

From the N. Y. Magazine.

THOUGHTS ON AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS.

"THE AMERICANS," said a splenetic friend of mine; who has travelled a good deal in America, "are a nation of readers. Taking one with another, a far greater number of the people devote some of their time to reading, than of any other people in the world. In Great Britain, France and Germany, those who do, or who can read, bear a very small proportion to the rest. They are scarcely one to twenty; but in America almost every man is a student.

"They read, not casually, or now & then, but regularly and daily. They betake themselves to reading as punctual as to dine or to labour. Surely, then, they must be a very learned nation. All their minds must be turned to a generous and enlightened key. Society must wear among them, a face totally different from that of any other nation—and is not this so?

"Why one must pause a little and enquire what is it they read? Books of history, or poetry, or science or morals? Much depends upon their kind of reading. Are they meagre ballads, or fabulous legends? If they be, we can only expect them to be confirmed in every silly prejudice or vile superstition. A fort of volume is left, daily, at every man's door. What are its usual contents? To judge of its efficacy, it is necessary to know the tenor of it.

"If we examine them, we shall find them to be nothing more than Newspapers; pages in which the two factions, who divide the nation, perpetually fight their battles; and in every species of invective and stratagem, endeavour to get the better of their adversaries. In this school, you may judge what progress the American student is likely to make in the art of governing his passions, enriching his fancy, or enlarging his understanding.

"It is thus that the traveller affected to sneer at our Americans for our attachment to the noble pursuits of history and politics. "I would fain know, Mr. Caviller," returned I, "how the time of a citizen can be better employed than in watching the conduct of his governors, in detecting their mistakes, and, if need be, censuring or displacing them. For what end has the power of choosing our governors and legislators been vested in us, if we do not exercise it with judgement and vigilance; if we do not inquire into their claims to our favours, and regulate our choice by the tendency of those measures which we know they will adopt.

"But mere political discussions do not wholly engross these publications. Are they not continually supplied with intelligence from all parts of the world? And do they not inform us of the fate of battles, the schemes of statesmen, and the change of rulers in every part of the world? And what objects are more sublime, more interesting to the rational inquirer, than the successive scenes of this great drama?

"There is no soul among us so fond of grovelling that has not an active curiosity in relation to these great events. He will always lay down his great for the sake of knowing what they are about in Germany, Egypt or Bengal. The scene cannot be so remote but we have an eye to it; and Sultan Tippoo, and Field Marshal Suwarroff, are people with whom every American, the meanest and most laborious among us, is as intimately acquainted as with his next door neighbour.

"Not convinced by these reasonings, my companion continued to insinuate, that to know the incidents of a German and Italian campaign, cannot very materially benefit a native of America, who has his bread to get by his industry, and his family to cherish by domestic virtues. He prated much about the necessity of limiting our attention, in the first place, to our own family affairs;—and, if those will allow any of our time to be employed in general pursuits, he urged that it ought to be devoted to the improvement of the heart and the understanding, by writings that explain to us our personal duties, and illustrate them by familiar, pertinent and amusing examples; by books that advance us in the knowledge of the properties and processes of nature; that make us, or tend to make us, better fathers, husbands and neighbours, better artists or husbandmen.

"Now, no instruction of this kind," he continued, "can be gained from the dickerings of faction, vulgarly called politics, and from the shreds and fragments, trifling, contradictory, and vague to be found in newspapers, and gravely dignified with the name of history is any profession skill, any maxim of domestic economy or of social conduct, any improvement in the condition of ourselves or our neighbours, to be drawn from these fountains? How is any man the better in his taste, his temper, or his fortune, how is any man the wiser, in any art or science worth knowing, by hearing that so many Austrians were killed in this affair and so many French men in that; that the Pope died in Tuscany, and Suwarroff in Lithuania; that the Queen of Naples passed from one part of Italy to another in a Russian frigate, and the like particulars.

"A newspaper, considered as one among a merchant's documents, is a very good thing; as conveying, in due season, information of what is to be bought and sold, of ships arrived or de-

parting, or taken, or shipwrecked, may not be conveniently dispensed with by the owners of ships, and the venders and buyers of commodities; but why so many of its pages should be stuffed with declamation against individuals and with scraps of news respecting the operations of armies and ambassadors in another hemisphere, is not easily conceived.

