NEWSPAPER COPYRIGHT.

It is not possible to find reasonable objections to a newspaper copyright. At first sight it seems to be just enough to allow newspapers and newspaper associations any protection they may demand in the possession of the exclusive news they gather. For example, the newspapers within the Associated Press pay largely for the collection of news and immediately on its publication claim exclusive property so that other newspapers which go to no expense whatever may use it. So with the special dispatches which come to a newspaper. In a measure now under debate, it is proposed to permit newspapers to copyright their communications. It has been said that news may be prevented from passing from using material which has cost the first user a good deal of money or labor.

But it is not practicable or reasonable, and as newspapers now do it isn’t worth while to do anything of the kind. In the first place, if it is done at all, it would have any other effect than to advertise the thieving sheet. A newspaper has clearly a right to its own manner of giving news, but it is doubtful if a court would concede the right of a newspaper to anything more than the first publication of its news. It is a matter of common information as soon as it is printed, and men may spread it by word of mouth or may write to one another about it because it has been made common property. To prevent other journals commenting upon it is to stifle free speech, and to permit them to comment is to permit them to republish the matter.

There are special features of a newspaper which it should be able to hold exclusively if it chooses, and this it may do under the present laws. But no newspaper can protect the matters of news that a journal has the first publication. There is such an advantage in priority of publication that no enterprising journal will ask for any special protection. The sheets which obtain their news from the newspapers are protected by the copyright, but in the matter of news, injury by the use of matter second-hand. In any city a man may issue a journal an hour after the newspapers are issued and use their news. Yet in no city is this done. This is because the publication of second-hand news doesn’t pay. The little local sensationalism and blackmailing would do just as well if they were to omit all the news of the regular newspapers. They are not supported for their news. Nothing more is to be gained from news once published, and since no paper really profits by it, if it is second-hand, there is no reason why the original copy should claim perpetual right in it.

It is suggested that an enterprising journal which devises new methods of presenting news ought to be allowed to copyright the method. As newspapers go, when a newspaper appears with an improved system of organization or anything else which will attract the country adopt it. Newspapers are allowed a good deal of liberty because they are important agents for the spread of intelligence, and therefore the people should not be shut out of the benefit of any improvements in that direction. Besides, the enterprising journal would be capable of leading in the adoption of improvements, which will lead popularity in the long run.