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DANGER OF THE SENSATIONAL PRESS

WHILE a free press is undoubtedly one of the bulwarks of liberty, it would seem sometimes that in this country the liberty of the press comes dangerously close to license. It is one thing to have free discussion of all matters of public interest and to give free expression to all the views of the people, but it is another and much more dangerous matter to allow any newspaper full power to shape the acts of intensely ignorant and inflammable people by stirring up the worst passions of undeveloped human nature. We see the effect of sensational reports of crime and punishment, given with all the vulgar detail demanded by morbid minds, in the "epidemic" that almost invariably follows the exploiting of any particular kind of crime. The law of suggestion is called into play to the working of untold harm, and, what is even worse, the lionizing of criminals through the publication of everything they say or do, and the photographing of them in every imaginable pose and circumstance, actually puts a premium upon wrong-doing. Combined with laxity in the administration of our criminal laws, and the difficulties thrown in the way of inflicting capital, or even severe, punishment for abominable crimes, it is easy to follow the mental processes by which some morbid degenerate, or some man with a real or fancied grudge against society, resolves upon gratification or revenge as the case may be, secure of being for a time at least a prominent figure in the public eye and reasonably sure of escaping any very serious consequences.

We have had instances enough of the harm worked by this type of journalism. The unspeakable Thaw trial, which came close to being a national disgrace, ought to have carried its own lesson, but we find no diminution in the eager efforts to exploit and advertise to the utmost limit, every criminal who furnishes a spacy news item. Worse than that, the papers that sport the most flamboyant headlines and the most shocking pictures are those almost invariably seen in the hands of young boys and girls, ignorant men and women, and foreigners who presumably are in training for American citizenship.

The shame reached its climax with the shooting of Mayor Gaynor. Not only was this attempted assassination the direct outcome of the morbid diet upon which the readers of the sensational journals delight to batte, but the lionizing of the man Gallagher was in itself enough to induce all other soured incompetents to seek the same kind of notoriety by doing a similar thing. Directly after the shooting, when the first thought of everyone was to get the latest news of the condition of this man who in one short year has made himself so universally loved and respected, it was something of a shock to find almost as much space given to pictures of Gallagher, interviews with him, accounts of his delight at being, as he said, "the most talked-of man in America today," the complete presentation of his grievance over and over again, and the story of his every act, word or look, whether or not it had any bearing upon his deed. So complete were all the details that one paper actually noted the fact that the man had been a greedy reader of the most sensational journal in New York; that he was seldom seen without a copy of it in his pocket, and that he specially delighted in all tales of crime. Being what he was, a chronic grumbler with an undying grudge against the world which did not give him the living that he thought was due him, the outcome was inevitable. Other men were brought suddenly into the limelight by committing murder; why not he? So the shot was fired, and it was only by an accident that the devoutly inclined might call a direct interposition of Providence that it did not prove fatal. Gallagher got exactly what he wanted, and then we began to see in this or that paper accounts of discharged employees and other malcontents taking shots at their employers or at anyone prominent enough to get them into the papers if the shot should take effect.

Mayor Gaynor's own story of the shooting, given in the letter written to his sister during his convalescence, contained one paragraph that should rouse every decent citizen to demand cleaner journalism. He said: "I could now see faces and I wanted to get away from the crowd. I could not bear to have them looking at me in the plight I was in, especially the crowd of newspaper men and especially those with cameras. Two of them rushed from the line where they all stood and put their cameras right in my face and snapped them. I finally put my hand up and think I said 'Don't.' I hope those pictures were not pub-
lished. The other newspaper men acted decently, as they always do." For the credit of the profession, it is a comfort to learn that some of the newspaper men "acted decently." The burning shame is that there were others so entirely lost to all sense of decency that they were capable of thrusting their cameras in the face of a bleeding, and as they supposed, dying man, and that the newspapers they represented not only published these pictures but probably raised the salaries of the men for getting them. The insult to the wounded Mayor, however, was merely a matter of heartless impertinence in the gratification of morbid curiosity. The real harm was done when the cameras were turned on Gallagher, and when the newspaper men thronged his cell, gave him cigars, shook hands with him and then published columns about it for the people to read.

If a law could be passed making it a misdemeanor to publish either the name or the picture of an assassin; if, after the commission of the deed, he were simply hurried away to his cell and never allowed to see a newspaper man; above all, if, except on the court records, his name was never mentioned and his act never alluded to, the chief incentive toward the committing of a sensational crime would vanish. All sorts of measures have been suggested for the protection of our public officials; but just so long as the papers are allowed to inflame the minds of men like Gallagher to the point where they are ready to commit murder, and then to inflame their vanity to the point where they regard themselves as heroes and martyrs for having committed it, no precautions will be of any value. We have an overwhelming foreign population, drawn from the lowest classes in the most turbulent countries of Europe. Assassination is no novelty to these people, and assassination that wins them such enviable notoriety is something to be sought as they would seek undying fame or fortune. And the menace grows every day. We may blame our police department for inefficiency; we may surround every public man with a guard of detectives, talking meanwhile of the deplorable conditions that make such things necessary, but as long as we permit criminal sensationalism to flourish unchecked in the newspapers, just so long will we have murder, dynamiting, kidnapping and every other outrage that the inflamed imagination of lawless man can suggest.

NOTES

WHAT FRANCE IS SAYING ABOUT GEORGE GREY BARNARD'S WORK

Editor's Note.—One of the first, if not the very first significant article about the sculpture of George Grey Barnard was published in The Craftsman of December, 1908. Although Mr. Barnard's work had already received international recognition and although among artists and critics it was accepted as sculpture displaying rare genius, still the magazines and very largely the newspapers were vague and indeterminate. There was not a popular vague for his work at that time and there seemed to be some fear of saying just how great it was. A few months after this article was published Barnard returned to France to finish the work of his colossal figures for the Capitol at Harrisburg, Pa., some of which had been already exhibited in Boston in the fall of 1908. It is nearly two years now since Mr. Barnard sailed away to complete this monumental undertaking. At the request of the French Government the finished work was exhibited this last summer at the Salon des Artistes Francais, and created the sensation of the year. The French newspapers have been full of enthusiasm. It was the wish of many members of the Jury that the gold medal of honor should be given to Mr. Barnard, as the position of honor at the Salon had been, but one or two members of the Jury felt that this medal should not be awarded to a foreigner, so that eventually it was given to a French sculptor. The desire of the majority of the Jury to see honor Barnard was seconded throughout the press of Paris and throughout France. Indeed, such generous praise has probably never before been awarded to any one foreign artist. Rodin was among the most enthusiastic of the admirers, classing Barnard as one of the great, if not the greatest of sculptors. So widespread was this recognition of the genius of this American artist that it has seemed significant to The Craftsman to reproduce here translations of the critical reviews from various papers throughout the country. It is perhaps worth the while to mention in connection with the article by K. M. Roof which was published in The Craftsman that Mr. Barnard expressed himself as liking it better than any other article about his work which had ever been published.

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THERE are two great groups in marble, at the Salon des Artistes Francais, guarding either side of the main entrance ordered by the Government of Pennsylvania from the American sculptor, George Grey Barnard. He is a student of our École des Beaux Arts. Mr. Barnard was congratulated greatly on having added to his fame by an achievement so grand in its character.