

TOO MUCH INK

INTO an England where Faith was indigenou, Charity a common virtue, and Hope a sane, constructive effort, Caxton was admitted as a man with a wonderful new toy. He was, in fact, the pioneer of materialism, and the legacy we have inherited from him after more than four centuries, is the chaos of the modern world.

We live now, at best, in a maze of false optimism. Most men realise that something is wrong with the world; they know that Faith is a limited psychological phenomenon with a certain commercial value, that Charity is either a convincing gesture (also with a commercial value) or a weakness that encourages the lower classes, and that Hope is a pious wish that, in spite of Socialism, Mammon may come into his own; but 'hard-headed business men' and their satellites are the last people to face realities; self-preservation is the antithesis of soul-preservation, and the one is pleasing and lucrative, the other painful and exacting, so the issue is cloaked in the obscurity of ink which itself is the maggot that has bred our present corruption. Ink, according to the Oxford Dictionary, is a black liquid ejected by a cuttle-fish to assist its escape from a foe. It is also a black, scarlet or purple liquid that men squirt out of fountain pens to assist their escape from reality. It is not money, but ink; not the Bankers, but the Printers who control the lives of the purblind millions. It is ink, the cheapest drug in the world, that has debased men's minds: and to-day we seek to be informed not by the Holy Ghost but by the Press. Modern man's first duty in the morning is not to make his orizons, but to scramble downstairs to the breakfast table, and, in sacrosanct silence, to consult the daily oracle of his choice, upon the state of

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his affairs; to learn, for example, what he must do with his money—which company promoters he must patronise and which horse-trainer he must abet; to learn how he must manifest his aesthetic taste—what school of art to admire, what plays and films he must pronounce clever; to learn, finally, with grumbling satisfaction, how extraordinarily superior are his own adopted political opinions to those of all heretics: and when he has finished, he must pass on the oracle to his wife that she may learn the dictates of the capricious goddess of fashion, or the exciting possibilities of breaking two dozen eggs into a quart of cream.

Whatever appears in print is invested by the public mind with an aura of reverence; though men attack they revere the printed word, and the most bigoted will condone a blatant heresy in one nearest and dearest to them if the heretic has the sanction of publication.

A murderer is convicted, not on the evidence produced in court, but by the false witness of the penny oracles the jurors read; for the Press becomes alarmed from time to time, by the results of its own stupidity in prematurely publishing all available evidence in criminal cases and so acting as accessory after the fact.

Games are acknowledged to be a healthy form of bodily and mental recreation, and England is popularly supposed by foreigners and by the English to be a nation of sportsmen, but a very small proportion of adult English people play games and a comparatively small proportion of them even watch games; instead they reconstruct them on the garbled evidence of biased reporters whose word they implicitly believe.

And if you happen to be a player yourself you will be so drugged by ink opinions, so deluded by ink prestige, that your ambition will be to figure in press

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accounts of professional games; and when the printers have lured you into their columns they will not let you depart until you have branded yourself with their ink-mark by proclaiming to the world your opinions on literature, or on your own success and the failure of others. Pugilists and cricketers are now to be known by the paper they write for, and gone are the glories of the Gas-man of Hazlitt's immortal memory; gone, too, are the days of cricket of W. G. Grace's standard, for *The Times* warns rising batsmen that their first duty is to 'the gate.' It is useless to complain that professionalism has ruined games: the Press has created, and maintains, professionalism.

Print has first, a soporific effect on the public mind, but, as doses are repeated, it sets up a lingering process of poisoning that corrodes the reason. Photographs, reproduced in ink, persuade the less sophisticated to ape the behaviour of those who owe their notorious existence to publicity. The artisan's interests are deflected from his natural skill and natural delights to unintelligent accounts of meddling in international affairs by his own leaders who are attempting to cover up their incompetence to deal with domestic problems. And most of our social evils thrive because they are nourished by publicity: the ink addict becomes a crank and advocates with diabolic insistence grotesque schemes like vegetarianism, birth-control and prohibition, until at length such perverse practices receive the sanction of legislation: indeed, it would not be very fantastic to deduce from the publicity given to Communism the intention of newspaper magnates to accustom the public to the idea of Bolshevism and subsequently to impose it upon us.

Men don't trouble now to live life; they read about it instead. With every opportunity to know mankind, they content themselves with reading about men of sawdust and women of paint. They learn with avidity

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every detail of a film star's toilet, diet and emotional upheavals, and have no time to cultivate a sympathetic understanding of their nearest neighbours. Their native wit has been destroyed by pictorial humour of the lower sort, and *Punch* itself has triumphed chiefly in fostering that middle-class type of mind that affects to despise the middle classes.

Daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly journals abound in the country, consciously or unconsciously comic, and nearly all tragic. Is there a movement afoot to improve the lot of humanity, an effort made to combat an evil—the Press is ready, waiting and eager to scotch it. The Pope writes an Encyclical on Married Life; and that is the opportunity for Miss Naomi Mitchison to break out afresh, and for the formation of the National Birth Control Council.

But the Press has by no means the monopoly of ink. The drug is administered to infants in their cradles, and the dose is daily increased. To begin with, indestructible books are provided, gaudily embellished, to teach the mystic signs of the alphabet. The newly-christened child exerts all his strength in an effort to destroy the noisome thing; but after frequent frustration he comes to gaze upon it with a sense of awe; he sees it as something immutable, a transcendent glory that never fades, a great reverential thing to be multiplied and increasingly adored. To mark the milestones of his career, more and more elaborately prepared volumes are presented to him, each one a stronger dose of poison more insidiously disguised than the last. By the time he is six he is spelling out impossible adventures in *Comic Cuts*. At eight years old he gets as far away from reality as the adventures of Harry Wharton and Billy Bunter in the *Magnet*. When he is ten he gives up his reason and his imagination to the power of 'Sexton Blakes.' He is encouraged in his vicarious reading: he is honoured for it: the

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term ' a great reader ' is a term of commendation instead of abuse.

And he goes to school. Every boy goes to school! And every girl, too! And they are forced, by the State, to go to school for the primary purpose of learning to use ink and to absorb all the inky information they can. They paddle in ink. They smear ink all over their clothes, all over the walls. They fight with ink, squirting it in each other's faces. And all the time, paradoxically enough, their reverence for ink increases. Family life is a thing of the past; instead of conversation there are books and magazines. All the boy's impressionable years are spent in the blind service of the Printer's idol; and that is part of a gigantic conspiracy, an incredible, evil scheme, for, ' School,' explains Professor MacColl, ' is a device for relieving busy or idle parents from the care or exasperation of children who cannot occupy themselves at home, and entails the slowing down, by years, of those who are capable of learning without compulsion to the pace of those who are determined not to learn without it.' But things are worse than that. The fact is that nowadays education is merely another form of unemployment relief. The Government proved the point by lately introducing a Bill to raise the leaving age of pupils in State schools. The only reason for keeping the children at their text-books for another two years of parrot training, is that they would then make their appearance in the lists of unemployed two years later than now they must. And wherever possible, opportunities are made—indeed, forced—for the continuation of this system by sending young men and maidens to universities for three, or four, years.

It is enlightening to notice the changed meaning of the word clerk. Originally a clerk was a lover of learning, a guardian of that pearl of great price: to-day he is a dingy figure with a dingy mind who pores all day

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with dimming eyes over figures in dingy ledgers, for thirty or fifty shillings a week; he is a clerk in most unholy orders. To this scholastic end has he been 'educated.' And the girl whose notions of propriety have been upset by the ink-poison she has assimilated at school and in some business-training institution, spends her working hours at an ink-machine banging out commercial jargon in a language which is neither pure nor undefiled.

The university graduate and those who ape his characteristics have had longer to glean more, and are able to interlard their conversation with words, phrases, *clichés* in a foreign tongue, like Euphues at a tea-party. But there is little to choose between the effects of ink on the university addict and on the board school addict. They both read books that are injurious to the health of their minds and souls, and both are so far divorced from the strength of reality that idealism becomes a mockery. The stable-boy is drugged: he rides to an impossible victory, for a fabulous fortune, on one of Nat Gould's horses. The domestic servant is drugged: she defends her unassailed honour against Charles Garvice's unconvincing villains. But all the others are drugged too! They read voraciously, perhaps, and then their minds are impaired by too much gleaning; they acquire nothing but a superficial knowledge of certain facts. They are broad-minded, modern and *interested*? That means that they are thrilled by dangerous teachings on psychology and other social topics that they are ill-prepared to receive; and they are just able, as a result of their reading, to discuss the complexes of other people, a legitimized form of scandal-mongering!

There are innumerable books and it is a social duty to read as many as one can, and to leave those one can't but *really ought* to read in a prominent position in our home: and pathetic are the results.

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The swollen stream of ink has brought us a corresponding increase of credulity. Explorers have lied and lied again about the big fishes they have caught in Southern seas, about buried civilizations, and about lost races. Scientists have lied shamelessly in books that purport to be divine revelations; in the Dark Ages they would have been laughed to scorn, but in this age of Light thousands of men and women whose minds are warped by the superstition of the printed word hail them as prophets.

