

## CHAPTER 14

### MEETING STORIES

IT WAS past midnight of one of the days of an annual convention of a national organization. As a matter of fact it was a farm organization. But it might just as well have been a business organization in the throes of discussing relations with the government, a national labor organization, a national organization of women's clubs, a political convention, or even some large technical or scientific group. It might have been yesterday, last week, or years ago. No matter what or when, it furnishes a typical illustration.

The meeting was being held in a big city hotel. The air was filled with rumors of dissension. One or more state branches might secede from the organization. There was a struggle on between factions, representing two sections of the country, for control. Much seemed to depend upon the new officers elected or upon the resolutions adopted.

Long after the evening meeting had adjourned, here and there in the lobby and corridors could be found little knots of delegates and visitors, heads together, whispering. They paused and turned the conversation when someone of another faction approached.

It was after midnight when one of the prominent delegates decided to hold a caucus in his room. Delegates from other parts of the country were summoned from the lobby or from their beds. In that room for three hours the delegates talked with a freedom not possible in a formal session. Plans and compromises were offered and much of the difficulty threshed out.

One group stepped inside the bathroom to talk over a proposal that not even the others present knew anything of. But before the caucus broke up, the atmosphere had been cleared of a good part of the difficulties and differences.

No editor or reporter was present at this meeting. But the

next morning the experienced reporters knew before breakfast just what had happened, who had been there, what would be the outcome. This caucus was in reality the most important thing in connection with the convention.

How did the experienced reporter find out what had happened?

First of all, he had prepared himself to cover the meeting. He had found occasion before the convention opened to visit with prominent delegates from various sections, not to report what they might say, but to gather and store away in his memory what they might tell him—to “get wise” to the whole situation. He had learned that there was dissatisfaction underneath and what it was about; he had learned that it might break out or that it might be adjusted by electing a new head and setting up somewhat different policies. He knew the men he talked with, and they knew him and his publication and trusted both.

Late that night, after the caucus, the experienced reporter learned from a man or two on the inside what the outcome had been; it took only two or three sentences to inform him; he knew the rest through advance preparation. He had the story; he understood what to print and what not to print. Later he wrote the news impartially and without giving offense to anyone.

The inexperienced reporter, not understanding the situation, without intimate friendship with men who knew he could be trusted, might have been entirely unaware of this caucus and have taken his place in the meeting the next morning to observe the motions made and officers elected, thinking what a fine, harmonious meeting it all was.

It is said that there are less than a dozen political reporters in the United States who can adequately cover the news of a national political convention, because there are so few men with the wide acquaintanceship and knowledge of men and events necessary to understand what is happening and to interpret the swiftly changing events at such a gathering.

The same statement is relatively true regarding the meetings of some of the national farm, engineering, and scientific organizations. To handle a complex meeting, attended by men from all parts of the country, each with different views and viewpoints,

each with his ax to grind, requires something more than native ability. It requires experience as well.

These illustrations drawn from important meetings are used to point out problems which are also present in more or less degree in meetings of less scope and importance. The task of covering the monthly meeting of a county farm organization is essentially of the same nature. Its program is likely to include several sectional meetings, and each has to be handled on the basis of its news values. A reporter who has an assignment to cover the county fair has as intricate a task, although the occasion is not so important, as the one who must report the annual convention of the American Farm Bureau Federation or National Grange.

**Meetings bulk large in the news:** A little examination of newspapers or technical journals in almost any field will uphold the statement that news growing out of meetings comprises a large part of their content.

To a city of any consequence comes an endless succession of meetings—conventions, assemblies, conferences—of high or low degree, and each must be covered. Sometimes a meeting gets columns of space in before and after stories; sometimes it rates no more than a “stickful” of type or two, but each must be covered and given space. In even a modest capital city, meetings number hundreds in a year, and the local Chamber of Commerce is certain to maintain a convention secretary with an office staff to make sure that they are well taken care of.

To almost any county seat town come many meetings also, of less consequence perhaps and with smaller attendance, but of prime interest to those who come and to others who rely upon their local newspaper to carry a story about the gatherings.

So newspapers in all fields find it essential to deal with meetings and give them much of their space. Failure to do so soon brings an unpleasant kickback.

For technical publications the meetings in their respective fields also bulk large in importance. A farm journal, especially a local journal, has every meeting of state or district importance on its date or assignment book, and often it covers county gatherings if they have more than county concern.

Likewise, meetings of engineers, scientists, research workers, and industrial trade, and business organizations provide news that must be secured.

The winter meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science is as important in a way as a national political convention. It brings together at one time more than sixty different technical and scientific organizations. Its program is so complex and far reaching that when printed it sometimes makes a book of more than 300 pages. Science reporters and science writers attend in such large numbers that they have set up their own organization, the National Association of Science Writers, which holds its annual meeting in connection with the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Some workers in the field of science closely related to agriculture meet with this large association, such as entomologists, plant pathologists, and geneticists. Other agricultural scientists, notably agronomists, agricultural engineers, and animal husbandrymen, hold their winter meetings in Chicago at the time of the big International Livestock Exposition and Grain Show. The annual meeting of the American Home Economics Association and the American Dairy Science Association are held in summer.

