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The Fourth Estate

by  
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Hope today's column finds all you nice folk out there feeling prim and perky and bubbling over with thanks that you're still with us and taking advantage of all the time the good Lord's given us to enjoy this thing called retirement.

I'm excited because I just realized that I'm a member of an elite group that ranks very high up the societal ladder and has power of which I was never aware. Well, actually I knew the potential for power was there but didn't really think I would ever be included in this select aggregation known as the Fourth Estate.

What, or better yet, who is the Fourth Estate you ask, well, let me tell you where it, or they, got the name Fourth Estate. The phrase was coined by a British Parliament member, statesman and philosopher, Edmund Burke, who was born in Dublin, Ireland, and walked this earth from 1729 till his death in 1797. He was known as a conservative thinker who felt Britain's handling of the American colonies was too "inflexible" and felt the French Revolution was nothing but mob rule which could have been prevented had saner minds been in charge. He was known for many quotable quotes... some are used by great writers ... as I have and am today. The following are samples of his wisdom:

-“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing”

-“Better be despised for too anxious apprehensions, than ruined by too confident security.”

-“No one could make a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.”

He was the one who identified and named the Fourth Estate and made sure everyone knew just who they were. A little background is necessary here to preface his remarks... During Burke's time as a politician England's government was made up of three different Estates... 1) The Priesthood (Church); 2) The Aristocracy (Royals and Nobles); 3) The Commons (Lower House.) While Burke was making a speech one day he looked to the gallery occupied by newspaper reporters of the day... yes, they were very active then, too... and he pointed to the lot of them and said, “... there sits a Fourth Estate more important than they all (the other three). It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact... Whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-

making, in all acts of authority. It matters not what rank (it) has, what revenues or garnitures: the requisite thing is that (it) has a tongue which others will listen to; this and nothing more is requisite.”

In other words, if you’ve got a voice loud enough or a circulation large enough you can influence the populace greatly, who in turn will influence those in the decision making business thereby, indirectly, shaping the laws and mores of the land in which one lives. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Playwright and author, Oscar Wilde, whose works are still being produced throughout the world, commented very accurately on the Fourth Estate as well when he said, “Somebody - was it Burke? - called journalism the fourth estate. That was true at the time, no doubt. But at the present moment it really is the only estate. It has eaten up the other three. ... We are dominated by Journalism. In America the President reigns for four years, but Journalism governs for ever and ever.” He said this in the 1800s... just think what he would think if he were alive today?

Now who wouldn’t be happy to be a member of such an erudite collection of writers, movers, shakers and contribute so much to society’s betterment? I wrote in one of my articles that people come up to me asking advice on the strangest things, and they do. Although I spoke somewhat tongue in cheek I am amazed at the lofty status to which we often lift up many of those who keep us informed on “what’s happening.”

I do wish to shape your mind with my column with hopes of getting you to look around your domain and encouraging you to dwell on the pink and fuzzy amidst all the pockets of gray and black so you can see that all is not lost. Of course if you were to see me on the golf course, shanking my ball 40 yards to the right... a ball that had been lying two, 30 yards from the green on a par five hole, you would want to say... “Oh great member of the 4<sup>th</sup> Estate heal thyself with that great balm of wisdom and amazing alliteration that you possess.” It’s not always easy folks, but we’ve got to keep at it.

Have a great day and see you next week.