

SIX MONTHS IN A NEWSPAPER OFFICE

Reflections on the Past and the Outlook for the Future; Effort to Control Editorial Policy and Prostitute Public Morals; the "Enemy Spy;" the Narrow Way and the Better Way.

By Eber K. Cockley.

Can you picture in your imagination a young man, midway between the draft age limits, who has been since his fourteenth birthday employed as a railroad telegrapher seven days in a week for fifty-two weeks in a year, suddenly coming into control of an old established newspaper—a country weekly in its thirty-ninth year. Consider some of the fancies you may now have in mind with relation to the responsibilities, duties, eminence, and what not of the business of publishing a newspaper, then throw off your bedroom slippers, jump into the proprietor's shoes, and come behind the scenes a moment with me for just a little confidential revelation.

One fact stands out before all others in the newspaper business and that fact is that the reader of a newspaper usually knows little or nothing about the business of publishing a paper, either in detail or in general. A publisher may be an honest, square, conscientious man, who is constantly doing his utmost to produce a good lively newspaper, struggling against tremendous odds—and six days in a week that man may be subjected to the most absurd and pitiless kind of criticism by the readers of his—and their—newspaper. Too many subscribers never think how many others besides themselves are required to make up the subscription list of a newspaper, and it never occurs to some that what the publisher may see fit to print in the paper to the benefit of any number of readers with whom he is well acquainted and knows their taste, is not published primarily as an offense to those readers with whom he may not be so well acquainted. While the reader may commit the most harmful acts of negligence, viewed from the publisher's point of looking at things of a business nature, the moment a small error of judgment is committed by the publisher there are a score of subscribers ready to spring at his throat.

Since assuming charge of The Commercial I have endeavored time and again to place the paper, or rather the business of publishing it, on a sound basis financially. Yet almost every move that I have made with that end in view has brought forth a considerable amount of ignorant criticism, which I have good naturedly been obliged to tolerate, while waiting for developments from my undertakings. The first month's balance sheet showed a net loss of \$102.41, which amount I was expected to make up. Comparison of past records with mine showed that business was running along at about the usual rate, a little falling off in one branch but sufficient increase in another to overcome it, making the average business transacted about the same and if anything a little greater in volume than it had been in the preceding month. From that condition I could draw but one conclusion—something was radically wrong with the prevailing business policy, which had to be corrected, and that pretty quick.

Meanwhile merchants began to withdraw their advertising from The Commercial, and on a number of occasions I was approached and very politely told that if I would not be so radical in views expressed in the paper that I could count on lots of advertising patronage from the business men of the town. In other words, if I would consent to submit to their dictations and thereby become a party to the crime of prostitution of the public morals, which, in effect, such action certainly would have meant, then I might count on enough advertising to support a large paper, which subscribers are constantly clamoring for.

During the second month I reduced the size of The Commercial, owing to reduction of demands for advertising space, and the necessity of reducing my force to curtail expenses. At the close of that month's business the balance sheet showed a net loss of \$22.43, quite a decrease compared with the former month, but still further reductions had to be made, and several plans were tried out with no satisfactory result.

The third month's report showed a deficit of \$27.49; the fourth, \$20.60, and the fifth, \$38.48.

While this condition of affairs was prevailing my competitor was indulging in an extensive mud slinging campaign against The Commercial, undermining the public confidence and doing his durndest to kill the publication which he has hated so consistently for years. A "spy" was employed at a fabulous salary, according to information which came to me afterwards, and he was "planted" in The Commercial building for purposes which were certainly not for the good of this publication, nor in the best interests of the people of Meyersdale, if I am any judge of their interests. Some very interesting things happened for a month or two which are pleasant to remember, and which may prove valuable for my future guidance, but which would not look so pleasant in print, and are of no particular advantage as additions to the knowledge of the general public at this particular time.

All the while I was not asleep, but had been learning from my experience, and gaining knowledge of the business from confidential chats with friends and acquaintances among fellow editors, and from other sources. I learned, for instance, how one publisher gets his income partly by taking a big corporation's orders for job printing and presenting a bill "for service rendered" to cover his private needs, and the needs of his family, in finances. That is, the corporation may order work that is worth say \$3.00 to someone else. If the publisher is shy \$30.00 in his private accounts, his bill for the work is \$30.00, or whatever he happens to need. Since Congress passed a law requiring that the names and addresses of owners, bond holders, or other security holders, having an interest in a newspaper, must be sworn to and published twice a year, some publishers have evidently found this a way around. Another instance coming to my attention was one where the publisher is fortunate enough to secure sufficient legal advertising—pure graft as a rule—to meet his bills, and still another where an influential politician pays the bills.

