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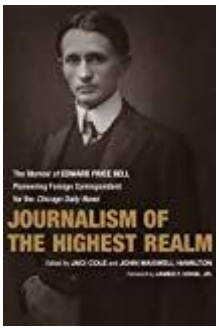

Jaci Cole, John Maxwell Hamilton, eds. *Journalism of the Highest Realm: The Memoir of Edward Price Bell, Pioneering Foreign Correspondent for the Chicago Daily News.* Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007. xlii + 353 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8071-3285-2.

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Reclaiming Edward Price Bell and the _Chicago Daily News_ Foreign News Service

Scholars have long worried that many of the historical accounts of American journalism are too New York-centric. It is as if all the great media outlets were based in New York, and all the really remarkable journalists affiliated with New York publications.

To some degree, *Journalism of the Highest Realm* provides a counterweight to that notion. The memoir of Edward Price Bell, who founded a foreign news service for the *Chicago Daily News* and served as the newspaper's London correspondent in the years leading up to, during, and following World War I, this work provides interesting insight into the world of journalism in what even Bell described, perhaps grudgingly, as the "provincial" press around the turn of the twentieth century as well his work as a major foreign correspondent for more than two decades (p. 186).

It should be said at the outset that Bell's memoir, which he called "Seventy Years Deep," was unpublished at the time of his death. Jaci Cole, a graduate student at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication, and John Maxwell Hamilton, the dean of the Manship School, have edited that unpublished manuscript, giving it its current name. Changing the title of the work was but a small step the editors took. By their own account, they chopped entire chapters that they felt had little historical value. In their note on their editorial method, they also noted that they changed some chapter titles and cut the text in various parts to "maintain coherence." The editors have also annotated the text, providing background and explanations for the names and historical events Bell mentions.

The result is a tale that can be neatly broken into two sections. The first is an interesting and lively account of a young man building his career in journalism in the Midwest. The second part is a story of a journalist who saw himself as an actor on the world stage, almost as much a diplomat as a reporter. Both parts are interesting and well-told

tales that shed light on the practice of journalism in a period that saw the profession grow significantly in stature.

Edward Price Bell was born in Indiana in 1869. Apparently, he knew from a relatively young age that he wanted to be a reporter, and when his brother informed him that newspaper men needed to know how to spell, Bell hotly retorted that he was working on his spelling. In any case, at age 14, Bell presented himself to Spencer Ball, a co-owner of the *Terre Haute Evening Gazette*, and asked for a job, noting that he had grown up on a farm, worked in a drug store, had attended business college, learned shorthand, sold newspapers on a train, and wanted to write. Ball asked him for a writing sample and a couple of days later Bell had a job, setting type in the morning and following what was called a "reporter's route" along the Wabash River in the afternoon, where Bell was expected to collect the news from the railroad depot and freight houses as well as from the normal school. Within a week, Bell could set type adequately, but within a short time, he was a full-fledged reporter and feature writer.

The first section of these memoirs tracks Bell as he jumps from newspaper to newspaper. It gives a good feel for what the newspaper business was like in the period. His first byline came when he wrote an account of a canoe trip he took with a bridge watchman. It ran with a banner headline and Bell's name printed boldly underneath. The next time Bell saw the watchman, the man offered to pay him a few dollars for the write-up he published, observing that the article attracted customers. Bell declined to take the money.

Over the years, Bell moved from Terre Haute to Indianapolis, Evansville, and ultimately to Chicago. At one point, he also set up his own country newspaper and took three years out to attend Wabash College, where he met his wife. He scored some interesting scoops, including an interview with the lecturer Robert G. Ingersoll, who, taking a liking to the young reporter, wrote out both the answers and the questions for Bell. He covered a strike at the coal mines in Indiana, where the federal government had sent troops to maintain order. He covered a confrontation between the federal government and the Chippewa Indians in northern Minnesota. And he traveled to Wilmington, North Carolina, after race riots erupted in the majority-black town. The white population attacked the black citizens to regain political control, and Bell captured the deep-rooted racism at work in his account of his time there.

