest battle of the human being is against isolation. One of his strongest fears is the fear of being alone. It is this fear which is the motivating force behind many aspects of human life. It drives men into groups, it has its place in the impulsion to family life, it is one of the bases of religion. Whether or not it gives rise to or grows out of the herd instinct is difficult to say, but at any rate that instinct is a very potent one. Man is afraid, in other words, of the unknown, the physically unknown and the intellectually unknown. Because journalism, in disseminating information and bringing men together, helps to break down this isolation, it is a great social force.

Very closely tied up with the fear of isolation, and with its bearing on the journalistic function, is human curiosity. It is probable that curiosity is the weapon with which men have tried to conquer isolation. If one considers curiosity in a broad sense, he sees that it is the characteristic of the human mind which drives it to the acquirement of knowledge, and that it plays, therefore, a most important role in the evolutionary scheme.

If one could trace curiosity back through human experience, he would no doubt find that it once played an almost exclusively protectionist part. The prehistoric man was curious to know the cause of a noise outside his hut, for the noise might be that of a human or animal enemy; he was curious about the weather, for it would affect his hunting or fishing.

Modern man is curious for the same definitely vital reasons. He wants to know whether his neighbor's child has chickenpox or smallpox. He is interested in the fall of a foreign government for that political event may foreshadow a world catastrophe, or the avoidance of one.

But modern curiosity is not solely protective. The instinct itself has evolved much wider uses and implications. We have now a desire to know for the sake, apparently, merely of knowing. This disinterestedness is probably only apparent, but at least it is not by any means so definitely protectionist as the limited curiosity of the child-man. A desire for knowledge, for culture, does not serve directly in the safeguarding of the physical man but is a method for the amplification of the ego, for the development of the spiritual or intellectual stature.

Journalism is then an organized attempt to do efficiently and economically what men have more or less always done—satisfy the instinct of curiosity and thereby ameliorate the fear of isolation. And, incidentally, it will be well to remark that just as curiosity has many manifestations, from, for example, the dispassionate and altruistic inquisitiveness of the seeker after scientific truth, to the trivialities of the smallest and coarsest gossip, so journals vary in the types of material which they offer to the curious.

What is news? These basic considerations lead to the questions: What specifically is news? What are its qualities or characteristics?

No definition of news is quite satisfactory. It is something which cannot be confined by formula or boundary.

What constitutes news is something a reporter and writer must know and understand instinctively or acquire through experience rather than by reading or study of textbook material.

To be news an event usually must have one or more of the following characteristics, regardless of the field in which the event may occur or the type or class of publication concerned:

1. Something that actually happens.
2. Unusual, out of the ordinary.
3. Important, not trivial.
4. Near to point of publication or to readers of the publication.
5. New, recent or timely.
6. Something that interests us.

This analysis is stated dogmatically for the purpose of making an understanding more simple. It must be remembered that we are dealing with a question complicated by the subtlety of the human mind, that no arbitrary classification can indicate all of the shades of significance which are embodied in the idea of "news value." It should also be kept in mind that the fundamental characteristics of news are exactly the same, wherever news is used. News is news, be it in a daily newspaper, a trade paper, a technical journal, although the way of writing it may vary widely in different classes of publications. These various characteristics of news need to be discussed in some detail.

1. Something that actually happens: News, first of all, is neither fiction nor something imagined. If a house burns down, that is news. But a vivid, imaginary story of such a fire would not be news. The reporter must write only of something that has happened, that is happening as he writes, or that is scheduled or expected to happen in the future.

A student in a technical journalism class wrote a story for a class assignment of how a research worker in veterinary medicine on the campus had discovered a cure for tuberculosis in humans. If true, this would have been news of world-wide importance. On checking it, the instructor found that the student reporter had merely drawn on his imagination and enlarged upon what was

only a minor bit of research about tuberculosis in a farm animal. His story most decidedly was not news.

2. Unusual, out of the ordinary: The college faculty member who daily meets his classes in the same routine way, day in and day out, may go on for years and not be news. But if he dies, becomes seriously ill, has an accident, gets a promotion to higher rank, writes a book, concludes an unusual experiment, is elected to the local school board, takes a trip to Australia during his vacation, goes to a national convention, is elected to office in a scientific or professional society or is awarded a medal for research, he then becomes news. It is the thing he does, or which happens to him, that is unusual or out of the ordinary that is news.