Without undertaking to give a complete list of the scores of other societies whose meetings are important from a news standpoint, we name a few more to suggest their varied interests and purposes: American Chemical Society, American Medical Association, civil, mining, mechanical, and electrical engineering societies, American Association of Nurserymen, American Seed Trade Association, American Soybean Association, American Waterworks Association.

A reason why the technical and scientific society conventions make news, beyond the mere fact of the meeting itself, is that it is a custom of scientists and research workers to make the first announcement of new discoveries at such gatherings in the form of papers.

Sometimes a timid man may stand up behind a desk and read in a monotone a paper filled with technical terms, which half of those in the room do not even hear. Yet when a skilled reporter

gets the paper, finds its essential point, and translates it into words of the common man, it may be a story of national or even world-wide importance. At a meeting of a great technical or professional society, there may be a half dozen stories like that in one day.

**Campus meetings:** The student in technical journalism classes need not lack for laboratory work to give him experience in writing meeting stories. With a little look around he will find that "the woods are full" of organizations of many kinds which hold meetings—faculty groups and student groups. What they do and say when they meet is usually likely to have local interest at least, and occasionally they bring to the campus meetings of much wider consequence. At almost any time in his college year, the student reporter may cover some meeting of importance for a local campus or town publication at least, and often of state-wide interest for the state dailies.

**Types of stories about meetings:** There are two general types of stories about meetings. In one, a single speech or address constitutes the meeting. One man is the whole program. We might well call it a "*speech story*."

The other type is the *meeting of an association, society, or club*. Here general business is taken up, in addition to one or more important speeches. There are reports of officers, resolutions, committee hearings and debates, election of officers, motions and debates on the floor, an outburst from some dissatisfied member, gossip of the lobby, and dozens of cross currents and angles. Often the convention breaks up into a number of sessions, each discussing a different topic—and all of them must be watched.

We want to deal briefly with a third kind of story about meetings which is nothing more nor less than a news story of a meeting to come—an *advance story*, as the reporter is likely to call it. We will deal with it first—in advance—because it is convenient to do so.

**Advance story:** Good news management on a daily or weekly newspaper demands an advance story of a meeting to be held in its field. In periodicals of less frequent publication a mere mention of name, place, date, and a brief presentation of the program may be enough.

Information for an advance story may be secured from an or-

ganization's publicity man, if it has one, or from its secretary, program chairman, or some other officer. Usually the reporter may have to reach such a person by mail or by telephone. A member of a local committee on arrangements may be of assistance.

In getting and writing an advance story, keep in mind that the newspaper or other publication will likely want the following essential information:

1. Exact name of organization or meeting.
2. Sponsor, if it is not an organization meeting.
3. Date, time, and place of meeting.
4. Purpose of meeting, if this is something important or not routine.
5. Nature of organization, if it is not generally known.
6. Who are expected to attend, number, any from distance.
7. Important facts of program—important speaker or speakers, unusual topics to be discussed, changes in officers expected, new policies to be announced, important action that is expected to be taken, reports to be submitted.
8. Entertainment or other features beyond routine—tours, demonstrations, special exhibits.
9. Information about speaker, if a speech type—who speaker is, what he or she has done, unusual experience, books written, research carried on, distinguished honors won, subject of talk.
10. Any special part that local people will take in program.

What has been said in previous chapters of this book regarding a good lead and correct construction of a news story, preferably in the pyramid form, applies to an advance meeting story.

The following are examples of typical advance stories:

#### AN ADVANCE CONFERENCE STORY

Conservation officials and leaders from twelve states will come to Des Moines this week for the seventh annual Midwest Wildlife conference.

Sessions will be Thursday and Friday at Hotel Savery, with two field trips scheduled on Saturday, final day of the conference.

#### First Session

Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, chief, United States fish and wildlife service, Washington, D. C., will open the first general session at 9:30 a. m. Thursday by discussing "Wildlife and National Defense."

There will be technical sessions during the afternoons of both days, with groups split into classifications of fisheries research and management, and farm game management.

Jay N. (Ding) Darling, cartoonist and former chief of the United States biological survey, will be guest of honor at an informal banquet at the hotel Thursday evening.

### Field Trip

One field trip Saturday will be to Ledges state park, the state game farm and Iowa State College, Ames. The other will be to Lake Ahquabi state park, Lake Keomah state park, and Lake Wapello state park.

Participating states will be Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, Ohio and Wisconsin.—(*Des Moines Register*)

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### ADVANCE STORY ON FARM BUREAU MEETING

Bloomington-Normal owners of farm land have been invited by the farm bureau to meet in the bureau assembly room at 7:30 p. m. Tuesday, Dec. 2, for discussion of the proposed formation of a soil conservation district in nine townships and the signing of petitions to call a hearing.

