

Instead of an Article

Brand Whitlock

Table of Contents

<u>Instead of an Article</u>	1
<u>Brand Whitlock</u>	1
<u>INSTEAD OF AN ARTICLE</u>	3
<u>THE SAME OLD STORY OF GRAFT</u>	6
<u>THE SHOCK TO CARNEGIE</u>	7
<u>THE REAL STORY OF PITTSBURG</u>	8

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- INSTEAD OF AN ARTICLE
- THE SAME OLD STORY OF GRAFT
- THE SHOCK TO CARNEGIE
- THE REAL STORY OF PITTSBURG

"Instead of an Article: About Pittsburg and, Incidentally, about Editing a Magazine"

Important articles in magazines of the type of "COLLIER'S," "MCCLURE'S," the "AMERICAN," and "EVERYBODY'S," like plays, are rewritten rather than written. Too begin with, there must be the idea, then to find the man or woman best able to embody it. That settled, the author must steep himself in his subject. When he acquires mastery, his findings are written down and submitted to the editor. This may take months; it often requires years.

It has happened that the editor did not know what he wanted until he read this first draft. Now he has the subject spread before him by an authority. His associates all read it and criticise. Sometimes that first draft is flawless, but most often it is returned to the author with direction for reconstruction. The process may be repeated half a dozen times. Finally the manuscript is satisfactory, which means that it is valuable, simply expressed, and readable. It is in shape for publication. It is put into type and sent around to outside experts who are the representative authorities on the subject.

In these days a magazine can afford to have its conclusions disputed, but its facts must be incontrovertible. Perhaps the trouble the big publications take to be right and that means square and just, as well as accurate explains such prestige and influence as they now enjoy in America.

At a women's club gathering in Mississippi, recently, Harris Dickson told his audience something about an article of his that had recently appeared in "EVERYBODY'S." He explained that a manuscript written by another man had been sent him to put in shape. The facts were there, and the moral, but the treatment was technical. It lacked carrying power. Dickson knew nothing of the other author, and so proceeded to get up the subject at first hand. He took not one of the facts for granted. After three months he returned the revised manuscript to the magazine. It was sent back, with specific directions for rewriting. In due course he again remailed it to the editor, who congratulated him on his achievement for that is what it was. Then the article, having attained a satisfactory form (it was on Fraternal Insurance), was sent round among the experts. The first man who read it was a high official of one of the old line insurance companies, but a hearty believer in the fraternal system. He returned it with approval and an elaborate criticism. Then it was submitted to the chief insurance commissioner of a western state — the undoubted political authorold line insurance companies, but a hearty believer in the fraternal system. He returned it with approval and an elaborate criticism. Then it was submitted to the chief insurance commissioner of a western state — the undoubted political authority on the subject. The approval and criticisms of both men, with the manuscript, were again forwarded to Mr. Dickson. The necessary corrections having been incorporated, the manuscript was ready for the printer. To make assurance doubly sure, proofs were sent out to

Instead of an Article

prominent officials of leading fraternal organizations, who returned them with most commendatory letters. And then, and only then, did it appear in the magazine.

Mr. Dickson's audience, doubtless under the impression that magazines are produced by editors out of the contributions sent them by mail, expressed surprise that so much time, effort, and money should be devoted to what seemed a comparatively unimportant subject. Yet it involved a matter that concerned five million men and their families, and a tremendous controversy. Its appearance has made the controversy even keener, and of course the enemies of sanity and good order in fraternalism are now hurling bolts at us. However, when we have done our part and know we are right, we stay put.

Mr. Dickson told part of what to us is a familiar story. In this instance he knew nothing of the time and trouble the author and ourselves had taken just to get together the facts and place them in the right perspective. We began on this particular article in November, 1906, and during the interval it was being worked at or over by one of some dozen men. The same is true of most of our big series. "The Woman's Invasion" represented two and a half years of work. Fifteen months elapsed between the delivery of Judge Lindsey's first manuscript and the beginning of publication in the magazine. Trained writers, the best men we know about, are out investigating and gathering the facts for the articles we will print a year hence. This is the process of magazine making to-day. It is not peculiar to "EVERYBODY'S"; it is the rule with "COLLIER'S," "MCCLURE'S," the AMERICAN, and SUCCESS."

