

"THE CRUDE WAYS OF OUR ANCESTORS ARE THE LANDMARKS OF OUR HISTORY."

nals and also of pamphlets was prohibited, and so jealous were the authorities respecting the circulation of intelligence, that private letters and the gossip of conversation were about the only channels for the circulation of news of any kind. Less than a century ago the homeless mendicant who wandered about the country, begging for a meal and a night's shelter, was the principal purveyor of news to the rural population of Scotland.

In the days of Queen Anne, it was the exclusive privilege of men of official importance, lords, and squires, to receive a regular news-sheet from the metropolis. This was a great improvement upon the plan previously in existence, when the sheet, described as a *News-Letter*, was not printed at all, but written, copied in London, and circulated from a recognised centre. When this arrived at the mansion of the lord, or at the residence of the squire, containing intelligence of unusual importance, the proprietor would cause his immediate friends and neighbours to be summoned, and would read out the more interesting items for their information. What a contrast is all this to the experience of to-day! Every restriction has been removed from the circulation of the press; advertisement duty, paper duty, and the compulsory impressed stamp have successively been swept away. A single number of a daily newspaper presents its readers with news which has been gathered with great care and at considerable expense from all parts of the civilised world. It is not only that the incidents occurring in the United Kingdom are duly chronicled, but that intelligence is flashed by the electric wire from every clime and across every sea. An occurrence which happens in Melbourne one day is read in Great Britain the next, although the vast distance of 12,000 miles separates the two countries! The prices of stocks in London and in New York are regularly telegraphed from one place to the other three times a day, notwithstanding that 3,000 miles of ocean roll between them. The steamers which plough their way over the tempestuous surface of the Atlantic are outstripped by the invisible cable lying calm and undisturbed miles below the level of the sea. And as to the provinces, instead of being dependent on the chance arrivals of wandering mendicants, every little town has its own newspaper, in which is regularly photographed the world's news as it has been received by telegram from foreign countries, and from the farthest corners of our great colonial possessions.

The expansion of newspaper enterprise in the provinces is, indeed, one of the most conspicuous signs of the progress which has marked the last quarter of a century. It is not only in great towns, like Manchester and Birmingham, Liverpool and Leeds, Bristol and Sheffield, that a marvellous stride has taken place in the vigour manifested by the proprietors of local journals. No town in the kingdom with any pretension to size is now without its own newspaper. In some, indeed, with a population of only a few thousands, there are now often two newspapers, where a few years ago there was nothing of the kind. These, while presenting a full and complete record of what is passing in the great world outside their own pleasant hills and

valleys, are replete with the varied intelligence of the immediate district. To the inhabitants of these towns, and to those of the villages which surround them, the local paper is the chief avenue to a knowledge of the world's events, and in this respect the journal is a benefit which is appreciated by the people amongst whom it circulates. Containing matter which is interesting alike to the dweller in the town and to him who passes his life in the calm solitude of a rural life, the newspaper is welcome in many a home as tending to relieve that monotony which is frequently so inseparable from the life of small communities. The London markets, the gossip of the metropolitan clubs, the movements of the Royal family, the state of political feeling in the United States, the most recent crisis in France, the latest of the civil struggles in Spain, the prospects of our own Ministry, the exciting Parliamentary division which took place in the House of Commons at two o'clock that morning, the latest tragedy, the fatal railway accident, and those three momentous epochs in life's history—the Births, the Marriages, and the Deaths—are duly recorded in its columns. As the poet Cowper wrote—

"The grand debate,
The popular harangue, the tart reply,
The logic, and the wisdom, and the wit,
And the loud laugh—I long to know them all."

"This folio of four pages, happy work!
Which not even critics criticise, that holds
Inquisitive attention while I read—
What is it but a busy map of life,
Its fluctuations and its vast concerns?"

Macaulay has told us how in the Reform agitation of 1830 and the following year, the people were accustomed to go forth in thousands, morning after morning, to meet the mails, and thus ascertain whether the battle which was then being waged between the masses and the aristocracy, had been lost or won. Now, through the energy of the provincial press, which has established telegraphic agencies in London, the events which happen in the metropolis one hour can be known all over the country the next.

The newspaper is a great instructor, and let us hope that its civilising influence is appreciated as it deserves. Some of our most eminent men have testified to the value of the press as a powerful engine in the cause of civilisation and humanity. Mr. Cobden once said that a single number of *The Times* was worth more than a whole volume of the works of Thucydides; and Dr. Johnson has paid this high tribute to the value of the press as a humanising agency:—

"These papers of the day have uses more adequate to the purposes of common life than more pompous and durable volumes. If it be necessary for every man to be more acquainted with his contemporaries than with past generations, and to rather know the events which may immediately affect his fortune or quiet, than the revolutions of ancient kingdoms, in which he has neither possessions nor expectations; if it be pleasing to hear of the preferment and dismissal of statesmen, the birth of heirs, and the marriage of beauties, the author of journals and gazettes must be considered as a liberal dispenser of beneficial knowledge."

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