

## THE PARIS PRESS.

A CRITICAL ARTICLE BY A UNITED STATES NEWSPAPERMAN.

ONE afternoon, an American newspaperman ran across the editor of one of the most prominent Paris evening newspapers. He was sitting on the terrasse of the Cafe de la Paix, and upon the table in front of him was a glass of absinthe. Hardly an hour before had occurred a calamity which had stirred Paris to its centre. More than 100 people, the flower of French fashion, had been burned to death in the ruins of the Bazar de la Charite. The news had been brought to the boulevards by word of mouth; hundreds of victims, was the report, and among them all the great people of the old regime. It was the biggest piece of news in 20 years.

The editor-in-chief beckoned to the American and pointed to a seat beside him. He was greatly excited, although he assumed calmness.

"What a desolating thing it is!" he cried. "Ah, my friend, France has received a cruel blow! Well, we must bear up; we must have fortitude."

He went on, waxing reminiscent, then poetical.

Presently, the American's nose for news impelled him to remark that none of the papers seemed yet to have got out an extra.

The Frenchman's glance was reproachful. "Always thinking of the dollars! What a practical people, you Americans!"

The American explained rather strongly that trustworthy news regarding the calamity would relieve public anxiety; as yet, there was nothing but rumors.

"An extra!" echoed the editor again. Then, with an injured air, he pulled out his watch.

"Why, my dear fellow, do you know that I dine in half-an-hour?"

The American laughed, impolitely.

"To-morrow, my friend, to-morrow," said the Frenchman, "You will be able to read it all to-morrow. It is too late this evening."

It was then not six o'clock. At seven, the Presse, a puny little sheet, published late to give the result of the races, had no information about the fire. At 10 a religious paper, The Croix, got out an extra. Its printing office adjoined the scene of the disaster and some of its compositors had helped at the rescue; but it printed nothing but the rumors of the street. Toward midnight two or three of the evening papers, the reporters of which had finished their dinners and made the usual rounds of the theatres on free tickets, tumbled over each other at the police station nearest the scene of the disaster. They got no news, but some extras came out announcing in big type the facts that everybody knew.

In the morning, each of the papers had two or three columns, not more than 2,000 words, still rumors. On the second day they printed the police reports. On the third

day the news began to be something like trustworthy, and was of the character that an American paper would have had in press within an hour. There was a diagram of the scene of the fire, and two or three hasty sketches of the ruins were given in one of the most enterprising papers. But it was only when the weekly illustrated papers came out, on the fourth day, that the real story of calamity was told. From that time until the expiration of three weeks the news came out in dribblets, and at the end of the month the French press, with many repetitions, had told such a story of the burning of the Bazar de la Charite as an ordinary American paper in a town of 50,000 people would have told upon the following morning. This little incident, the American newspaperman thought, struck the keynote of French journalism.

The French paper gives, almost invariably, as its leading first-page article, its one editorial, which is usually a column and a half in length. It is political, often red-hot, sometimes poetic. Following this is generally what are called "Echoes," which consist of a column or so of matter, frequently intended to be humorous, reprinted from English papers or from magazines. In this department the French find their American news, which consists, for the most part, of highly ingenious theories regarding the pursuits of American millionaires, or preposterous yarns showing off the supposed customs of higher circles of society among "the countrymen of Clara Ward," as the French refer to us. After the "Echoes" come a few telegrams from half-a-dozen provinces, usually about fires, floods or strikes, or the celebration of the unveiling of a statue. The unveiling of a statue is the reporter's strong point; he never thinks of writing less than two columns about it, and, if the matter is sent by telegraph, it always exceeds in space all other telegraphic news. Unless the President is on one of his junketing tours through the country, these telegrams, amounting in all to an average of half a column, are all the telegraphic news the paper receives, except the foreign telegrams from the agencies. If the President is on his travels, the editor spares no expense; each Paris newspaper dogs his steps, and the reporter telegraphs hotly every detail—every time the President opens his mouth, every word that he utters is telegraphed; his clothes are described in full every time he changes them; the Parisian newspaper prints in leaded type the bill of fare of every meal he sits down to.

After the telegraphic news, the French paper presents a column entitled "Information." This is made up of the routine reports of the Government offices, relating principally to the changes in clerkships. Then comes the court news, and, confined to the smallest space, the reports of the proceedings in the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, also presented as a matter of routine. Following these is the local news—always concentrated under the heading "Faits Divers," or "Paris au Jour le Jour." All the news of Paris, much of it exceedingly picturesque, is here boiled down to paragraphs. It makes an American reporter heartsick to see the way in which "beautiful stories" are smothered. After the "Faits Divers" comes a half-column of similar matter relating to the suburbs. Then follows the theatrical news, which is in two divisions. The first is the criticism of new plays, written by the critic who is a great man on French papers; the second, another criticism,