INSTEAD OF AN ARTICLE

This is all by way of introduction to the story of an article that was not written. About the time the Pittsburg flare-up began to show itself in the papers, it occurred to us that some exposition of the situation there would be of value and interest to our readers. Before going about it, we debated it very carefully. Some of us in the office (and this magazine is edited by all of us) were fairly familiar with the subject, and we believed it would subserve no useful purpose to tackle it along the "Shame of the Cities" lines. We agreed that the way to approach Pittsburg was to consider what had happened there, not as a sporadic outburst, but as an economic symptom. Whom could we get that was far enough from the controversies involved to treat the subject objectively and with a big perspective? Brand Whitlock. The Mayor of Toledo knows more about cities and their governments, and the evils that arise within them, than any other man, and he can write — with knowledge, with sympathy, with clarity. Also he knew Pittsburg. So we telegraphed to find if he was free to write an article, and, when he replied in the affirmative, the following letter was sent him:

April 1, 1910.

DEAR MR. WHITLOCK:

The article we want is on Pittsburg. It is neither our purpose nor our desire merely to "muckrake" Pittsburg or any other city. The eruption there is typical of similar conditions in other great civic centers throughout the country, and it seems to us it might be made the text of a diagnosis of the whole municipal problem in America.

Here are a few thoughts that occur to me which might be represented:

We have come to realize that the real trouble in our country is Privilege. Big business, in its ruthless pursuit of results, has the ultimate responsibility for the ills that confront us in political, social, and commercial life. The graft scandals, the bank defalcations, etc., are simply symptoms of internal disorders. They are the eruptions of the disease.

Pittsburg might be called the typical get-rich-quick community. Its great wealth is based on the abundant coal and iron with which the Creator loaded its environment. Down on those deposits fasten thousands of Americans seized with the mania of money-making. They coin the coal and iron into millions. They work feverishly; they work their men furiously. It's a mad, frenzied scramble for success and sensation. To get rich quicker, they exact excessive protection from Congress — first to prop up infant industries, then to consolidate abnormal profits. If the government undertakes to deny their demands, they bluster first, then intrigue, then intimidate. Mills are closed down; the "prosperity" of the country is threatened, lobbies are organized, corruption funds subscribed, until Congress succumbs and new "jokers" are written into steel tariffs.

In the meantime a huge city is upreared. But this city is run for the benefit of its industries, not for the comfort of its inhabitants. Street railway, gas, electric corporations are organized, ostensibly to serve the community, actually enabling a greedy group to make more money. Again, what cannot be gained by request is won by force and guile.

Over and over again the various processes are repeated, until you have built up a sort of City Monstrous, dedicated to machinery, in which all the men and many of the women are just machines, and there is no ideal save that of feverish industrial adventure and accomplishment. Power — blind, ruthless, marvel-working, bending backs and bodies to its will — is Pittsburg's god, and Success its divine attribute Success that spells Gold, the instrument of exploitation and sensation. What wonder that weaker men, confronted by the colossal rewards of industrial conquest, are frenzied with the gold fever? In the absence of communal patriotism, graft becomes an incident. Graft and greed are the minor watchwords of success. Get money, anyway — but get it. Is it surprising that cashiers graft, that aldermen graft, that city officials graft, that there's a very pandemonium of graft? Isn't it the way the other fellows get rich?

All of a sudden the poison clogs the pores, and the infection blotches the surface — and every one is horrified. The great manufacturers, the great merchants, the great lawyers — high priests of the Power God — throw up their hands. Can such things be? Dreadful, horrible! — blindly oblivious of their own responsibility for the epidemic.

More startling still to the conquerors were the pitiless revelations of the Survey, exhibiting in mathematical terms the cost to the human factor of this monstrous material success. Hordes of anaemic, emaciated men and

Instead of an Article

women, exhausted by long hours of toil, piled thick in wretched hovels, underfed, half-clothed, dragging out a miserable existence unrelieved by leisure or rest or recreation — the Juggernaut toll of efficiency — of the passion for results at any price. Against this horror, what avails Pittsburg's panorama of splendid churches, of lordly palaces, of noble art museums, of great orchestras, richly endowed educational institutions — the patriotic tribute of the conquerors to civilization? What is this boasted civilization of ours worth — not Pittsburg's only, for Pittsburg is an incident — if it be reared on the wrecked and depleted bodies of men at its base?

There would then be the opportunity in the article to suggest the regenerated Pittsburg — all this furious energy hitherto devoted to material success turned to social betterment and decent government. The turn of the worker comes. The conquerors, having learned that they cannot take greedily what belongs to a community, and find happiness, turn magnificently to the rescue of their own downtrodden. The old question — what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? — has been burned into Pittsburg humanity once again.