All owners of land, whether or not it is located in those townships, are invited, according to the farm bureau announcement. The proposed district includes Cropsey, Anchor, Martin, Dawson, Arrowsmith, Cheney's Grove, Bellflower, West and Empire townships.

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### ADVANCE POULTRY SCIENCE CLUB STORY

Suggestions on not only how to buy but how to prepare that Christmas turkey will be offered at Ohio State university Thursday, when the Poultry Science club sponsors its first annual dressed turkey show. Producer and consumer alike will benefit from the program, to be held in the poultry building. Buses will leave Townsend hall before each meeting.

Prize-winning turkeys, representing the highest quality fowl offered on the Ohio market this fall, will be on display during

the afternoon and evening and will be sold to the highest bidder at an auction scheduled for 8 p. m. Trophies and ribbons will be awarded winners in four classes, with a sweepstakes trophy going to the outstanding bird of the show.

The morning program includes talks by Dwight E. Lifer, Danville, well-known turkey farmer, and A. G. Williams of Alabama Polytechnic Institute, now doing graduate work at Ohio State. At 2 p. m. D. D. Moyer, Ohio state agricultural extension service, will discuss "Buying the Christmas Turkey," and Miss Ossee Hughes, of the School of Home Economics, will give a practical demonstration on preparing the Christmas turkey. A colored movie, "Turkey Production," is scheduled for 7:30 p. m.

Purpose of the show is to encourage production of quality turkeys by Ohio growers. Class divisions are based upon weight and height.

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### ADVANCE ENGINEERING SECRET MEETING STORY

Engineering work in the national defense program will be discussed at the sixty-second annual meeting of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, Dec. 1 through 5, in the Hotel Astor, it was announced yesterday. About 100 technical papers will be presented.

Commissioner of Borough Works Walter D. Binger, chairman of the National Technological Civil Protection Committee, will report on "Lessons Learned From London" at a luncheon on Dec. 2. Mr. Binger returned from England last month.

A clinic on conservation and reclamation of materials used in industry will be held the same night. William A. Hanley, president of the society, will preside at a national defense symposium Dec. 3.

The speakers will include Frank B. Jewett, president of the National Academy of Sciences; Brig. Gen. G. M. Barnes, Colonel L. B. Lent, chief engineer, National Inventors Council, Washington, D. C., and Dean A. A. Potter, of Purdue University.

**The speech report:** Newspapers and magazines may employ any one of three ways of covering a speech. In many cases it is possible to get from the speaker an advance copy of his talk. This enables the editor, if he desires to speed up the story to make a

particular edition, to have the account prepared in advance of the meeting and even put in type. It is necessary, however, for a reporter to attend the meeting to make sure that the speech is given, that it substantially corresponds to the advance copy, and that nothing else of particular interest occurs at the meeting. Even when there is no need to rush the preparation of the story, the possession of a copy of the speech makes possible a fuller and more accurate story than can be secured in other ways.

If the speech is a very important one, and no advance copy is securable, the paper or magazine may send a stenographer to take a shorthand report of the speech. When this is transcribed, it is turned over to a reporter or editor, who has usually heard the speech, and he writes his story from the transcription. If the address is of very great importance or the speaker outstandingly prominent, the talk may be published verbatim in the paper, with a lead written by the reporter.

But both of these methods are exceptional. By far the greatest number of speeches are covered by a reporter without the aid of either an advance copy of the speech or a stenographer's notes. He attends the meeting and takes longhand notes of the speech. (If he knows shorthand, it will be a great help in note taking, but not many reporters are so equipped.)

**Taking notes:** The taking of good notes requires a skill that comes only with long practice. One cannot hope to get down in his notes more than a small fraction of what is said. The mistakes that novices make in taking notes of speeches are usually of two kinds: They try to get too much down, with the result that their notes consist of hurried, incomplete scraps; and they fail to discriminate between the statements that are important or colorful, statements which will, therefore, make good copy, and those which are explanatory and elaborative and therefore unessential to the story.

Most speeches follow some kind of an outline. The speaker may even deal in firstlys, secondlys, and thirdlys, in which case it is comparatively easy to follow the points of his discourse. When he is not so explicit he will often indicate, by the tone of voice, breaks in the flow of his talk, and in other ways, the division points of his subject.



By closely watching for these points, the reporter is able to get into his notes a rough outline of the speech—and this, because it follows the logic and the chronology of the address, will later help him in recalling the details of the talk.

He will also want to put into the speaker's own words some of the more important statements made by him. These also can often, although by no means always, be anticipated from the speaker's tone of voice and gestures. With practice a reporter can learn to put down quite extended bits of direct quotations.