A farmer living on an average farm, with a wife and children, who grows the usual crops of the community with average yields and who has just average livestock and farm equipment, may not be news in his home neighborhood for years. But if his house burns down, or he builds a modern barn, or buys a new type of corn picker, or is elected master of the Grange, or wins in a corn-growing contest, or exhibits winning livestock at a fair, or takes a cross-country vacation trip, he becomes news.

The house built just like a dozen other houses in a community is not much news, but a house built of prefabricated material and the first such in a city is news.

The bridge built according to a stock plan of the state highway department, just like dozens of other bridges, is hardly news; but the bridge which embodies a new principle of design, or has the longest span, or is the highest, or which collapses and falls in a short time after it is finished, or is washed away by a flood or torn off its foundations by an ice jam, becomes news.

Just so, in every walk of life, in every business, industry, or profession, and with any individual or institution or organization, it is the unusual happening which makes news, and has news appeal.

The known, the commonplace, the usual is that with which we have already made contact. The unknown, the strange, the unusual, offers, then, opportunities for new experiences and on this basis strikingly attracts our interest.

To put the idea in other words, the abnormal, from the very fact that it is strange, has strong elements of appeal. A farmer produces a hundred bushels of corn to the acre or a ton litter of hogs. A story about either of these facts will have some value in a local newspaper or a farm journal, partly because the achievements are important, at least insofar as they stimulate other farmers to go and do likewise, but more because they are unusual. If most farmers raised a hundred bushels of corn to the acre or litters that weighed a ton, there would no longer be news in these facts.

"The honest thief," "the tender murderer" of whom Browning writes are objects of curiosity primarily because most thieves are not honest and most murderers are not tender.

This element of unusualness permeates, more or less strongly, practically all news.

The arrest of a college student in Evanston, Illinois, for driving through a red traffic signal, is news of such minor importance that it might hardly be carried in an Evanston paper and surely would not be news in a Chicago paper. But because it was an unusual happening and not common and ordinary, the following story appeared in the *Los Angeles Examiner* on a June 19:

SHE'S SWEETHEART OF COURTROOM, TOO

CHICAGO, June 17.—A judge, a city attorney, a college junior and a co-ed joined in a quartet for a new version of an old song in Evanston. Robert Mitchell, Northwestern student, was in court for a traffic violation. He said:

"We were parked, talking—you know, judge—and I was just hanging my Sigma Chi pin on her. My foot must have slipped or something. Anyhow, the car started, and we went through a stop light."

Crittendon C. Jarvis, city attorney,

coughed a bit and looked down at the Sigma Chi pin on his vest. He said:

"I know all about it, judge. 'The gold of her hair, the blue of her eyes, she's the ——'"

Judge James M. Corcoran felt beneath his robes, touched the Sigma Chi pin on his own vest, and finished:

"She's the sweetheart of Sigma Chi."

She was, too, for Judge Corcoran dismissed the case, while Miss Ciesta Kramlich, the co-ed, looked on, very prettily.

Construction of just another freighter for Great Lakes use may be news only to those directly concerned with such type of transportation. But when a new type of vessel is built, then it makes news, as did the following, which appeared in a Toronto daily paper:

NICKEL-LINED VESSEL SCOURS LIKE A DISH

PORT WELLER, Aug. 6.—En route through the Welland canal today on her maiden voyage is the 5,500-ton nickel-lined cargo carrier, Dolomite IV, unlike any other ship sailing the Great Lakes.

Built secretly near Rochester, N. Y., in an abandoned lock of the old Erie canal, and launched by syphoning in enough water to float her, the Dolomite is carrying a bulk cargo of kerosene to Chicago.

She is 300 feet long, twin screw, Diesel-powered and built to full ocean classifications.

Dolomite IV will pick up a return cargo of wheat. The ship has specially-installed scouring equipment which with her nickel linings, enables her to be quickly cleaned and take on a grain cargo immediately with no danger of damaging or tainting it.

Engineering, surgery and human interest combine to make this happening in Egypt an item to be published in the *Cleveland, Ohio, News*.

CAIRO, Egypt (AP)—R.A.F. doctors, forced to improvise in a western desert first-aid station, have performed four delicate spinal operations with the aid of a five-ton crane.

