

NEWSPAPER CONTENT AND STYLE

The subject matter of Canadian journalism in the last half of the nineteenth century was largely determined by the events and issues of the day. Although domestic political developments continued to occupy a significant share of newspaper attention, discussion of the Responsible Government question was replaced in turn by a consideration of Confederation, the Washington Treaty, the Pacific Scandal, the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the two Riel Rebellions and the Manitoba School question. In addition, particularly towards the end of the period, the press gave more attention to questions of international concern. The papers had always carried foreign news, but formerly the coverage had been that of the remote observer, and the newer reports gave a sense that readers were participants in world affairs. This change was partly caused by the fact that, with speedier news-gathering methods, foreign items no longer appeared as ancient history, and partly because increasing Canadian autonomy indicated that Canada was preparing for greater international activity. The interest and involvement of Canada in such matters as the South African War, the Alaska boundary dispute and conferences on pelagic sealing, for example, are readily understandable, but citizens of the new country showed themselves to be interested observers of such events as the Dreyfus trial—a fact which Canadian newspaper reporting amply demonstrated.

During the 1858-to-1900 period newspaper reports became freer of the editorial opinion that had marked their earlier counterpart, but the news-story still lacked the format of the twentieth century prototype. Editorial comment, now somewhat more closely confined to the editorial page, was still characterized by the vitriolic abusiveness that had disgraced earlier newspapers. A comparable blot on newspaper records was the practice of writing careless libel, of writing matter which would bring convictions for contempt of court today, and of commenting freely on questions which now would be classified as *sub judice*. Advertising, particularly of patent medicines, continued to be irresponsible, such matter being shamelessly disguised as news accounts with extravagant claims being made for the curative and life-saving powers of the items sold. On occasion, such deadly articles as devices to procure abortion were offered openly in the press.

While very few new *kinds* of stories appeared in the late Victorian press, there was a growing tendency to departmentalize the news. A cautious use of bolder headlines was made, but eight-column, 72-point and larger banners were still rare. Label heads continued to appear fairly frequently, but the more exciting stories began to carry several decks after the fashion of the *New York Herald*. These gained variety through inverted pyramid and hanging indent arrangements.

Pictures, mainly line drawings, began to make their first modest appearance in the daily and weekly press. On June 3, 1871, the *Canadian Illustrated News* carried a photograph of Montreal's new Custom House. According to the *Montreal Gazette* of Oct. 13, 1956, this was the "first time that a photograph had been successfully transmitted to the printed page." However, it was not until Max Levy of Philadelphia developed the cross-ruled screen in 1886 that a really successful method of reproducing photographs in newspapers was achieved. In Canada the *Dominion Illustrated* introduced a practical form of the half-tone illustration in 1888, but the possibilities of the new device were little realized by the end of the century.

MECHANICAL CHANGES IN THE PRESS

Many mechanical improvements in the press occurred during the 1858-to-1900 period. These included the introduction of wood pulp manufacture into Canada in 1866, the first adoption of electrically driven rotary power presses after 1890, and the use of better folder attachments and improved inks. But perhaps the most revolutionary invention of all was Mergenthaler's linotype, first demonstrated in the *New York Tribune* in 1886, and available in improved form in 1889. This was to find increasing Canadian use from the 1890's onward. It was these inventions primarily that caused the dramatic transformation of the press which characterized Canada's fourth journalistic period.