It is important that the story of the speech be written just as soon as possible after the talk, for if one's notes get cold and his memory faint, it becomes very difficult to construct an accurate account of the speech. Immediately following the meeting, it is well, therefore, while the reporter is getting to a typewriter, while he is getting home or to the office, on the streetcar or in the taxi, to go over the address in his mind, organizing it for his story and attempting to recall the important points which he will want to incorporate in his account of what was said.

**Preparing for the assignment:** In the case of either the speech or convention type of meeting story, the wise reporter makes advance preparation for his task. He gets hold of any available advance publicity material, the program, "dope" on the speaker or meeting leaders, and studies them.

If he does not know the conference or convention officers, especially the secretary and publicity director, he gets acquainted with them and with as many leaders as possible. Through them he is often able to get advance copies of resolutions, reports, and speeches, or he can make arrangements to get them when they are ready. This is a good time to get the exact names of those who are prominent in the meeting, correct initials, names of organizations, and other details.

The daily newspaper reporter is often forced by the necessity of making early editions to write an account of a meeting on the basis of the advance material which he can get, before the meeting actually takes place. The practice has obvious dangers, which the reporter should take every precaution to overcome. It is not often that a correspondent for a magazine has to resort to this device.

The dangers are illustrated by the following case: The farm editor of a small city daily thought that he would emulate the enterprise of his brother reporters and write in advance the story of a colt show. But he made a mistake of just one week in the date—and his story appeared seven days before the show was held.

The reporter will not wish, however, to go about his task with too firmly established notions. Sometimes the speech or other expected business of the meeting turns out to be less important as news than some unexpected occurrence. For example: A farmer who made a world's record in corn growing was given a banquet by his home folk. He was called on for a speech, but he was so moved by the occasion that he broke down in the middle of his speech and had to be helped from the room. And the reporter made this unexpected episode, with its high emotional value, more prominent in his story than what the hero of the banquet or any other of the speakers had to say.

On one occasion, a high United States Government official came to a college campus to make an important talk. A dozen or more reporters present were supplied with advance copies. Some left without waiting to hear the man speak. But this official read just two paragraphs of his colorless prepared speech, then threw it on the table, stepped out in front, and made a forceful impromptu talk that was full of red-hot news copy.

A veteran farm paper reporter tells this story of a meeting in a tent on a state fair grounds during the fair. There were two speakers, a prominent state politician, and a farmer of whom nobody seemed to know anything. But this reporter did some preliminary investigation. After the politician spoke, the city newspaper reporters all got up and went out. The farm paper reporter stayed to hear the farmer, then talked with him for an hour after the meeting. This farmer gave him the foundation for what this reporter said was perhaps the most significant farm news story he had ever written.

**Writing the speech story:** The orthodox speech story consists of three ingredients, direct quotation, indirect quotation, and the reporter's own words of description, narration, and explanation. The handling of these elements involves some special problems.

Direct quotation is the reproduction of the speaker's words or a very close approximation of them. The reporter is in fact permitted some latitude in altering and modifying the phrasing of direct quotation, but only to a limited degree. He must give a scrupulous reproduction of the speaker's ideas in approximately the same words that the speaker used. The latitude that he may take with the speaker's phraseology must be governed by the necessity of making the quotation clear and conformable to the context of the story.

A greater danger than that of actual misquotation is the use of quotations in themselves accurate, but in a context other than that the speaker intended. It is no defense for this error to say that the words quoted were the actual words of the speaker. The writer's purpose is not to reproduce words but ideas.

A practice followed by many reporters in an effort to avoid this difficulty and other errors of representation is to discuss the speech with someone else who has heard it before writing the story. Such a discussion with someone who is alert and open minded will help the reporter to determine the important aspects of the speech, to check his own judgment, and to avoid the overlooking of parts of the speech which did not particularly appeal to him as important or significant.

If a speech is reported at length, considerable sections of it may be in direct quotation. In a shorter story direct quotation will be principally used to give the more important aspects of the speech. The amount of direct quotation in the story will be determined, then, partly by the length of the story, but also by the nature of the speech—whether or not the speaker has used a diction which makes copy which is clear, interesting, and colorful.

Indirect quotation is the reproduction of the speaker's ideas in the reporter's words. It is used primarily for two purposes: to give a clear or more effective phrasing to ideas which are not clear and effective in the speaker's own words or which the reporter has been unable to take down in direct quotation; and to make it possible to summarize in a few words the ideas which the speaker discussed at length.

Material about the speaker, the meeting, the audience—any

facts which are not the reproduction of what the speaker said—will be told in the reporter's own words.

The following stories are typical short speech reports:

### A BANQUET SPEECH STORY

The United States must not be made to choose between "butter or guns" during the national emergency, E. E. Howard of Kansas City, Mo., director of the American Society of Civil Engineers, said Thursday night in Des Moines.

Howard, a consulting engineer who has designed some of the nation's outstanding bridges, spoke at a banquet ending the annual meeting of the Iowa section of the civil engineers society at Hotel Fort Des Moines.