Perhaps the chief function of ink nowadays is to advertise. Novels advertise the licentious minds of the novelists. Histories advertise the lively imaginations of the historians. Theological studies advertise the dexterity of clergymen. And poems show forth the prosiness of poets. The press and the hoardings that defile the countryside, the decorations of railway carriages, the burdens of sandwichmen, placards and the wrappings of parcels are all part of the advertiser's endeavour to vitiate men's taste. The devil, understanding the power of matter over mind, has used ink as a means of destroying man's stomach. All the poisons of tinned salmon, sardines and canned meat ruin man's digestion and impair the working of his intellect. And one quack medicine does more bodily and spiritual harm than all the witches of the Middle Ages. In short, ink has deluded men into the belief that many injurious superfluities are essential to human existence. But, even worse! ink has deluded men into the belief that they can get something for nothing; they actually believe that cigarette coupons and packets of tea vouchers represent the magnanimity of monopolists!

The average man's worst disability in this era of ink is that he can read. It is much to be lamented that the shining example of the burning of the library of Alexandria has not been followed periodically through the

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centuries. Next to the Enclosure of the Commons the worst act of enslavement in this country has been the enforcement of learning coupled with the endowment of free libraries. Knowledge is so readily available now that no one troubles to find out anything for himself : he goes to a public library and picks someone else's brain, marking his place in the book, in at least one case, with a piece of bacon-rind : such reference is not a sign of progress but of neglect. It is encouraged deliberately : soak the mind in ink and it will not exercise itself inconveniently in thinking.

What wonder, then, that religion ultimately suffers most from this pollution? Step by step, the devil has advanced, starting with the printing of the Bible, advancing through 'Pilgrim's Progress,' until he has reached the printing of 'This Mysterious Universe' by Sir James Jeans, 'Beyond the Veil,' by the Reverend Vale Owen, and 'What I Believe,' by Lord Russell. Recently Sir Oliver Lodge made this profound statement as a concession to the religious opinions of the United Free Churches : 'Science is beginning to recognise that outside this material world exists not necessarily a spiritual but at any rate a non-material world.' Sir James Jeans and Professor Eddington, who are scientists, take it upon themselves to descant on metaphysics. Julian Huxley, further, denies the existence of God on the authority of his own eminence as a biologist. And men and women up and down the country lap up this inky poison, then, with a bland countenance, say 'You know, there isn't a God. All the clever men say that.' The one truth they have got hold of is misconstrued : clever men are not wise men, and wise men are not clever.

And finally there is the matter of songs. No longer do we sing because we are happy and because song is a spontaneous expression of joy ; we sing because we remember that our forefathers sang, and because the

noise of our tired voices deadens the sounds of chaos in our ears. No longer do we sing the songs that poets or we ourselves have made; we sing, from cheap paper cheaply printed, inane words strung together to embody some doubtful meaning, to suggest what the Censor will not pass in plain language.

Try to imagine a world without printing presses and the tyranny of ink. Only the best stories and songs would survive, and they would achieve an immortality denied to the printed word. The tale of Cinderella was told in Ancient Egypt; it has run no risk of oblivion until now when it is threatened by the overcrowding of the publishers. All folk stories are common to all nations and all times, and it is only necessary for Mrs. Kennedy-Fraser to rescue Hebridean lyrics because cheap print has made men too lazy to learn from their fathers; and such rescue-work is their destruction; once in print the songs enjoy a vogue and are then forgotten, displaced, it may well be, by the score of the latest musical comedy.

The Government, free of the shackles of the Press, would be able to rule again, and the only public record of its transactions would be a form of Hansard report.

The art of conversation would be regained; first, men's minds would be localised, and their interests more intensive; our native tongue would be purer, for speech is rarely influenced by verbal importations—novels and newspapers to-day teach us the slang of the United States; and dialect, that invaluable ally of self-respect, individuality, patriotism and independence, would revive from the strangle-hold that the snobbery of the Board School has laid upon it.

No longer, without ink, would the drama be debased by prolixity, and scholars would not write inconclusive theories on corrupt texts for the mystification of aspirants to academic honours. The Bible, not

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easily available, and reverently guarded, would be authoritatively interpreted.

Without papers and pamphlets to explain their grievances, men would not know they had any. Without printed propaganda no useless commodities could be foisted on the public, so that waste would be minimised; and as waste is the explanation of mass-production, that particularly pernicious form of industry would die a sudden death; Distributists, it must be observed in parenthesis, must stop sending out literature and concentrate upon relieving the masses of their intolerable burden of education, if they are to reinstate them on the land. Without psycho-analytical books to warn them, people would not know they had complexes; they would not know how gravely ill they are, so they would be less of a nuisance to everyone else and of less interest to themselves.

Imagine the delectable hours of leisure in a State without books! Family life, community life, national life, would be real once more. Tales told by the fire-side in companionship; a symposium in the village inn; games played for enjoyment and exercise; and handicrafts leading men's bodies and minds to God. There would be peace and tranquillity in the countryside and cleanliness in the towns. In that renewed freedom men would learn to live and love again, in the strength of reality.

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