Readjustment of spinal bones without paralyzing the patients, a medical officer explained, required that the injured men

be raised gently, with even pressure, to positions in which they were suspended by the feet.

Lacking a special table and pulleys, the R. A. F. doctors requisitioned the crane, normally used to lift engines from damaged aircraft.

3. Important, not trivial: Just because something happens, even though it be unusual, does not necessarily make it good news. Many things happen that are not news. A news happening must be something that is in itself important or about an important person. The more important the happening, the more prominent the person, the greater the news value.

The intrinsic importance of an event is one of the greatest determinants of its value as news. The more deeply and the more universally an event will affect the lives of the readers of a paper, the more significant it is as the material of news. The election of the president of the United States is a great news story because that election may very closely and immediately affect the lives and fortunes of all the people of the country. This election may lead to financial economies or extravagances, it may lead to foreign difficulties and even war. Because of these potentialities and a thousand others, this event is "big" news. The passing of an ordinance by a city or town council may be correspondingly important to the citizens of the city or town. The news that a cow of a particular breed has broken the yearly butterfat production

record for her breed is important news for the owners of cows of that breed. The decision of a state highway commission to build a paved highway across a county has importance to all who have been driving over a worn-out gravel road.

A corollary to this idea is the fact that news which involves people of prominence is "better" news than that about people who are unknown. We are interested in the trivial doings of the great, not because of the importance of the events but because of the prominence of the actors in the events. Two men die, one a state official of the farm bureau, the other an unknown farm laborer. The death of the official will be an important news story, the other may not even "make" the paper. Although, presumably, both men regretted the event with equal intensity, they have not provided equally good material for the curiosity of the newspaper's readers. The death of the official is of intrinsic importance, but its news value is enhanced by the mere fact of his prominence.

4. Near to point of publication or readers of the publication: If one should draw concentric circles upon the point representing the office of the journal, the first interior circle incorporating the town or city, the second the county, the third the state, the fourth the nation, the fifth the world, he would have a chart showing in a rough way the zones of decreasing local news value. Events will have news value in proportion to their approach to the center of the circles, insofar, at least, as the point of publication represents the center of circulation of the journal. In the case of magazines of large sectional or national circulation, this statement needs modification, although it is true in principle. Also, remember that even though news may happen far away, its magnitude (and importance) may push it so far above the horizon that it comes near. War news affords an example.

Of all of the people in the world each individual is most interested in himself. He is next most interested in his family, his neighbors, and associates. He has beyond this a feeling of municipal pride, of state pride, of national patriotism.

Of all of the news stories in a journal, then, the one about "me" will be the one in which "I" am most vitally interested. But I shall also be strongly drawn to any story dealing with people

whom I know, with places with which I am familiar, with events in which I have some part, even a most casual one. For instance, one will read the story of an accident which he has witnessed with more avidity than one of an incident which he has not seen. If one has heard a speech, he will read the story of that speech with greater interest for having "had a part in it" though that part was merely one of auditor. The death of some boys who drowned in a Canadian lake interests you because you once camped at that lake.

From this it is apparent that a local story, that is, a story about an event which occurred in the town or city where the paper is published, is by all odds the best news story if it has other requisites of news value.

Because we have an emotional as well as practical response to the idea of statehood, we are more interested in news which originates in our state than in news from without. For the same reason we are more interested in news which originates in our country than that from foreign countries. Obversely, news stories other than local must be very strong in other news values to be able to compete with the local story.

This factor of news value has most weight in the case of daily and weekly newspaper stories and correspondingly less weight with stories for magazines of extensive circulation. In many of the latter, however, another kind of "nearness" than the geographical comes into play. The subscribers to a livestock breed paper, for instance, are attracted to stories in their magazine about animals of the breed which they themselves raise or about the breed organization to which they themselves belong. Although these ties are not geographical they have nevertheless a potent influence on news values. In the same way a farmer is drawn to farm stories, a woman to stories which bear on her interests, an engineer to stories about engineering developments and enterprises in his special line of work, a scientist to stories about research in his field.

5. New, recent or timely: News is something that has just happened, is happening right now, or is expected to happen in the near future. So history is not news. The blowing up of the Maine in Havana harbor, discovery of hog cholera serum, stand-

ardization of the width of railway tracks, discovery of vitamins, creation of the first hybrid tea rose, invention of rayon, discovery of insulin, learning that bacteria can cause plant diseases, finding of corn borers in Ohio—these were all news events at the time. But they are by now history. News must be new or timely, and the newer, the more recent, the better news it is.