#### Civilian Work

While the major portion of the nation's productive output should be devoted to defense "guns," Howard said sufficient "butter"—civilian work for civilian purposes—should be allowed to keep the country's economic condition "half way normal."

"It would be a disaster if civilian building and work were stopped to aid the defense program," Howard said.

"Certainly we should devote our greatest effort to the defense program," he said, "but we also should continue our civilian building, although it should be subordinate to our defense needs."

"You may have a paving project in Des Moines or some other civic building program which shouldn't be abandoned when half completed."

A "tendency toward war hysteria" must be overcome, Howard added, and the nation "must maintain its social system, and carry on its normal life as much as possible."

#### Credit to Engineers

Credit is due the engineering profession for the "wonderful accomplishment" in the progress of the defense program, Howard said.

He cited a munitions plant at Kansas City on which work began under private contract last February.

Howard visited the plant last month, he said, and found it "turning out bullets at 46 per cent of capacity already."

Besides several defense contracts, Howard's engineering firm has designed bridges at Dubuque, Ia.; Omaha, Neb.; Rock Island, Ill., and the triborough bridge in New York, N. Y.

### CHEMICAL SOCIETY DINNER SPEECH STORY

Pittsburgh, Pa., March 20—Dr. Alexander Silverman, pioneer in glass technology and head of the Department of Chemistry at the University of Pittsburgh, received the 1940 Pittsburgh Award of the Pittsburgh section of the American Chemical Society at a dinner at the University Club tonight for "outstanding service to the profession of chemical education and for distinguished contributions to industrial chemistry and the ceramic industries."

Dr. Silverman in his acceptance speech praised the cooperation of his colleagues and students at the University of Pittsburgh during the past thirty-five years.

A new method of making opal glasses was described by Dr. Silverman in his discussion of recent developments in glass. Experiments already tried, he said, indicate that beryllium oxide added to quartzite should increase opacity, as do alumina and similar substances.

In 1902, when Dr. Silverman became a chemist in a glass factory, nothing was taught about glass technology in America.

"I was asked to reproduce alabaster glass, the art of whose manufacture had been lost prior to 1880," Dr. Silverman recalled. "Opal glass produced a fiery glare with the Edison carbon filament lamp. Alabaster glass did not show opalescence. Its analysis revealed considerable alumina and so, knowing its refractory nature, I decided to use this compound directly. It had never been used in opal or alabaster glasses before."

"Alumina produced a horrible glass which looked like curdled milk. Undaunted, I added a stirring agent, selecting salt which vaporized appreciably at white heat. The salt did the trick and alabaster glass was reborn. Years later, when I studied colloid chemistry, I learned that ionized salts precipitate colloids, thus accounting for formation of alabaster in-

stead of an opalescent glass. And then Willard J. Sutton, one of my graduate students, proved that fused salts ionized when they dissolved in glass."

Dr. Silverman, whose work is recognized internationally, was born in Pittsburgh on May 2, 1881, and was graduated from the Western University of Pennsylvania, now the University of Pittsburgh, in 1902. He received his A.B. degree from Cornell University in 1905, and M. S. from Pittsburgh in 1907. He joined the Pittsburgh faculty in 1905, and became head of the Chemistry Department in 1918.

### HOMEMAKING LEADERS' STORY

It's best to open a can of soup at the top, but the same rule doesn't hold necessarily true for all kinds of canned goods.

For example, asparagus is an exception, Miss Dorothy Gill, Chicago, Ill., home making lecturer, said Thursday, in an adult education lecture at Stowe school.

"Cans containing asparagus always should be opened at the bottom. Then the stalks may be slipped out without damaging the more fragile tips," Miss Gill explained.

As for Vienna sausages, there is another step in the process.

**"Both top and bottom of the can**

**should be removed. Then the sausages may be pushed out of the can without damage,"** she said.

Miss Gill, a representative of the Libby, McNeill & Libby Canning Co., described the use of lacquer in food cans.

### Shut Out Light

"Beets, strawberries, raspberries and other red foods are put in cans having shiny lacquer interiors to protect them from light rays which seemingly penetrated the tin and discolor the food," she said.

"Dull lacquer interiors are used in cans containing pumpkin, corn, ripe olives and other foods containing sulphur.

### Black Spots

"Sulphur reacts with the tin, forming black spots in the food," Miss Gill said.

She pointed out, however, that the spots in no way affected the quality of the food.

**"It is just as safe,"** she added, **"to keep food in the can it comes in—if the can is cool and covered after it is opened."**

"Cans and foods are sterilized in processing, but the dish into which the food might be emptied is far from sterile—and much more likely to have on it bacteria which cause food to spoil," she said.

**Attributive phrases:** Two things further about the handling of the speech story need to be noted: the use of the phrases which explain who is being quoted—what we may call the "he saids"—and the arrangement of the material in the story.

In direct quotation we have a symbol, the quotation marks, which tells the reader that the material is quoted. The end-quote signals to him that the quotation is at an end. It is necessary, then, in any single direct quotation to make only one reference to the speaker. This should be done in the middle or at the end of the first sentence in the quotation.