As a rule country newspapers are not a paying proposition at the best. This I have found to be the prevailing opinion among men who ought to know. Therefore, The Meyersdale Commercial is no exceptional case; and whoever willfully or deliberately conveys the impression that this publication is about to suspend because it is alleged to be worn out or is in the hands of incompetent persons, or for any other imaginary reason, is simply displaying his ignorance and his other shortcomings to the public view.

Where there's a will there's a way—and the conqueror will have his will, regardless of the material interests of petty grafters. With the foregoing in mind, the idea of co-operation supplanting competition ever in view, the Commercial Co-operative Council was conceived and originated. Its aim is primarily to rally labor in a co-operative organization, made necessary by the action of the business men and other interests that do not control our editorial policy, to support The Meyersdale Commercial, "to the end that that publication may continue its existence to advance the interests of labor and humanity in general by promoting interest in the co-operative movement, propagating the principles of Socialism, of labor and farmers' organized efforts for their mutual benefit, etc." Each member of the Co-operative Council pledges moral support to The Commercial, and financial support to a limited degree, automatically becoming a part owner of the publication when attaching his signature to the membership certificate. Members are fully protected against any undue responsibility financially, and the new organization is guaranteed "spy proof."

The month just past—the sixth month of my experience in a newspaper office—was the most encouraging of all. The balance sheet at the close of business for the month showed, not a deficit, but a surplus of \$52.81, with the Co-operative Council organization still in its infancy. Still not a very substantial salary for a publisher, or the Business Manager of a co-operative council, but unmistakable proof of the practicability of the co-operative principle, made all the more significant when it is considered in connection with the fact that most of the business men of the town are still withholding their advertising patronage from The Commercial.

In conclusion I can hardly be accused of exaggeration when I say that publishing a newspaper under the old capitalistic plan is no longer a profession, but a disgrace. There may be a few exceptions, but the exception merely serves to prove the rule.

Again, those merchants who, by withholding their advertising patronage from The Meyersdale Commercial, imagine that they can thereby control the editorial policy of the paper and, in effect, prostitute public morals, or failing to control that policy of the paper, then to bankrupt the business—if such really is the aim or desire of any who have withdrawn their patronage—to those I can only say now that they have made a sad mistake in business judgment, which they may either rectify or totally ignore.

The narrow way, or the displaying of personal prejudice, must be abandoned for the better way—mutual understanding through co-operation. The quicker the issue is brought to a head the sooner our life problem will be solved.

COME ON IN AND HELP TO WARM THE THING UP.

Co-operation is defined in political economy as, "The association of a number of persons for their common benefit." Co-operation among the common people is essential to preserve life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

In America, as in Germany, the plain people must come together in associations for their common benefit, or suffer the consequences resulting from a lack of such organizations. That person who opposes co-operation by the common people, claiming to be their representative and spokesman, whether his title be kaiser, king or just plain mister, is not the representative of the common people, but a traitor to the plain people everywhere.

Any person, anywhere, who is not at heart a traitor to the plain people everywhere, is eligible to become a member of the Commercial Co-operative Council and a conditional part owner of The Meyersdale Commercial.

It is too early yet to make any definite promise of specific cases where benefits will result from any person joining the Co-operative Council. However, an instance can be cited which might prove of benefit to every member, assuming that a sufficient number of people will join to make it practicable. This much we can say, that less than one-half of our readers in the Co-operative Council would enable us to supply each member with their paper at a cost somewhat below what they are now obliged to pay, or, in lieu of this, we might increase the size of the paper and raise the rates of subscription on non-members. That is one way in which each member would be immediately benefited, not to mention indirect benefits that would come from the success of this undertaking, as soon as sufficient number join the co-operative organization. But in order to benefit any one we must all act together, or at least a large number of us must, as you well know.

Join the Commercial Co-operative Council today and argue the question tomorrow—or the next day you meet a Commercial reader who is not a member.

Local and Personal

Harry Ford, of Clairton, Pa., is visiting friends here.

Miss Evelyn Leckemby spent Saturday in Cumberland.

Mrs. Charles Hauger is visiting relatives in Johnstown.

N. E. Miller was a business caller in Pittsburg, Thursday.

Fred Rowe, Jr., has returned from a business trip to New York.

Walter Bittner, of Glencoe, was a business caller intown, Thursday.

Rev. W. H. Beachler, of Ashland, Ohio, is visiting friend here.

Hugh Smith, of Rosemont, Va., is the guest of his brother, A. G. Smith.

Mrs. Charles Darrow has returned from a four weeks' visit in Pittsburg.

Mr. and Mrs. James Wilson were in Cumberland, Wednesday, on business.

Mrs. Charles Cook and two children, of Pittsburgh, visited friends here, last week.

Mr. Charles Platter, of Garrett, was a caller at the Commercial Office, Friday.