“Have you heard the latest,” the arresting phrase with which the gossip introduces his story, is an unconsciously scientific device to secure interest, to arouse curiosity. News, as well as gossip, to be “good” news, must be new. The more recent the events with which the news deals, the better news it is.

How old may an event or incident be and still be the material of news? The answer depends upon two considerations, the type of publication in which the news story is to appear, and the familiarity of the reading public with the event. An event, the facts about which have not “leaked,” may be news for a considerable period after it has occurred. The fate of an exploring party in the Arctic may not be known for months after the event has transpired, but the story of the expedition will be news whenever it is available. A new variety of oat may be developed at an agricultural experiment station, but the announcement of the discovery withheld until the station is able to supply seed for trial plantings. When the oat is announced, even though this may be months or years after its discovery, it will provide important news. Of course, even in cases such as these, there is an element of timeliness: While the events to be described are old, their availability is new.

Obviously, the news stories which appear in a weekly newspaper cannot all deal with events as recent as those which are recorded in the daily paper. For a weekly, events which have transpired in the week preceding publication will be news. Even in this case, however, the better stories are those dealing with events near to the time of publication.

For a daily paper, news must deal with events of a much more recent occurrence. Roughly speaking, the news in such a paper will deal with events which have transpired during the 24 hours preceding publication. In a town where there is both a morning and an evening newspaper, the time will be still more contracted.

The best news for each of these papers will be about events which have happened since the other paper was printed. A still greater emphasis is put upon recency in a city where there are both morning and evening papers and where each of these papers has several editions coming at intervals from the presses.

Suppose that a convention is being held in a city where both morning and evening papers publish several editions. The morning paper will carry stories of the activities of the convention on the preceding evening. The afternoon paper, which has editions at periods from the middle of the morning until 6 or 7 p. m., will follow the events of the convention, remodeling earlier stories to include the most recent activities of the convention.

This process of getting the latest, the newest, the "hottest," material is going on continually on every publication, although the effort is speeded up to its highest rate in the case of the daily newspapers in the larger cities.

Many stories, especially those dealing with technical material or which also have informational value as well as news quality, are news only if they are published at the particular or appropriate time in the year. In these cases news value is enhanced by the seasonable publication. While this factor of timeliness in news value operates in all kinds of publications, it is especially important in the farm field, women's magazines, garden magazines, hunting and fishing or other outdoor activities magazines, and to such trade and technical journals as are closely tied in with seasonal activities. Stories, for instance, about seed corn testing, sowing wheat to outwit Hessian fly, a luncheon for the June bride, concrete mixing and pouring methods in freezing weather, fly fishing for black bass, and propagating chrysanthemums by rooted cuttings would depend for their news quality largely on the time of year when they are published.

6. Something that interests us: News must in final analysis be something that we want to hear, something in which we are interested. Running through all news is what the newspaper man calls human interest—an intangible value which appeals to our emotions; makes us laugh or cry or be indignant or become curious. Or it may interest us for some of the reasons already set forth. It

comes near to us. It may concern our work or profession, our home, our savings account, our family living. It may be just plain information of which we are in need that becomes news when it is made available to us.

Before going into details as to things which interest us, let us take a look at human interest more carefully.

Human interest: This characteristic of news is the most difficult of all to define or explain. All of the others, newness, importance, locality, unusualness, seasonableness, are news characteristics which make their appeal primarily to the intellect. Human interest—and perhaps this is the best way one can find to define it—is that characteristic of news which makes its appeal to the emotions of the reader.

The term itself is in a measure misleading, for it would seem to imply solely an interest in human beings. It is so firmly fixed, however, in journalistic speech, that it is hard to avoid its use. We must keep in mind that any event which attracts because of its appeal to the emotions has human interest.

A human interest story may make its appeal on the basis of one emotion or a combination of emotions—mirth, pathos, sympathy, horror, anger, hatred, and so forth. The emotions growing out of the sex instinct are among the strongest to which appeal is made in many news stories.