But when the quotation is indirect there is no such sign to tell the reader the extent of the quotation. The sentence is the unit of indirect quotation. It is therefore usual to put a "he said," a reference to the speaker, in every sentence of indirect discourse. This rule may be violated only where the context is so clear or

where several sentences are so closely related that there can be no doubt in the reader's mind that the material is being quoted.

The "he said" in indirect quotation may come anywhere in the sentence. In the summary lead, however, when either direct or indirect quotation is used, the "he said" should not come in the middle of the quotation, for the explanatory material which accompanies it would break the back of the sentence.

Because of the necessity of repeating the "he said," indirect quotation is apt to become monotonous if used at too great length. This can be somewhat obviated by variations in the phrases that refer to the speaker. But it is usually well to alternate between direct and indirect quotation to avoid this difficulty.

**Building the speech report:** The material in the speech report is organized just as the material of any other news story is organized. The story usually follows an inverted pyramid arrangement, although when extended quotation is given, it may be chronological. A verbatim report would, of course, be chronological.

In building his story the reporter must go over his notes and memory of what was said, determine which are the most important points of the speech from a news point of view, and build his story to put these important aspects of the speech toward the top of his story—although they may have been dealt with by the speaker at the end of his talk. In other words, the reporter will make no particular attempt to reproduce what the speaker said in the order in which he said it but will rather attempt to rearrange the material in the order of its importance and interest to his readers.

**The meeting story:** It has already been indicated that the covering of a convention, conference, short course, or other such gathering is apt to be anything but a simple job. Here the reporter has something more to do than listen to and take notes on a single talk. He must follow a whole program, which may consist of a number of speeches, reports, resolutions, elections, and contests—as well as undercurrents of gossip, contention, and rivalry that never appear on the surface of the meeting. Out of this welter of material he must get the comparatively few things that are significant as news.

A reporter sent to handle a meeting should first of all, in case

he is not already familiar with them, secure and put down in his notes the exact name of the organization and such facts as the time, the place, and the attendance.

Accuracy in the name of an organization may seem a trivial thing to mention. Yet as a matter of fact, names of educational institutions, engineering and scientific bodies, breed associations, and farm organizations are constantly appearing incorrectly in print. It is Iowa State College, not "Ames" or Ames College or Iowa Agricultural College. It is the University of Connecticut, not "Storrs." Michigan State College and University of Michigan are two different institutions. It is Ohio State University, University of California, and State University of Iowa. It is Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College but Kansas State College, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, and Purdue University. It is Iowa Farm Bureau Federation, Illinois Agricultural Association, and Michigan State Farm Bureau, although the three are parallel.

The experienced reporter must know the history of the organization whose meeting he attends. If he does not know in advance, he should find out as soon as possible. Else he may make ludicrous errors. One experienced and usually careful farm paper editor mentioned a man as a leader in one type of cooperative marketing, not so long ago, when as a matter of fact this man has had no connection with the organization and is really opposed to it.

A recent state convention of an industrial organization was held on a university campus. In addressing the gathering, a dean of a college of the university tried to speak in technical terms familiar to his audience. In so doing he made a statement that was entirely incorrect. A reporter covering the meeting had gone to a good bit of trouble in looking up the history and background of the meeting and so knew that the dean was wrong.

This reporter was faced with a problem. It was quite possible that the dean's statement was merely a slip of the tongue and he had said what he did not intend to say, without realizing the error. But it sounded as though the dean were uninformed and consequently inaccurate.

The reporter could have quoted the incorrect statement which, when printed, would have reflected on the dean. He ran the risk

in so doing of having the dean deny the statement and accuse the reporter of being the one who was inaccurate. His best way was to talk with the speaker after the meeting and see if he couldn't get permission to use the correct fact in his report of the story. He might make the correction in his story without permission, but this would not be quite right. He could have used a more general statement without giving the exact context of what was said. What he did was to play safe and make no reference whatever in his story to that part of the dean's remarks.

At any convention meeting much routine business will be transacted, some of it important and some not. The reporter will have to exercise judgment in determining what is essential. If he is unfamiliar with matters brought up, he should ask someone about them. Usually the secretary can help him, some of the leaders will be only too glad to set him right, or some other reporter present will lend a helping hand.

Reports of officers and committees, resolutions, debates either in committee or on the floor of the convention, reports of credentials and nominating committees, elections, contests, votes on important motions, significant events such as revision of the constitution, personalities, keynotes, notable addresses—all should be watched for and covered.

The inexperienced reporter will spend a lot of time at first sitting through tiresome sessions, making voluminous notes. After a time, he learns to tell when something worth while is going to break for which he should be on hand. Meanwhile he spends his time to better advantage in the lobby or corridors.

