JOURNALISM FOR WOMEN
A PRACTICAL GUIDE. E.A. BENNETT.
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BY E. A. BENNETT
Editor of "Woman"

JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD
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CHAPTER II

IMPERFECTIONS OF THE EXISTING WOMAN-JOURNALIST.

Despite a current impression to the contrary, implicit in nearly every printed utterance on the subject, there should not be any essential functional disparity between the journalist male and the journalist female. A woman doctor (to instance another open calling) is rightly regarded as a doctor who happens to be a woman, not as a woman who happens to be a doctor. She undergoes the same training, and submits to the same tests, as the young men who find their distraction in the music-halls and flirt with nurses. Her sex is properly sunk, except where it may prove an advantage, and certainly it is never allowed to pose as an excuse for limitations, a palliative for shortcomings. Least of all is she credited (or debited) with any abnormality on account of it. But towards the woman jour-
nalist our attitude, and her own, is mysteriously different. Though perhaps we do not say so, we leave it to be inferred that of the dwellers in Fleet Street there are, not two sexes, but two species—journalists and women-journalists—and that the one is about as far removed organically from the other as a dog from a cat. And we treat these two species differently. They are not expected to suffer the same discipline, nor are they judged by the same standards. In Fleet Street femininity is an abysm, not an accident. The statement may be denied, but it is broadly true, and can easily be demonstrated.

Such a condition of affairs is mischievous. It works injustice to both parties, but more particularly to the woman, since it sets an arbitrary limit to healthy competition, while putting a premium on mediocrity. Is there any sexual reason why a woman should be a less accomplished journalist than a man? I can find none. Admitted that in certain fields—say politics—he will surpass her, are there not other fields in which she is pre-eminent, fields of which the man will not so much as climb the gate? And even in politics women have excelled. There are at least three women-journalists in Europe to-day whose influence is felt in Cabinets and places where they govern (proving that sex is not a bar to the proper understanding of la haie politque); whereas the man who dares to write on fashions does not exist.

That women-journalists as a body have faults none knows better than myself. But I deny that these faults are natural, or necessary, or inevitable, or meet to be condoned. They are due not to sex, but to the subtle, far-reaching effects of early training; and the general remedies, therefore, as I shall endeavour to indicate in subsequent chapters, lie to hand. They seem to be traceable either to an imperfect development of the sense of order, or to a certain lack of self-control. I should enumerate them thus:

First, a failure to appreciate the importance of the maxim: Business is business. The history of most civil undertakings comprises, not only Trafalgar, but many; and in journalism especially the signal Business is business—commercial equivalent of England expects—must always be flying at the mast-head. On ne badine pas...
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Consider the effects of any lapse from the spirit of that signal in a profession where time is observed more strictly than in pugilism, where whatever one does one does in the white light of self-appointed publicity, where a single error or dereliction may ruin the prestige of years! Consider also the rank turpitude of such a lapse! Alas, women frequently do not consider these things. Some of them seem to have a superstition that a newspaper is an automaton and has a will-to-live of its own; that somehow (they know not how) it will appear, and appear fitly, with or without man's aid. They cannot imagine the possibility of mere carelessness or omission interfering with the superhuman regularity and integrity of its existence. The simple fact of course is that in journalism, as probably in no other profession, success depends wholly upon the loyal co-operation, the perfect reliability, of a number of people—some great, some small, but none irresponsible.