Drama is one of the surest avenues of approach to the interest of people. By drama we mean here, of course, not only the formal presentation of a human struggle upon the stage, but rather the element of the dramatic which permeates all human activities. Because, no doubt, of a deep race memory of strife as the dominant factor in race survival, as well as the part it plays today in all of our adjustments to our environment, we are inevitably intrigued by the spectacle of conflict. A hero, a villain, and a prize for which they fight, in whatever transformations these may appear, are a sure machinery for arousing emotion.

It is this element of conflict which is largely responsible for our interest in many kinds of news stories. A farmer, starting from scratch on a rented farm, meets and conquers obstacles—the weather, lack of capital, poor equipment—and wins a gradual

success. There are several elements of news value in such a story, but perhaps the predominating one is human interest. The story of the home economics teacher who extends her influence through the high school classes to many of the homes they represent to bring about changes in food preparation, is full of human interest. Sports stories, stories of court trials, of scientific investigations which have been pursued in the face of infinite difficulties—all of these lean heavily for their appeal upon human interest.

This factor of news value is present in more or less degree in many news stories. When a story depends largely upon this factor for its value, it is called a human interest story.

What interests us? Let us consider further, and in a different approach, the things which interest mankind most. A somewhat arbitrary, perhaps illogical but yet useful, classification of interests would be as follows:

1. Life and death.
2. Fight or struggle.
3. Crime.
4. Women, children, and home.
5. Adventure and romance.
6. Unknown or mysterious.
7. Information.
8. Weather.

1. Life and death: Any death is news to somebody. The more prominent the deceased, the more important in news value a death becomes. Equally true is that the death of an individual to whom the term notorious would apply, rather than prominent, is news. The nearer to us of the person dying or the more unusual the death, the higher the news value.

Likewise, human life endangered has strong news appeal. Sometimes the story of a person otherwise unknown, endangered in an unusual way or saved by a striking or startling way, gets far more news space than if the same individual had been killed or had died in a normal manner. So there is news in motor accidents, fires, train wrecks, floods, and many other happenings which may endanger human life.

News, too, is concerned with the beginning of life, and for a

newspaper births are important news items. Likewise, there is great news value in sickness, diseases, public health, sanitation, medicine, drugs, cures or remedies, serums, and preventive measures. An epidemic of spinal meningitis, typhoid fever, infantile paralysis, or undulant fever may be the biggest news story in a community, at the time. Much of this kind of news is not only of interest to the general reader, but has technical news value of importance to doctors, druggists, bacteriologists, pathologists, sanitary engineers, and others.

From the standpoint of the farmer, anything which kills or endangers the farm livestock becomes news. Thus, at times farm news concerns such matters as hog cholera, eradication of tuberculosis in cattle, or death of stock from poisonous weeds.

2. *Fight or struggle*: Anything which involves a fight or struggle, as already suggested above, has news value. The greatest fight is a war. So news of our own country at war, and preparedness and defense measures at home is of greater importance and interest than any other.

There are, however, many other kinds of struggles which make up the day-by-day run of news.

All athletic contests are of this class. Day in and year out, football, baseball, basketball, prize fights, wrestling matches, and other more minor sports, are a large part of the news in the daily papers.

Elections, all the way from that of the President of the United States down to choice of the home-coming queen on the campus, or of officers for poultry science club make news. Strikes in industry have been important news events in recent years. There has been news in strikes of field workers in California, in Ohio onion fields, of milk truck drivers; likewise in a revolt of share croppers in a recent year, and raids of the night riders in tobacco districts some years ago.

So, too, judging at any show or exhibition is a contest. This may be concerned with livestock, dairy products, grains, apples, flowers, photographs, architect's plans, landscape designs, or retail store show windows.

The field of agriculture and farm life has many types of contests

which supply news. Spelling, hog-calling, husband-calling, horse-pulling, canning, milking, cornhusking, and sheepshearing contests are all in this class. So, too, are selection of master farmers and master homemakers. Extension work has been dramatized by hundred-bushel corn-growing contests, kitchen-scoring, potato clubs, and many kinds of 4-H club and FFA contests.

3. *Crime*: The constant struggle between the forces of the law and criminals supplies frequent news. Daily papers carry stories of murders, burglaries, raids on gambling joints, arrests, trials, jail breaks, foreign spies, the activities of the FBI and other angles of crime.