And there is more. Working in conjunction with reform-minded politicians and civic leaders, Bell exposed extensive political corruption in the Cook County court system in Springfield, the capital of Illinois. And one of Bell's proudest moments came when a story he wrote about a former Chinese diplomat who was then earning a living working in a laundry ran on the front page of the *Chicago Record*, in around 1900. Bell does not not specify the exact date. After the story ran, Bell received a note from the *Record*'s owner, Victor Lawson, opining that the story was good journalism. Bell believed he had created a new form of journalism, one that captured the emotional and intellectual side of the news.

Bell shows himself an enterprising journalist who worked hard to get the inside story, outworking and outthinking his competitors, while at the same time valuing their camaraderie. In short, Bell offers a romantic view of journalism in this period. And while the roots of contemporary journalism are evident, journalism really was practiced differently then. In Bell's account, journalism is an open, relatively informal profession.

Shortly after the story about Sam Moy, the Chinese-diplomat-turned-laundryman, ran in the *Record*, Victor Lawson invited Bell, who was 31 at the time, to set up a European-based foreign service for the *Record* and the *Chicago Daily News*, which Lawson owned. The ideas was not to compete with the Associated Press's spot news coverage, but instead, write longer stories that provided

depth and insight into European issues and culture.

The last two-thirds of ***Journalism of the Highest Realm*** is Bell's account of his days as a foreign correspondent and director of the ***Chicago Daily News's*** foreign news service. While Bell has an interesting chapter about his reporting from close to the front during World War I, in many ways, this part of the memoir is not as intriguing as the first section. Bell primarily recounts the prominent people he met and the outcomes of their interactions. He claims to have played a major role in several diplomatic efforts, including arranging for Ramsey MacDonald, the prime minister of the United Kingdom from the Labor party, to meet with President Herbert Hoover in 1929, which Bell asserts was the first meeting of its type, ever. Bell also claims that a series of letter he published in the ***Times of London*** in 1917 helped prevent the Anglo-American friendship prior to World War I from being ripped asunder. The strengthening of the Anglo-American friendship, according to Bell, led directly to German attempting to recruit Mexico as an ally, an effort that blew up with the discovery of what is called the Zimmerman telegram and helped push the United States into the war on the British side.

Bell acknowledges that these and other so-called diplomatic triumphs of his were not recorded by historians of the time, so it is hard to judge their accuracy. There can be no doubt, however, that Bell saw himself as a player in the grand game of diplomacy both before and after World War I. He was the first journalist to interview the British foreign secretary and at one point he interviewed a half-dozen world leaders in Europe in an attempt to help them understand each other and reach some necessary agreements. The interviews were successful and widely read. The diplomacy, however, failed.

In all honesty, rather than offering insight into reporting at the time, in this section of the memoir, Bell indulges in a vigorous round of name-dropping, which is made bearable only by the extensive notes from the editors explaining who the people are and why their names are worth dropping. In some ways, this part of the book can be read as an extended meditation on the fleeting nature of fame and political power as much as an examination of the practice of journalism.

And for all of his extensive experience in Europe, Bell misread the rise of fascism in Europe in general and of Hitler in particular, arguing in the late 1930s that neither Mussolini nor Hitler wanted war. While accusing somebody of being an appeaser like British prime minister Neville Chamberlain is one of the harshest slurs that can be thrown at a politician in the United States today, Bell writes, "Chamberlain's behavior, culminating in Munich and the Daladier-Hitler Declaration, is the most splendid performance for peace, which blazes across the general darkness of diplomacy since the Great War" (p. 313). It gives one pause to think that contemporary political pundits are probably just as accurate in their prognostications today.

In 1938, Bell retired to an estate in Pass Christian, Mississippi. He continued to write and pepper world leaders with his views of the day. He died in 1943.

A senior scholar of journalism history once opined that too much of the field consisted of resurrecting obscure journalists who really might just as well have been left in obscurity. Bell is not quite in that camp. He headed a major foreign news service for twenty-two years. At one point, he was the highest-paid journalist of his time, and he was in wide demand as a lecturer.

His memoir provides an interesting look both into the practice of journalism and the changing role of journalism in international affairs in that period. Slowly, according to Bell, European world leaders began to understand that public opinion was important in the conduct of foreign affairs and that the press was instrumental in shaping public opinion. Moreover, ***Journalism of the***

Highest Realm is a useful reminder that all innovation in journalism did not come from New York newspapers.

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