Stated plainly, my first charge amounts to this: women-journalists are unreliable as a class. They are unreliable, not by sexual imperfection,
or from any defect of loyalty or good faith, but because they have not yet understood the codes of conduct prevailing in the temples so recently opened to them. On the hearth, their respect for the exigencies of that mysterious business is unimpeachable; somehow, admittance to the shrine engenders a certain forgetfulness. Or perhaps it would be kinder and truer to say that the influences of domesticity are too strong to be lightly thrown off. For commercial or professional purposes these influences, in many cases, could not well be worse than they are. Regard, for a moment, the average household in the light of a business organisation for lodging and feeding a group of individuals; contrast its lapses, makeshifts, delays, irregularities, continual excuses, with the awful precisions of a city office. Is it a matter for surprise that the young woman who is accustomed gaily to remark, “Only five minutes late this morning, father,” or “I quite forgot to order the coals, dear,” confident that a frown or a hard word will end the affair, should carry into business (be it never so grave) the laxities so long permitted her in the home?
I would not charge the professional woman, as I know her, with any consistent lack of seriousness. On the contrary, she is in the main exquisitely serious. No one will deny that the average girl, when she adopts a profession, exhibits a seriousness, an energy, and a perseverance, of which the average man is apparently incapable. (It is strange that the less her aptitude, the more dogged her industry.) The seriousness of some women in Fleet Street and at the Slade School must be reckoned among the sights of London. It seems almost impossible that this priceless intensity of purpose should co-exist in the same individual with that annoying irresponsibility which I have endeavoured to account for. Yet such is the fact. Scores of instances of it might be furnished; let one, however, suffice. Once there was a woman-journalist in the North of England who wrote to a London paper for permission to act as its special correspondent during the visit of some royal personages to her town. The editor of the paper, knowing her for an industrious and conscientious worker and a good descriptive writer, gave the necessary authority, with explicit information as to the last moment for receiving copy. The moment came, but not the copy; and the editor, for the time being a raging misogynist (for he had in the meantime publicly announced his intention to produce a special report), went to press without it. The next day, no explanation having arrived, he dispatched to his special correspondent particularly scathing and scornful letter. This came the excuse. It was long, but the result of it amounted to exactly this: "I was knocked up and had such a headache at the ceremonies were over, that I really did not feel equal to the exertion of writing. I thought it would not matter." Comment would be superfluous. The curious thing is that the special correspondent was an editor's wife.

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Secondly, inattention to detail. Though shortcoming discloses itself in many and various ways, it is to be observed chiefly in the manner of literary style. Women enjoy a reputation of slipshod style. They have earned it. A lax, and intimate familiarity with the manuscript, hundreds of women writers, renowned and o
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Secondly, inattention to detail. Though this shortcoming discloses itself in many and various ways, it is to be observed chiefly in the matter of literary style. Women enjoy a reputation for slipshod style. They have earned it. A long and intimate familiarity with the manuscript of hundreds of women writers, renowned and other-
wise, has convinced me that not ten per cent. of them can be relied upon to satisfy even the most ordinary tests in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. I do not hesitate to say that if twenty of the most honoured and popular women-writers were asked to sit for an examination in these simple branches of learning, the general result (granted that a few might emerge with credit) would not only startle themselves but would provide innocent amusement for the rest of mankind.

Of course I make no reference here to the elegances and refinements of written language. My charge is that not the mere rudiments are understood. Even a lexicographer may nod, but it surely requires no intellectual power surpassing the achievement of women to refrain from regularly mis-spelling some of the commonest English words. The fact that there are niceties of syntax which have proved too much for great literary artists, does not make less culpable a wilful ignorance of the leading grammatical rules; yet the average woman will not undergo the brief drudgery of learning them. As for punctuation, though each man probably employs his own private

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system, women are for the most part content with one—the system of dispensing with a system. These accusations, I am aware, have a certain novelty. They are time-worn. They have been insisted upon again and again; but not sufficiently. And now the accusing sub-ed and proof-readers seem to have grown wearied of protest. They suffer in silence, corrected as little as they dare, while all around them appear women's articles, which, had the authors been men, would either have met with a curt refusal or been returned for thorough revision.

The root of the evil lies, as I think, in training. The female sex is prone to be inaccurate and careless of apparently trivial detail, because that is the general tendency of mankind. Men destined for a business or a profession of proclivity is harshly discouraged at an early stage. In women, who usually are not trained for anything whatever, it enjoys a more life, and often refuses to be improved or even maintained when the sudden need arises. One by taking thought, can deracinate mental habits of, say, twenty years.
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