

Might its entirety,  
unless we are first



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Might not such persons, if they could resist the attractions of the daily press, read instead, to their own great advantage, the noblest productions of ancient and modern literature? There is a large amount of force in the argument; but we can hardly accept the conclusion in its entirety, unless we are first convinced that the reading of newspapers is entirely unprofitable, and that newspaper readers, if debarred from their favorite reading, would turn their attention to something better. On the contrary, there is reason to believe that the hours now devoted to the newspaper would not all be devoted to solid reading. Many newspaper readers, supposing they were deprived of their daily paper, would simply read nothing at all; and men engaged in hard intellectual work could not without injury to themselves add to their daily burden of brain-work the hour they spare to the laborious perusal of the newspaper. Also it will appear on reflection that there is a great deal of profitable information to be derived from the daily press, and that any one destitute of this information will be intellectually the worse for his ignorance. Of course it must be admitted that a great deal of the matter contained in newspapers does not really add to our knowledge.

We do not learn much by glancing our eye over short paragraphs or personal gossip and report of trials for murder or embezzlement. Newspapers, as might be inferred from their name, attach far too much importance to an event that happens to be a novelty, although it may be forgotten and may deserve to be forgotten before a week has passed. They also waste a great deal of space on elaborate conjectures about future events for the settlement of which by time we might well be content to wait in patience. Yet, for all this, we must remember that the whole of contemporary history,

that is to say, the history which should naturally be most interesting to us and most nearly concerns us, can be read nowhere else but in newspapers. It is the press that gives us, in however fragmentary and irregular a shape, the latest development of all the centuries of history that have rolled away in the past. It is the press that does much to bind the whole world in bonds of sympathy by teaching its readers to take an interest in the successes and calamities of distant nations.

It is by the press that we most quickly become informed of the latest discoveries of science and of the newest works of modern writers. Finally, the press does an immense practical service by educating the multitude in political and municipal questions. Each particular newspaper gives indeed a very one-sided view of the facts; but, by comparing two of them on opposite sides. We have the same kind of opportunity of coming to a correct conclusion as is afforded to the jury by the pleading of lawyers for and against the prisoner at the bar.

Nor is this instruction necessary only for the unlearned multitude. Even men of literary culture would be unable to use their influence aright in national and local politics, if they were not informed of passing events by the newspapers. They might under such circumstances abstain from voting and taking any active part in public affairs; but it is evident that such abstention would throw the control of everything into the hands of the ignorant, crowd, with disastrous consequences to the national welfare.