

Science Service and E. W. Scripps' Philosophy of Life

The following are extracts from an address by Dr. William E. Ritter, president of Science Service, entitled "Science Service as One Expression of E. W. Scripps' Philosophy of Life." The late E. W. Scripps, founder of the large group of American newspapers that now are known as the Scripps-Howard newspapers, endowed Science Service as an institution for the popularization of science operating in part as a newspaper syndicate.

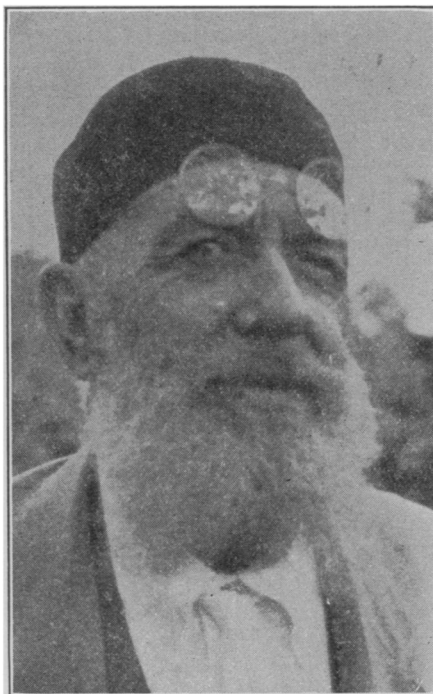
It would be useless to try to evaluate E. W. Scripps' belief in Science Service without trying to understand his philosophy. With this, as with every other major thing he did, if but twelve words could be devoted to it, at least six of them would have to be devoted to the philosophy behind it to assure the effort of any success. Again it would be useless to try to understand his philosophy apart from his personality.

Objectively realistic to the very root-tips of his nature, his attempts at self-analysis brought out conclusions that were striking, to say the least. Trying to appraise the factors that contributed to his journalistic and business success, he put down in one of our very last talks his ability "to holler louder than anybody else" as probably one of the specially potent factors; and from what I had seen of his methods in years past I could accept his appraisal.

It is useless, Mr. Scripps often said, to think of making the world safe for democracy without thinking also of making democracy safe for itself; and the only possible way of making democracy thus safe is to make it more intelligent. But since to be intelligent is utterly impossible without having much of the knowledge, the method, and the spirit of science, the only way to make democracy safe is to make it more scientific. But the real import of this view of his can be seen only by seeing what being "scientific" meant to him.

Unquestionably his psychobiological type was humanistic and esthetic rather than physical and mechanistic. The most serious part of his formal education was under the guidance of his sister Ellen, and consisted largely in reading, predominantly of history and literature, in which poetry had a large place. Formal science had but little chance in his program of early education. The way he had of counting everything fish that got into his net is well illustrated by the on-coming of his interest in science during the late period.

He contended that his later ex-



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cursions into science and philosophy had on the whole made more objectively real the cardinal principles which had guided his entire business and journalistic career, and hence had redoubled his determination to stick to those principles regardless of how strongly business interests might seem to require a different course.

Since, he said, he had recognized from the outset of his career, that all business, journalistic business in special measure, has no foundation whatever apart from human welfare, his perception that science too is basically thus founded had augmented the firmness of his life-long business convictions to such an extent as to move him to do all in his power toward bringing science and the business of journalism into organic cooperation.

To indicate as briefly and cogently as possible the journalistic and business principles which had guided his career and which he held to be confirmed and extended by what he later learned from science, it is necessary to go back almost to his entrance into journalism, when he was well nigh experienceless, reputationless and moneyless. That was the time of his founding, in 1878, of the Cleveland Penny Press, the first penny paper in the United States, on ten thousand dollars made available

to him by other members of the Scripps family. The sum and substance of the principles then adopted and the policies acted upon was simplicity itself so far as statement is concerned: Get the truth just as far as possible; write the essence of it so simply and clearly that anybody who can read it at all can understand it; and publish it so cheaply that anybody who has any money at all can afford to buy the narration.