"If these events are worth knowing, it is ridiculously absurd to seek the knowledge in this way. Stay till a little time has rendered the issue of transactions certain, & stay till you have the whole of a particular event, in all its parts and incidents, before you, instead of indulging a childish impatience, and eagerly swallowing every mutilated lying rumour. A little time will not only afford you an authentic account of an event, but will save you all that expense of time which is wasted in procuring and reading premature, unauthentic, and what is worse, unintelligible statements.

"If the knowledge of great events, passing in the other hemisphere, be of any value, newspapers, as at present conducted, are liable to insurmountable objections; inasmuch as, instead of faithfully and accurately affording this knowledge, they only tend to confuse, bewilder and mislead. In all they give us, there is such confusion of contradiction of dates—such opposite accounts of the same events—such idle and incessant repetitions, that no mortal can extricate himself from out of the chaos. After a week or a month's study, a man may safely conclude that a certain battle has been fought, or a certain treaty has been ratified; but as to the causes and circumstances that belong to them, the memory is burdened with a discordant and obscure mass. Of these he knows nothing, till some impartial and enlightened observer has collected, arranged, sifted and weighed the accompanying testimony, and profiting by lights for which it was requisite patiently to wait, or deeply to search, he delivers, in a narrative of half a page, what had filled, in its impure and chaotic state, not less, perhaps, than an hundred columns of an hundred Gazettes.

"But even admitting that there is some use in perusing these desultory and impertinent details of news, what have I, a plain farmer perhaps, or a man of some studious vocation, physician, lawyer or divine—or a country shopkeeper, or city artisan—what has such an one as I to do with this long history of shipping—this catalogue of floops and brigs to be sold or freighted—their fits of goods, wet and dry, to be found at such a corner or in such an alley? These things occupy three out of four huge and overflowing pages which I daily receive, and are absolutely of no use but as blank paper.

"A daily gazette contains, when collected, at a year's end, no less than twelve hundred and fifty-two pages, and these are equivalent to, at least, twelve thousand pages of a good sized octavo, and these would make, at least, twenty-four bulky octavo volumes. When we reflect upon the infinite variety and quantity of valuable matter which might be squeezed into twenty octavos, how must we lament when we come to scan their actual contents! Three-fourths of them are nothing to the world at large. They are of use, of temporary use, only to the traders—to one of the numerous callings into which the people are distributed. To all the rest they are just as foreign as if some eminent taylor should send his ledgers and receipt books, for the last ten years, to the press, and I should be served, every morning, with half a volume full of the precious contents. What is the cargo of the ship sailfast to me? What is the bale of dry goods, or a thousand bags of prime green coffee, to be sold to-morrow by an auctioneer, to me, who live an hundred miles off, or whose pursuits have nothing in them of a mercantile cast? Yet such is the vanity of fashion, and the caprice of the passions, that two thousand copies of such stuff shall be daily printed, and dispersed with in a sphere of an hundred miles. Though never read by any but traders, it is bought and laid upon the table, because it is connected with the news and politics of the day; a connection that is perfectly incongruous, and irrational and unnecessary.

"Among other causes for regret, which the contemplation of the world and its ways furnishes to a friend of mankind, is the absurd or pernicious application of an instrument capable of the most illustrious and permanent use. It is impossible to praise too highly the invention of the press. Of all the forms of publication, that of a large sheet, filled with small type, and printed and dispersed daily, is the most to be admired. By this means, a man shall have, for eight dollars, in daily and convenient portions, put into his hand, without effort or forethought of his own, a quantity equal to twenty-four volumes in octavo.

"How powerful in the cause of true virtue and beneficial knowledge might this instrument be made! Put into the hands of philanthropy and genius, what wonders would be wrought by it! How might the knowledge diffused through costly, or inaccessible, or widely scattered volumes, be compressed, with new forms, arrangements and illustrations, into this easy and current vehicle! How might the truths of science, the maxims of morals and economy, be modelled and distributed anew, be familiarized, and rendered, at the same time, captivating and intelligible, in a daily paper!