Lobby gossip, the use of friends on the inside of caucuses and closed door committees, and an understanding of the significance of things all play their part. A chance remark, seemingly of no consequence, made at the breakfast table in the hotel dining room by one prominent cooperative leader to another, once gave a reporter a tip that uncovered one of the most important bits of inside news at a national farm meeting.

The observation of two men in conversation may give a clue to some combination of forces. There may be something quite significant when the delegate from Illinois rises to make a nom-



ination or present a resolution. It may reveal to the experienced reporter that a political deal or combination has been made.

The careful reporter does not take many chances. He goes early and stays late. The very session at which he thinks nothing is going to happen may be the most important of all.

In a national farm organization meeting some time since, there was a tense situation regarding the past and future policies of the organization. It looked as though nothing would be brought up at an evening meeting except some reports. Most of the newspaper men, however, were on hand until after these were read. Nothing exciting had happened except one outburst from a farmer delegate, after which a number of reporters left.

But just when the end of the session was at hand, a delegate arose and asked a seemingly inconsequential question of a speaker who had been called on for remarks. The speaker came back with an unexpectedly dramatic answer, which uncorked the lid, and the pent up excitement of the past two days broke out.

For nearly two hours matters were debated and threshed over, and the meeting lasted until after midnight. That night's session in a way marked a turning point in the history of the organization—and those reporters who left early missed it all.

In a recent annual convention of a prominent national organization, there was a bitter and successful under-cover fight against re-election of the president of the organization who had become unpopular with parts of the country because of his pronounced views on national defense matters. Reporters present all knew of this, but since none of it came out into the open or upon the convention floor, the stories written of the election of another man as the new president said nothing of this fight, and readers might have had the idea that all was harmony. A few days later, however, one city newspaper told the real story back of the change in leadership. Then other papers, in self-defense, had to write additional stories which told the same facts.

**Writing the meeting story:** Because of the varied nature of the problems involved in writing the report of meetings, only a few general suggestions as to the handling of these tasks can be given.

The problem here, as in the speech report, is primarily one of selection. The activities of the meeting or convention may be extremely numerous and diverse, and out of this mass of material the reporter must select the significant and interesting things.

The account of these significant aspects of the meeting will usually be written in inverted pyramid form. Out of all of the things said, the business transacted and the other activities of the meeting, he must choose the most significant, from a news point of view, for his lead. This will be followed, in the order of their importance, by the other important events of the meeting.

The stories which are reproduced below will give some idea of the nature of the reporter's job in handling a meeting assignment. Some of them will illustrate, too, the type of story that should be written by a secretary, publicity chairman, or other person whose task it is to write a follow-up meeting story for a newspaper.

### BUSINESS MEETING STORIES

Leroy (PNS)—Roy Will, who dumped in baskets for Normal Community high during the basketball season, was elected president of the McLean county 4-H club federation at the annual county 4-H rally at Empire Township high school Friday night.

More than 350 4-H members, leaders, parents and friends were present for the games and entertainment. Bill Genders for the Busy B club, retiring president, conducted the business session. The Leroy club presented the program. Merle Spratt is Leroy president and L. A. McKean, leader. Richard Biven and Dorothy Bremer gave readings and the Bunkhouse Ramblers, Ernest and Odell Lamont and Lyle Pray gave musical numbers.

Others elected were Verne Erdman, vice president; Lois Bright, secretary-treasurer; Jake Bauman, reporter; Violet Schneider, pianist; Lyle Bidner, director; and Delores Wrzburger, cheerleader. Allen King of Towanda was chairman of the nominating committee.

Alfred Merritt Smith, Nevada state engineer, was elected new president of the Association of Western Engineers at the annual convention of this body held last month at Phoenix, Ariz. Mr. Smith suc-

ceeds Don McBride, Oklahoma water resources director, as president of the organization. Wardner G. Scott, Nebraska state engineer, was chosen vice president. A resolution was passed at the meeting demanding that "all water utilization work financed or constructed by federal departments be subject to the water laws of the state in which they are located.—(*Engineering News-Record*)

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### AGRICULTURAL MEETING STORY

"If we're going to further mechanize our work in agriculture in West Texas, how is a young man going to get started in farming?"

That was the question asked by A. H. Leidigh, dean of agriculture at Texas Technological college, Monday afternoon in a speech before representatives of co-operatives here for a school in cooperative information.

Dean Leidigh also asked where the families are to go from farms while the number of farms in Texas is being reduced.

He did not present his opinions in answer to those questions, but presented data from recent publications.

There was a 34 per cent increase in the number of tractors and a 57 per cent

increase in rebates on gasoline from 1936 to 1938. The number of tractors in Texas is estimated from 99,000 to 116,000. Each tractor displaces  $9\frac{1}{2}$  head of work stock.

If 846,000 tractors displace work stock in three years, that number of tractors will result in displacement of 3,000,000 acres of feed which previously would have been grown for work stock.

The farmer buys from 1,000 to 1,200 gallons of gasoline a year per tractor.