For several years the newspapers have carried stories about these successive scandals in Pittsburg, until people have in a measure become confused as to how they connect, whether all are really parts of the same story. I doubt if the average man who reads the article in the morning paper has a clear grasp of what has been going on, and he can't discover it without hunting back through the files. Once we published an article by Owen Wister about the Capitol frauds in Pennsylvania, after the newspapers had been printing countless columns on the subject for months, and it was one of the most successful articles we have used, because of the way it crystallized and interpreted the whole occurrence.

A similar service is here suggested. Write the story of Pittsburg dramatically; crystallize the big exposures of the last few years through which bankers and politicians have been going to prison, culminating with the present crisis in the City Council; bring out the economic significance of these occurrences to Pittsburg, to the United States. Such an article will help all of us to see where we are "at," will help develop civic consciousness in New York, Chicago, San Francisco. It is immensely well worth doing.

I'm not dictating your article. What is written here is purely suggestive. You must tell what you see and find in your own way. You will, anyway. You know most of the facts. You are in touch with the balance. We'll help to get material. If you will, you can put up an article that the country will read. We'd like copy as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

J. O'H. COSGRAVE, Editor.

Mr. Whitlock, replied, expressing willingness to handle the subject along the lines indicated, and asked for whatever assistance we could render him. William Hard, a member of our editorial force, had spent some time in Pittsburg, acquiring material for his "Woman's Invasion," and he recommended J. J. Nordman, a reporter of that city, as the best man to equip Mr. Whitlock with the historical details of the exposure. He would thus have immediately a succinct, up-to-date statement of the case for his use as a skeleton.

Mr. Nordman was willing to help, and soon after got into communication with Mr. Whitlock. Here is an account of his service, which was accompanied by a letter from District Attorney Blakeley, certifying to his reliability and knowledge of the facts.

May 10, 1910. HON. BRAND WHITLOCK, Toledo, Ohio.

Dear Sir:

Mr. Cosgrave has asked me to forward you matter bearing on the Pittsburg graft exposé and such clippings as I may have.

I shall weave the facts together with no effort towards literary form, but rather in letter form, and present it to you not later than Monday next.

Enclosed please find what I have termed a "Retrospect," being a review of the political conditions leading to and making possible the present exposé.

Such clippings as I have will be forwarded with matter. I enclose letter from Mr. Blakeley.

Very respectfully,

J. JEROME NORDMAN.

After that we waited, rather impatiently, it must be confessed, for Whitlock's manuscript. After the passage of other admonitory letters and telegrams, we received the following letter. We print it "instead of an article." In our opinion, it is an extraordinarily valuable summary of the whole subject of municipal misrule. It goes far and

Instead of an Article

beyond Pittsburg, and deep into economic, social, and national conditions of which that city is but an instance and an illustration. And, moreover, it sets forth just how such an article, could we find the right man to do it, should be written. Here it is:

Executive Offices

THE CITY OF TOLEDO 3 June, 1910. JOHN O'HARA COSGRAVE, Esquire,
Editor EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE.

DEAR MR. COSGRAVE:

The Pittsburg story is big, too big and too important and too significant to do at second hand. I have had a valuable correspondence with Mr. Nordman, and he has most kindly put his information, and in clear form, at my disposal. He has sent me his scrapbook of newspaper clippings, and he has written me at length and in detail of the various exposures and prosecutions. I have made inquiries, too, from friends, and I have been thinking over the story that you propose. But it won't go, and I have concluded that it ought not to go in that form; and that is the only form in which it is possible for me now to tell it.

I find just what I expected to find, or I find the familiar symptoms of what I expected to find. The intelligent answers to the several questions I put to Mr. Nordman after our first few letters are exactly what I expected them to be. One city is all cities; and all exhibit the same effects, proceeding from the same causes. Look about you, anywhere, and if you see graft, and bribery, and corruption, you'll find a bi-partisan machine controlling nominations and elections to municipal offices, and representing the few who consider themselves privileged to exploit the people by means of franchises in public utilities, etc. It's as easy as it is for a physician to tell what ails a sallow and emaciated Southern "cracker" who shivers with chills one day, and burns up with fever the next.

And so, in Pittsburg, I found the usual Republican machine with its big boss, the usual Democratic machine and its little boss, and the two, as usual, working together, the Democratic boss and his tools rewarded by a few small offices on "bi-partisan" boards, and the like; then the street railway system and other public utility corporations which these bosses represent, and for which they procure franchises. And after this, the "better element," the "eminently respectable" citizens, supporting this combination, enjoying the fruits of its labor, and influencing the business interests of the city in the way that gives such perfect exemplification of the evils of class government in our cities — the same, old, sordid story.