Alongside this early statement of newspaper ideal or purpose should be put the following written earlier in 1919, when the idea which resulted finally in Science Service was taking form in his mind: "Every thorough scientific man who is in the habit of reading the daily newspapers is constantly reminded that there is a vast quantity of misinformation being constantly spread abroad by our newspapers."

Thus comes to clear light the large area of common ground, as he saw it, between the functions of the newspaper and of science in the community: To discover the truth about all sorts of things of human concern, and to report it truthfully and in language comprehensible to those whose welfare is involved. That the paraphernalia—methods and worker—preparation in the two fields must be very different he fully recognized, though the differences did not blind him to what is common between them.

The sketch of the man I have so far presented shows him as hardly more than a dabbler in the natural sciences. But in his relation to the humanistic sciences of economics and finance, he was a student in the truest sense of the word. He worked hard at them in their historic and theoretic aspects, and, what is of far greater importance, in their practical aspects. The volumes of his disquisitions on these subjects will, it seems safe to predict, when published and studied in connection with the organizations he built up, prove of great value to the world. Human welfare was the pole-star of all his thought and effort in these as in all else that seriously engaged him, though such welfare included his own welfare and was not something set over against his own under the illusion of an abstract altruism.

Mr. Scripps believed he had discovered late in his journalistic ca-

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reer what was needed to make more real, more effective, the ideas and ideals he had made his own early in that career. I believe we should look upon Science Service as embodying his idea and purpose to draft scientists into the task of doing their necessary part, along with journalists, toward making journalism what he had always conceived it ought to be, a great agency for promoting human welfare through education, conducted on a self-supporting basis. His purpose fully realized would enroll journalism as an applied science in the group of humanistic sciences.

Looked at in a little more detail, his discovery was that journalism might have in its foundation much of the attitude and method of science and might utilize to its own advantage much of the results of scientific research. One thing that had a strong place in the back of his mind when he founded Science Service was, I am quite sure, the mobilization of science in the interests quite as well of the journalistic profession as in that of the general public. He wanted to create an agency which, because of its com-

plete organic independence of his own and all other newspapers, would make it possible for scientific men the more effectually to utilize the newspapers for making actual their great latent powers of good for the public at large. In the earliest statement of his ideas we have, written apparently before he had consulted any scientist, he said: "The object of this institution * * * should be to make the greatest use possible of the press in the way of disseminating that knowledge which is the result of painstaking research carried on by a few hundred, or at most a few thousand, well-trained men equipped with great mental capacity."

Viewing the matter thus, the institution is seen to be just as intrinsically an element for making effective his journalistic philosophy as were any of his newspapers or as was the Newspaper Enterprise Association or the United Press. To him the daily newspaper was as truly an educational agency as the school. He held with the strongest convictions that it has some great advantages over the school, the chief of which is that it comes into closer relations with the actual life of the community than it is possible for the school to come; and that in virtue of such relations it is able, as the school is not, to be economically self-sustaining. That it is possible for the newspaper to perform its service to the community, not only without support from public taxation or private benefaction, but with actual financial profit, seemed to him of great importance in that it requires the teacher through it to have relation to life and business which the school teacher can not have. But the evidence is conclusive that he never lost sight of the fact that the real basis of the newspaper's ability to earn profits is its ability to render service. He felt keenly the danger newspaper management is in of becoming oblivious to the real basis of its possibilities of business success. The outspoken declaration of some newspaper men that financial profit is the real goal of this as of any purely commercial business he regarded with as much horror as would a physician or lawyer or teacher or preacher who should make such a declaration about his calling.

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Dr. Ritter's address on E. W. Scripps is printed in pamphlet form and copies of it will be sent gratis to subscribers of the Science News-Letter upon request.

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