"Such are its possible uses, but it is mournful to reflect on the actual application of it. Three-fourths of its contents are wholly useless & foreign to nine-tenths of its reader. By the remaining fourth, the illusions and misrepresentations of fact, are conveyed to us. Our understandings are misled by sophistry, and our passions are irritated and depraved by invective and by slander, or a silly curiosity is tantalized (not gratified) by the shreds and

patches, void of connection, authenticity and order, of events in which we have no concern, and attention to which usurps the place of every salutary study.

"Considering the popular newspaper as the best of civilization or wisdom in its readers, how very low must sink our opinion of Americans! Their connection with us, as natives of a common country, may rescue them from our contempt, and prompt us to extenuate the censure, by extending it from Americans to men; and, by studied comparisons, to show, that if Americans are no better, in this respect, than other nations, yet it may, at least, be said that they are not worse."

"Such was my good friend's invective against newspapers. It is easy to see that there was much error and extravagance in it; and that the fault thus imputed to the people at large, can only fall on the head of the editors or publishers of newspapers. As to the contempt cast upon the mercantile portion of a Gazette, it is plainly absurd, since intelligence of what is to be bought and sold, is useful to every one who buys and sells; and that is the case with every member of society. Every man is not interested in every article, but there are some to whom every article is of use; and in proposing the gratification or advantage of all, each one must be contented with a little."

"In a performance of this kind, nothing is more unreasonable than for any one man, or one class, to expect that his benefit or pleasure shall be solely consulted. It is sufficient that there is something, among a multitude of things, which is of use to him, and the scantiness of each portion is made up by the number of those who receive it.

"There is no valid reason why mercantile intelligence and general speculations should not be connected in the same paper.—Every merchant and townsman is a citizen and a man, though every citizen is not a merchant or inhabitant of a town; and, while one is contented to receive (for he need not read) the tradesman's catalogue for the sake of the literature or politics connected with it, the trader is prompted to extend his view beyond his professional concerns by the vicinity of other topics.

"As to the politics of newspapers, the curiosity that is attentive to the character & conduct of our rulers, so far from being merely harmless, or only moderately useful, seems to be the grand and indispensable duty of every citizen. Since it is our privilege to choose, it is our duty to choose wisely; and, for that end, to be vigilant in scanning the practices and principles of public men, to employ all practicable means of forming a true decision ourselves, and to recommend that true decision to our neighbours.

"In all transactions with our fellow-men, we must make account for the influence of passions & prejudices, and draw from their folly, their precipitation, & their selfishness new motives for industry in searching truth for ourselves, and for perseverance and ardour in combating the passions and rectifying the ignorance of others.

"If newspapers be, in general, the vehicles of falsehood, and men are betrayed, by faithful guides, in the pursuit of their true interests, and the selection of their true friends, it is criminal to stand idly aloof, or to content ourselves with reviling either the deceiver or the dupe. No; it is our business to exert ourselves to show them their preferable path; and, by thumping all absurd reproaches, all groundless calumnies, all personal altercations which obscure the penetration in proportion as they inflame the passions of men, we may confer the most signal & illustrious benefits upon our countrymen.

"Political intelligence, as conveyed to us through newspapers, is liable to many objections; but some of these objections arise from the nature of the thing, and are inseparable from human testimony; but much it is evident, must depend upon the industry, and candour, and judgment of the publisher. The proofs of momentous events must ever be wanting in absolute consistency and certainty, and in general, mere rumour and conjecture are just as likely to be wrong as right; but this is not applicable to every document or intimation, and there is constantly occurring proofs of a proper and legitimate kind. The selection of these evidences, and the conveyance of them to the inquisitive or studious part of mankind, are laudable and beneficial undertakings, and afford large scope for the exercise of diligence, penetration, and impartiality.

"The constitution of a newspaper will always allow some columns to be assigned to general information or speculative disquisition. It is in this respect, chiefly, that it is an important and inestimable instrument for influencing human society, and that a wise superintendent will have occasion for all his wisdom.