The revelations, as they are called — though by this time they should have ceased to be revelations, and have become "recognitions" in this country — made by the newspaper clippings before me are the expected indications of the deeper, underlying causes. The superficial observer sees in them merely a corrupt council; and, from the fact that councilmen have taken bribes, he makes the daring deduction that some one gave them the bribes; he sees that councilmen have been grafting, and then is naïvely astonished by the revelation that some business men higher up, although not very much higher up, have been caught and publicly disgraced. He sees, too, a brave and fearless prosecutor who is sending these men to prison; and there are the usual predictions that out of all this there is to come to Pittsburg "good" government — that is, government by honest men, to be aided, perhaps, by the adoption of the commission plan. That is to say, we have here the subject only in its personal aspect, and not in its institutional, sociological, economic aspect.

THE SAME OLD STORY OF GRAFT

Now, to be frank, the story of the grafting doesn't interest me much, though it is as saddening and depressing as ever; and I can't work up enough enthusiasm for that feature of it to write anything that would be worth your while to print, or worth anybody's while to read. Toward the subject I feel the same apathy that was felt toward the ordinary newspaper account of some casualty by Thoreau, who would not read, as you will remember, the accounts — for example — of crimes and accidents, because, having once grasped the principle, he felt it unnecessary to multiply, indefinitely, instances of that principle. The story of Pittsburg, so far as it has been related to me, is merely the old, squalid story of municipal graft. I have the names and the dates in an orderly and logical way — who were sent to the penitentiary, and when, and for what particular crime, and what the judge said in pronouncing sentence, etc. All of this has been told over and over and over again in the newspapers and magazines during the last few years; the only difference lies in the names and the dates and the place. Indeed, Pittsburg's story in this respect is hardly as interesting as the old stories — it is, if anything, more commonplace, more squalid.

But behind all this, there is, of course, a story, and a big one, as you unerringly divined. Reading between the lines of the dry recital of facts with which I have been provided, and peering a little way behind the scenes, I come, I think, upon the real story, the one that some one should write, the one that some one should print.

The first chapter, perhaps, is the story of the old political machines in Pittsburg, and of that interesting, and — in certain elemental, human senses — strong personality, Chris Magee, the boss — who has a monument.

Then, there is another personality, of a different sort, in Blakeley, the district attorney. My accounts are meager and bald, and yet I catch glimpses of a striking personality. This district attorney, I should imagine, is a man with the best ideals of the legal profession, honest, capable, sincere, and unafraid; a man, withal, who knows life and politics and can play the game without being soiled in its many contacts. What draws me to him, even at this distance, is that he seems to have little of the Puritan in him, as there is too apt to be in prosecutors who convict, and push their victims within prison doors. And he is another chapter of the story. But I don't know Blakeley; I can't describe him, I can't interpret him, and I haven't the time nor the opportunity just now to become acquainted with him.

Then there is the story of the organization of the Civic League, or whatever they call it, and especially the story of its operations. These good citizens, it seems, hired a detective to come and run their men down for them. To me the private detective is not the most inspiring and heroic figure on our modern scene; but that is neither here nor there. One of these detectives evidently has not only ability but versatility, and in an interesting manner combines the occupation of a detective with the profession of an evangelist. It was not, however, he who worked the old panel game — much as a black paramour might work it down in the Tenderloin — on certain councilmen, led them into a trap, and then exposed them — an achievement in confused morals that has not been permitted to go unapplauded. There are those, of course, in every city who could think fondly and smugly of themselves as doing, in this way, preëminently the will of God; and such deeds not infrequently make men self-righteous.

But, of course, I may be mistaken about the present application of this generalization, and, as I should like to be just, or, what is better, to be charitable, I should hesitate, on such unsupported conclusions, to write it down for the public eye. There are, of course, those who with logic can justify the larger end by the smaller means, and thus excuse certain deviations from the straight line of the moral ideal, and thereby hold one back from the temptation to divide his moral indignation about equally between pursuer and pursued. But, if he claimed one's sympathy for the pursuers, he could not prevent one's pity from going to the ruined councilmen.