Miss Daisy Ohler and Francis Ohler, of Sand Patch, visited friends here, Tuesday.

Mrs. Michael Keegan and Mrs. Thomas Keegan spent several days of last week in Cumberland.

Robert Miller is spending several weeks in Mt. Clemens, Michigan, for the benefit of his health.

Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Emeigh who were visiting relatives and friends here, returned to Brad-dock, Pa., Wednesday.

Miss Mayme Platt, a teacher in our public school, went to Johnstown, Saturday, where she expects to spend the summer vacation.

Mr. Frank Lowery, of Boynton, stopped off in Meyersdale, Thursday, on his way to Berlin, where he expected to secure employment.

Dr. and Mrs. R. A. Reger, of Buchanan, Va., and Mrs. Lakin Roberts, of Wheeling, W. Va., are guests of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Philson.

Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Crowe and son William, and Miss Kate Keidle, recently visited Mr. Crowe's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Crowe, of Frostburg.

Mr. and Mrs. Washington Lancaster, of Mt. Savage, Md., motored to the home of Mr. and Mrs. S. J. McKenzie, Sunday, where they are visiting this week.

Local Union No. 3083, U. M. W. A., of Garrett, subscribed for a \$1,000 Liberty Bond last week. "Fall in line, mine-workers, and help us put the union labor on the kaiser," says Norman Boden, District Organizer.

After a series of failures on the part of old party politicians to put The Commercial on a sound financial basis, Mr. Eber K. Cockley has eventually been successful in making this old reliable publication self-sustaining. Read the story complete in this issue. Do not miss this.

Mr. Charles Burkholder, of near Garrett, who has been a subscriber to The Commercial since it was first started, called at the office Friday to renew his subscription for another year and renew his allegiance to the old reliable publication, assuring the Editor that he is in sympathy with the democratic principles which we advocate.

A business man who called at the Commercial Office last week to censure the Editor for having published the truth about the partiality of business men of the town in regard to advertising the Third Liberty Loan, admitted before he left

that he would be ashamed for his family to read it, adding that he proposed to consign his copy of The Commercial to the waste basket at his place of business before reaching home. 271 inches of advertising, paid for and contributed by local business men, were published in The Republican, to advertise the Third Liberty Loan, but not one inch was given to The Commercial. Arouse, ye slaves, and THINK!

Mr. Fred Cohen, of Pittsburgh, brother of Louis Cohen, was a visitor at the Commercial Office, Monday. Fred brought us some encouraging news from the Smoky City, and asked us to convey to his many friends and acquaintances in Somerset County his best wishes and regrets that he could not meet each one personally while passing through on a business mission. He is enjoying the best of health, and is still a steady worker for the cause. Among other things, he said that Rev. Prosser, whose health was failing him last fall and winter, has completely recovered, and they have him headed for Washington as Representative in Congress from one of the city districts in Pittsburgh. It is said to have been admitted that influential men of affairs induced representatives of the government to drop the prosecution of the case which they had been preparing against Rev. Prosser last year, when it was announced in some papers of Somerset County that he was held for \$10,000 bail on the charge of obstructing enlistment in the army, as it was feared the people of his district, who hold a very high regard for him personally, would get busy and elect him to the Legislature or Congress if his case was pressed. Louis is now located in Columbus, Ohio, where he is advertising manager for a large department store, his brother informed us.

LAPE-SMITH.

Mr. Robert Lape, of Listie, and Miss Edna Smith, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Smith, of this city, were united in marriage at the bride's home, Sunday, by Rev. Steele. They expect to make their home in Listie.

ST. PAUL.

The missionary society met at the home of Mrs. Howard Maust, Saturday p. m.

Miss Elsie Sipple spent several days last week with her sister, Mrs. Morgan Walker.

Born, to Mr. and Mrs. John Whisler, April 30th, twin girls. John now wears a double smile.

A number of St. Paulites attended the funeral of Mr. Haselbarth in Salisbury, Thursday.

Mrs. Zack Faidley spent Sunday with her daughter, Mrs. Maurice Hostetler, near Meyersdale.

Mr. Fred Weise, who had been confined to his bed for several weeks, is up again and convalescing.

Mr. N. D. Hay, who had been confined to his home for several weeks by sickness, is out again, enjoying the pleasant May weather.

Ethel McClintock and Effie Kretzman, of Fort Hill, are attending the Normal School in Salisbury, and boarding with Mrs. Zack Faidley, of this place.

Many of our young folks were promenading in the groves near town, Sunday, enjoying the beautiful May weather, gathering flowers, and making love to their companions.

A patriotic meeting will be held in the Reformed Church Monday evening, May 13th. There will be special music by the Dry Federation male quartette. A large attendance is solicited.