There are, however, in more technical and special fields much news that comes in this same classification. Arrests for adulteration of foods, fabrics, seeds, and drugs belong here. Violation of housing ordinances by contractors or rooming house keepers, of weights and measures laws, of fish and game regulations, of health measures, or of quarantines are news. Violation of sanitary regulations in a dairy barn or a restaurant kitchen is news. Likewise is an arrest for cruelty to animals. So, too, is the bringing before a Federal court of a large corporation for a practice that involves an anti-trust law.

4. *Women, children, and home*: Love, marriage, society functions, divorce, all make news. Some daily newspapers may be more interested in that which is of a sensational nature. But others prefer to give space to the more substantial side of news which has to do with women and their activities. Children are frequently in the news. Often human interest stories in newspapers are of a child or group of children. In recent years newspapers have been giving much more space to news of club activities, schools, parent-teachers' associations, home furnishings, food, styles, clothing, 4-H club work, and many other allied interests. Home economics students and those majoring in sociology and social welfare work will find much news which can be classified in this section.

5. *Adventure and romance*: Anything which savors of adventure catches the attention of many people. A flight up into the stratosphere, a startling airplane flight, a trip over the North Pole, an expedition to the South Pole, climbing a high mountain, an ex-

ploring expedition to the Amazon jungles—these make thrilling news stories, when told.

What the beginning reporter may not realize is that some of the most thrilling news stories lie within the field of technical journalism. Adventures of plant explorers to find a new fruit or crop, the struggles of an engineer to build a road or drive a tunnel under a river, the scientist who conquers a disease, the struggles of a housewife on a lonely ranch in Montana, make thrilling stories, if only the reporter can find them.

The late William Vaughan Moody once wrote a poem, of which the following is a part:

Survival of the fittest, adaptation,
And all your other evolution terms,
Have omitted one small consideration, to wit,
That tumble bugs and angleworms have souls.
There are souls in everything that squirms.

Change that word "souls" to "news" and then it would read that there is news in everything that squirms. There is romance in the control of insect pests, in plant diseases, in developing new plastic materials, in creating new plants by hybridizing and selection. There is romance in bridge construction, in kitchen planning, in raising purebred livestock, and in farm implements. Many a good news story can be found in a laboratory. The good reporter is the one who understands all this, finds the story, and writes it.

6. *Unknown or mysterious:* Most people are interested in anything they do not understand or which surprises or frightens them. So ghosts, haunted houses, sea serpents, hermits, strange places or peoples, discoveries in archeology, unsolved crimes, and buried treasure make news stories. There are at times stories in the technical world which sound just as strange, if ferreted out and related. Wonders of science, science baffled, inside the atom or beyond the stars, are of this sort. Some of these are material for feature articles, rather than news stories, of course, but often a spot news story may have this same mysterious quality.

7. *Information:* Many a time; just plain information is the thing we want to know. When this is so, this information is news. The cook wants to know the correct temperature for roasting a turkey. We may want to know the best route to get to the football game.

A farmer wants to know the best way to control bacterial ring rot of potatoes, or apple scab. Many people want to know markets—prices of hogs, or turpentine, or cotton, or steel bars. People want to know when ships sail or when the tide will be in tomorrow, how to get a duplicate driver's license, or how to go about securing a permit to build an apartment house. A woman wants to know what dress styles will be in the fall. So newspapers and magazines publish much information of this varied nature because it is of news value. It is better news, however, if it is linked up with something that is spot news or that is timely.

8. *Weather*: Weather is the most universal news in the world, considered over a long range. Just how weather makes news and its many ramifications will be discussed in a later chapter.

The expected and the unexpected: These many kinds of news fall into two general classifications: the expected and the unexpected. They need merely a bit of comment by the way.

Expected news is usually lacking in the element of surprise, but none the less, it has its interest and importance. It arises in such sources as meetings, ranging from national to local; stated events, as the opening of college, or the gathering of a local, state, or national society; it is found in reports submitted by bureaus, committees, organization officers, governmental officers of all degrees. Market reports, news of scheduled athletic events, and a host of other related happenings are included.

The unexpected news has a more exciting interest, of course. It may come out of any field, but most often we think of it in terms of deaths, crimes, wrecks, fires, explosions, earthquakes, floods, storms, and other events that break without warning.