THE SHOCK TO CARNEGIE

But beyond all this — and here I think I touch on the real story — there is the peculiar temper and tendency of Pittsburg. Pittsburg is an artistic center; fortunes have been lavished in endowing schools and universities and palaces for art, on symphonies and oratorios. All the expressions of a new, ruling plutocracy are easily discernible here, as in all such epochs of society recorded in history; just, for instance, as Ferrero describes them in the last phases of the Roman Republic. And when Carnegie returns, he sheds tears and wrings his hands because of the corruption that has been exposed, and he fails, as many in Pittsburg seem to fail, to note the necessary, if subtle, relation that must exist between all this corruption and debauchery between all this art and music, and — shall I say? — the tariff on steel.

This, however, isn't all; though this is part. Pittsburg is a moral town; the most moral, in the conventional sense, in all America. She won't even allow the kids to play baseball on a back lot on Sunday. A woman, an old friend of mine who lives in Pittsburg, said: "I think it very unfortunate that the Survey was published. It overlooks Pittsburg's good points. For instance, Pittsburg has more churches than any city of its size in America. More people of our class go to church than in any place I ever saw; more money is given to charity. People just pour out of their houses and into the churches on Sunday morning." She was quite serious — and she expressed Pittsburg, or the ruling class of Pittsburg, exactly.

Now I don't mean to say that Pittsburg is especially hypocritical; but she does seem to be pharisaical. The article about Pittsburg should find its beginnings, perhaps, away back in the days of scholasticism, and come down through the moss hags of Scotland; and its title should be "Pious Pittsburg," or something like that. Written properly — if I am right — it would be an eloquent exposition of phariseeism at its apotheosis.

THE REAL STORY OF PITTSBURG

Now I can't write this, because I haven't the evidence to prove what I see, or think I see. All I have is the mere outline — and the outline applies, as I have said, to most cities. What one should have is the color, the detail, the thousand and one little things in the way of personality — you know what I mean; all that which is necessary to "lend artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative." (I wish I were in New York to-night! I'd go to the Casino and see the revival of "The Mikado.") The Pittsburg story can't be written, and it should not be written, without this; and to do it properly one would have to spend much time in Pittsburg and become saturated with the atmosphere of the place; and when he emerged, if he ever did emerge, he would be ready to undertake this rather stupendous study in psychology. I do not feel at all equipped for this task, and no amount of material without the personal contact could equip me for this service. With my material, I could only write the old and squalid story of a rather commonplace exposure of municipal grafting, and that wouldn't be worth while.

The story of Pittsburg would be all that the story of any city is — as I have indicated: the bi-partisan machine, the public service corporation, etc. — but it would be more. It would illustrate the curious effects of long acceptance of cold, intellectual theories in place of religion, and how this develops the ability to separate morals and manners; how one's theology needn't interfere with one's religion, and all that. It would be the story of the union of politics and business; and the trail would lead up to those proud and insolent aristocracies that are founded on the purchase of the privilege of making the laws, and down to those stews of horror where they pay for the privilege of breaking the laws. It would be the story of Chris Magee, the good-natured, human boss; of Blakeley, the upright prosecutor; of the methods of hired detectives and the corruption of officialdom. Pittsburg has riches, art, organized charity, and piety; but she lacks wealth, beauty, social justice, and religion. And sending the "bad" to prison, and electing the "good" to office, and changing the paper charters of the city, are not going to work any real reform. They think they'll get "good government" and "civic righteousness," and then their problems will be solved. This is what they propose to do; this is all they tell us now, and I can't write a story on that. The story would be as futile as little legal reforms.

It is, however, consoling and inspiring to believe — yes, to know — that there are in Pittsburg — as in all cities — hundreds of thousands of decent, virtuous, wholesome, toiling people; that these make up by far the larger part of the population, too, and that they will save Pittsburg, and make her as good as she is great. It is a fact stimulating to the imagination and encouraging to the soul that, in all these stores and shops and mills, there are hard-working, modest, unknown thousands who are pure and loyal, who are humanity's hope; that even the most stunted and abused figures out of the Survey give more promise than that class which rides upon their backs and devours them as it rides.

Good government, efficient government, if by those phrases is meant, as is usually meant, government by the "good" — whoever they may be! — and the efficient, will not do; it will avail nothing to Pittsburg or to any city, to substitute for grafters, great or petty, personally honest men who will legally give away franchises for nothing, instead of bartering them illegally for big bribes. Pittsburg can't be saved by an aristocracy of the better element, she can be saved only by democracy — with a very little "d." And she will be saved that way some day, never fear, though not until all the other cities are similarly saved.

I shall await with interest what you think of my suggestions.

Your ever sincere friend,
BRAND WHITLOCK.