

Aug. 4, 1920

Journal
Miss Vera Sinclair,
Tacoma, Wash.

My dear Miss Sinclair:

I have your letter of July 26.
Thank you for your kind expressions about my work.

You ask me for my opinion on the subject of your college thesis, "The Influence of Newspapers on Literature." I do think that there is a danger that newspapers make superficial readers; but I think it is too sweeping to say that they are making the American people superficial. As a matter of fact, there never were so many serious books read in any country by so large a proportion of the people as there are in the United States today. I think that the public library figures show this.

Of course a per cent. of serious book readers probably found their way to the library through the newspapers, so that the interest in ideas and knowledge that the newspaper awakens in some might offset the harm that it does to others by making them merely newspaper readers.

As to ~~effect~~ of newspaper writing on real literature, there is a question of great interest. Average newspaper writing has its qualities as well as its defects. It may be slovenly in style; it is often indifferent to the rules of grammar; but it almost invariably is interesting. It must be, if the newspaper is to be read. It has a quality of liveness, of reality, without which you cannot have any real literature. That is, I am inclined to think that newspaper writing, though it has quite obvious dangers for good writing, it also contributes something to good writing. Moreover, you take our best newspapers and you find much of the best writing of the country in them. Take the Oregonian, for example, its editorials, many of them, are in admirable English, and they have a foundation of knowledge and sense of construction. It is not a question of agreeing with the point of view of the writer, but they are worth reading because of the writing.

We must remember that the newspaper, in the nature of things, can be never more than a hasty report of the life of a community or state or country, for a single day of the week. Things are

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put down as they strike the writer at the moment. They don't pretend to be literature. They have the same relation to the considered article or a book that a finished address has to extemporaneous speaking and informal discussion. The more knowledge, the more taste, the more sense of construction that the journalist and editor of the newspaper have, the more nearly will what they write take on the literary quality; but their function is not to produce literature, it is journalism. The reader should discriminate, and intelligent readers do. If the reader allows himself to be submerged in the newspaper, and to read only that, it is his fault not the newspaper's fault.

I hope this may be of some use to you.

Very sincerely yours,