Two characteristics of news: There are two further qualifications of news that must be pointed out. They are not characteristics that determine news value for they are fixed essentials of news:

1. News deals with facts.
2. News is objective, that is, free from editorial bias or partisanship.

The first of these seems so obvious as to be unimportant. It is obvious, but it is the most important thing that a beginner has to realize about news.

"I saw it in the paper." This phrase, familiar to everyone, is pronounced with two different inflections. In one case it means, "Oh, yes, I saw it in the paper and therefore I can't tell whether to believe it or not, and I'd better not." Again it means, "Yes, I saw it in the paper, and so it must be true."

The ideal of the paper is to reproduce facts. Every story that appears in a paper carries with it the assumption that it is fact. Toward the realizing of this ideal the journal bends every effort. On the other hand no paper reaches the goal of absolute accuracy, and many, which are poorly or carelessly made, fall far short of it. In the complicated making of a newspaper or magazine, it is inevitable that some mistakes should occur, but this makes only more strenuous the efforts of the conscientious journals to make errors as infrequently as possible.

The first lesson a reporter for a paper or a writer for a magazine must learn is the lesson of accuracy. He must learn to check and recheck his facts, to verify names and to avoid the subtle errors of false implications, which so easily slip into his transcriptions of the words of others. Accuracy is an absolute essential to success, its absence a sure prophet of failure. And it is never too early to learn to be accurate.

When one reads a news story he expects to find facts, but he expects something more than this. He expects that these facts will be presented without editorial bias or comment. Whether he realizes it or not, he has a feeling that there are two distinct divisions to the editorial portions of the paper: One is the news columns and the other the editorial page.

In earlier times there was little or no distinction made between the news and editorial functions of the newspaper. Even today much of the foreign press does not make this distinction. In America, however, the theory has steadily developed that the news columns should be devoted to an objective presentation of a picture of current events; that they should contain unprejudiced data, from which readers can draw their own conclusions. The editorial function of comment, interpretation, and argument has been allocated to the editorial page proper. There we expect to find opinions, and to the editorial page we turn for the opinions of an

editor whose position is a vantage point for observation and interpretation.

The writer for the news columns of a paper must realize the difference between news and editorialization and must keep his copy free of his own opinions, must make his reports cover all sides of an event, must keep out anything that would blur the sharp edges of the objective facts.

Some modification of this principle is permitted in certain cases. The signed article frequently does, and may legitimately, carry not only fact but the opinions of the writer. In this case we know, as we do not in the case of the ordinary news story, who is responsible for the opinions expressed. Many farm and home economics stories may carry opinion and comment, on the theory that they are written by specialists and that the opinions of these specialists have news value. Certain types of information and scientific stories, as well as sports stories, may be free of the ban on editorialization. Magazines as a rule do not maintain the distinction between news and editorial, largely because most magazine stories are signed.

Evaluating news: The preceding analysis of the factors in happenings that make them news provides a practical method of measuring or evaluating news. All who gather, write, and edit news for publication have continually to decide whether a certain event is news and to determine its relative importance. With an experienced journalist this evaluation becomes almost an instinctive process. His training enables him to feel the value or lack of value in a piece of news. But for the beginner in the journalism field this problem of measuring value will be one of the hardest of his problems. Lacking experience as a guide, he will need to make conscious evaluations, basing them on such an analysis as has been presented in this chapter. By conscious practice he will develop his nose for news.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. List 20 important ideas in the field of technical journalism which papers and magazines are attempting at this time to inject into the minds of their readers.

2. Pick out of the current week's newspapers the story which you consider to be most remarkable for human interest; a second for unusualness; a third for importance. Discuss each example.

3. Clip five stories from a newspaper or magazine and "score" them for news value. Consider 60 a perfect score, 10 for each of the six news qualities discussed in the earlier pages of this chapter.

4. Go through one issue of a technical magazine and analyze the news values in each news story.

5. Make a list of tips for local or campus news stories of interest to faculty and students. Include events that have happened since the close of the previous term, of future events this term that you can find out about readily. (Two or three students may work together on this and turn in one report, with names of students who did the work.)

6. Read through one issue of a daily or weekly newspaper and check all statements which you think are inaccurate or misleading.

7. Have another person relate to you an incident, real or imaginary. Without his assistance, write a story of this incident, conforming as nearly as you can to the facts as he gave them. Check the story over with the narrator and note any discrepancies.