Under mechanized conditions, the number of farms will decrease constantly.

"This kind of movement will take 10,000 families off the farm a year," said the dean. "If farms are bigger, what will become of the people?"

Dean Leidigh also referred to an article in the *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, quoting from that article in discussing the mechanical cotton picker.

O. J. Edler, of Crosbyton, president of Plains Cooperative Oil mill, presided for Monday's program.

Other speakers Monday afternoon were S. D. Sanders, cooperative bank commissioner, Washington, D. C., and Claude Terry, manager of Cooperative Gin Service supply company at Houston.

### STATE FARM BUREAU MEETING STORY

Syracuse, N. Y., Nov. 25—"Food will win the war and write the peace," H. B. Little, president of the New York Association of County Agricultural Agents, said at the annual meeting of the State Farm Bureau Federation today.

"Without doubt, farmers are going to increase food production because they have been looking for an opportunity to make some money for a long time," he added. "And, to a casual observer, the time appears to be here."

But Mr. Little warned the farmers

against going too far. They might easily "overexpand," he said, even though food is one of the crying needs of the world today.

C. Chester Dumond of Ulster Park, president of the federation, said "farmers could not survive in an economy controlled by pressure groups unless they had spokesmen of their own and supported them by organization.

"The sooner we realize that we cannot stay home on our farm and mind our own business and let some one else run things for us the better," he added.

### Urges Unity of Rural Women

Speaking at the Home Bureau meeting, Mrs. Charles W. Sewell, administrative director of Associated Women of the American Farm Bureau Federation, urged an informed electorate among rural women.

"It was the organized womanhood of America which, in 1917 and 1918, fed an army. When the women of rural America are thoroughly organized their actions for the benefit of agriculture and farm homes will likewise accomplish things which will be written into the pages of history."

At the joint meeting of the three organizations in the afternoon Morris Sayre, vice president of the Corn Products Refining Company, speaking as a representative of the committee on agricultural cooperation of the National Association of Manufacturers, protested against attempts to isolate farmers and industrial workers into separate groups, often with opposing interests.

"The forces that are at work trying to divide all groups against each other may be expected to increase their efforts," he said, "and perhaps succeed if we forget we are American citizens above everything else and farmers and business men only secondarily."

**Meeting publicity:** Not infrequently it falls to the lot of a man or woman without skill in news writing to prepare a story or two about a meeting of an organization with which he or she is connected; for example, a Farm Bureau, a Home Economics society, or an Engineering society.

For such an occasion these suggestions are likely to be helpful:

If you are to write an advance story, do it in time for publication

a week or ten days in advance if it is to appear in a daily newspaper, and at least a week in advance for a weekly. The copy for the weekly should be delivered to the editor two or three days before day of publication. Make it really an "advance" story.

Make a personal call, if you can, to deliver the story. If not, send it by mail to the city editor of a daily newspaper, and to the editor of a weekly or a trade magazine.

If pictures of officers or principal speakers are available, offer them, but do it in plenty of time for halftones to be made. If "mats" are available, so much the better.

If the meeting is of special importance, two different advance stories might well be offered, each playing up some different angle.

If the stories are offered to competing publications, vary the stories. If advance copies of important addresses or reports are available, they will be appreciated by editors.

If some important change in plans comes unexpectedly, give information to the editor in good time.

**Follow-up:** One of the most common complaints of newspapers and other journals about those who promote meetings by giving or writing advance information is that they are zealously on the job before, and grossly negligent about it after a meeting.

Editors are probably a little keener about getting stories about what really happened than about what was planned. They get good cooperation by way of advance stories and usually none by way of follow-up stories of the event itself.

The publicity person who follows through is thrice welcome when he next comes with an advance story.

The suggestions made here are, or should be, of prime importance to anyone who wants to maintain good relations with newspapers or journals of any kind.

#### ASSIGNMENTS

1. As many stories as possible dealing with speeches and meetings should be covered by student reporters. Advantage should be taken of as many off-campus gatherings and conventions as possible to supplement campus assignments and to give students a wider experience in reporting.

2. Make an analysis of the meeting stories carried in one issue of one of the following publications or one of equivalent type and write a brief report: *Chicago*

*Daily Drivers' Journal, Engineering News-Record, Florists' Review, Farm Journal, Women's Wear, Dog World, American Lumberman, American Photography, Science.*

3. Make a similar analysis of one issue of one of the following daily newspapers: *New York Herald-Tribune, Philadelphia Bulletin, Atlanta Constitution, New Orleans Item, Dallas News, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Kansas City Star, Los Angeles Times, Oakland Tribune, Detroit News, Des Moines Register, Columbus Dispatch, Chicago Tribune.*

4. Clip and turn in examples of five well-written meeting and speech stories.

(*Note:* Students who expect to be engaged in some type of work after graduation where meeting and other stories will have to be furnished to newspapers or magazines, might well begin a collection of various examples which can serve them as a guide later on when such stories have to be written.)