

PAPER AND INK.

Vol. II

Toronto, April 1st, 1896

No. 3

THE EARLY DAYS OF JOURNALISM.

WHAT can be more interesting than a peep at the origin and development of this mighty "mind-engine," as it has been termed, and its influence upon men and nations, wielded, as it has been, by such intellects as Addison, Swift, Sheridan, Canning, Lamb, Southey, Cobbett, Hook, Thackeray, Dickens and many others who adorned the ranks of the Fourth Estate, and whose labors tended to the promotion of that progress and freedom which, as Junius remarked, constituted the palladium of all the civil, political and religious rights of an Englishman. Although Englishmen cannot lay the flattering unction to their souls that they originated the public press, they might find consolation in the fact that in no other country had the plant of journalism been cultivated and nourished with greater care, or grown into a tree of such wide-spreading, far-reaching dimensions and influence than in England. It is a matter for congratulation that, although nominally the first newspaper was published in a foreign land, the Press as we know it, with all its freedom and dignity, is an institution which England might fairly claim to have originated. The exact origin of the newspaper is not known, but it dates back into very remote times. It is well known that the Romans had what was styled *Acta Diurna*, or daily reports of public events. These *Acta Diurna* were placed in public and most frequented parts of the city of Rome, that the citizens might read them. Rome was not, however, the

birthplace of journalism. According to Dr. Chalmers, "The first sheet of news made its appearance in Venice about the year 1536, for the purpose of enlightening the Venetians on the progress of the war with Turkey. It was in manuscript and was read aloud at particular stations, but only appeared once a month." The art of printing, which was introduced into England by the old London mercer, Caxton, undoubtedly marked an epoch in the history of journalism. It is recorded of that old worthy that he printed about fifty or sixty books in twenty years. What a contrast is furnished by the achievements of the great publishing firms of the present day, with their splendid, steam-driven machinery, and the slow, heavy, but at that time wonderful results produced by Caxton! In the earliest stages of journalism they had the written news-letter, or sheet; next came the "ballad of news" which was sung or recited to satisfy the craving for information; then the news pamphlet, much in vogue during the reign of Elizabeth; then the periodical sheet of news, which was the forerunner of the ordinary newspaper. The first of any regular series of newspapers in England was dated May 22nd, 1622, and was entitled *The Weekly News from Germany, Italy, etc.* This was issued in London.

In 1657 the first experiment in the way of making advertisements a source of income was tried by one Newcomb, of Thames Street, London, who published the *Mercurius Politicus*. The first half-printed, half-written news-letter made its appearance in 1695 under the title of *The Flying Post*