Introduction

When I was eleven years old I got a night job in the Brooklyn Office of The New York Morning World. I ran advertising and editorial copy to the main building which now squats, dusty and desolate, in Park Row hard by Brooklyn Bridge.

When there was no copy I ran hot coffee and hot bean sandwiches from Dirty Smith's, or, sometimes, cold pints from Dixon's. On winter nights I'd hold the sandwiches against my chest so the heat would come through the paper and warm me. On hot nights I'd linger outside the office door the longer to cool my hands on the tin growler.

Best of all, when the copy was in, I could stand near the long copy table in the cavernous old World office and watch the poker games. Here I absorbed all the legends of the craft, ancient and contemporary. I contracted newsprint fever in this way, by a kind of osmosis. Here I learned, I think, a sounder journalism than is taught in graver halls of learning.

The men from whom I caught this fever have, for the greater part, long since died of it. They didn't know, but they were my faculty. I was their sole student. For the things in this volume they are indirectly to blame.

Wherever they are—Big Bob McNamara, Arthur Curtis,
Old Major Clowes, Louis Hart, Arthur Meyer, Charles McCarthy, and Buck Moran—whether getting out editions on asbestos or on tablets of samite and gold, I hope their reviews will not be too unkind.

The papers in this book are mostly about the queer, the quaint, and the quizzical in New York City; fragments and sketches of people I have met or of places I have visited in journalistic wandering in the avenues and side streets.

These papers were not written with an eye to book publication. No one was more astonished than I when the idea of a book was suggested. If the pieces gain any favor I shall count myself a fortunate fellow. If they meet only indifference it will not be too difficult to make believe it never happened.

M. B.