"Three or four columns of economical or moral discussion, daily supplied, will be quite as much as the occupations of mankind will allow them to attend to. More would be tedious & redundant; and the narrower be the compass of our lucubrations, the more incumbent on us will be the careful selections, and the judicious management of our topics. Instead of lamenting that three-fourths are otherwise engrossed, the friend of mankind should rejoice that literature and morals occupy so large a portion of a production that so widely circulates; and, instead of censuring the connection that is thus formed between literature, letters, & politics, he should give honour to his countrymen for permitting the alliance, and ardently approve of such effectual means for introducing the teacher of virtue, and the preceptor in useful arts, to the counters, desks and tea-tables of every rank and profession in society.

"Your efforts, Mr. Editor, to attain these useful ends, will gain you the approbation of every lover of his country, and, among the rest, of a

LOOKER-ON.

By this Day's Mail

BOSTON, November 20.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY

CALEB STRONG, ESQUIRE.

Governor and Commander in Chief of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

A PROCLAMATION.

WHEREAS the Honourable the General Court of the said Commonwealth, on the fourteenth day of November current, resolved, That the Governor be requested, with the advice and consent of the Council, to issue his proclamation, offering rewards to any person or persons for apprehending and bringing to legal punishment any of those notorious offenders, who were concerned in firing upon and wounding Broadstreet Wiggins and others, on the eighteenth day of July last:

I DO THEREFORE, by and with the advice and consent of the Council, issue this Proclamation, promising a reward of FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS, to be paid out of the public treasury, to the person or persons who shall be the first to discover and give information, to proper authority, of the said offenders, or any one or more of them, so that he or they shall be convicted of said offence in a due course of law—And all officers, civil and military, of the said Commonwealth, are required to use their utmost endeavours to bring the said offenders to justice.

GIVEN in the Council Chamber, in Boston, this Fifteenth Day of November, in the Year of our Lord, One Thousand and Eight Hundred, and in the Twenty-Fifth Year of the Independence of the United States of America.

CALEB STRONG.

By His Excellency's command. JOHN AVERY, Secretary.

Since his excellency John Jay, has declined serving again as governor of New-York—the candidate governor, George Clinton, the father-in-law of Genet, has been nominated. The Chief Magistrate in Pennsylvania is the father-in-law of the late Spanish Minister. If such a connection existed between an American Magistrate and an English Minister, what an uproar the impartial Democrats would make!—They would esteem it a broad avenue for foreign influence. Whenever the candid Editor of the Aurora, has observed an American Officer return the compliment of a bow to the English Minister—he has not failed to record it as an important circumstance.

We are told that a subscription of Two Thousand Dollars has been filled up at Salem, for the relief of the inhabitants of Marblehead.

BALTIMORE, November 25.

A letter received by a Gentleman in this city, dated Raleigh, November 16, says, "The mail will close in two minutes after this letter is watered. I can only therefore tell you that our electors are chosen, and that 4 are federal and 8 anti-federal."

NEW-YORK, November 26.

AT a General Meeting of the Clergy of different denominations, on Tuesday the twenty-fifth day of November, 1800.

Resolved, that as difficulties have unexpectedly occurred, to render inexpedient the observance of Thursday next, the 27th inst. as a day of Public Thanksgiving, agreeably to a former appointment and notice; the service intended to be then performed, be postponed till a future day; and that reasonable intimation thereof be given by the chairman of this meeting.

By order of the meeting, JOHN RODGERS, Chairman.

The 25th November 1782.

Yesterday the Anniversary of the evacuation of this city by the British troops, and the successful termination of a long and destructive war, was celebrated by a general parade of all the uniformed companies, the artillery and the horse; the whole under the command of Brigadier General Stevens. In obedience to his orders the different detachments assembled at half past 10 o'clock in Broadway; the right, opposite St Paul's Church and the left extending beyond the Bridewell. At twelve o'clock, they took up the line of march, and moved down Beekman street, through Pearl street, up Wall street and down Broad and Beaver streets to the Battery. The numbers, the brilliant uniforms, the military discipline and order that characterized the troops on this occasion, merit peculiar praise. We rejoiced to see the immense crowds of spectators, and the strong marks of approbation that were visible on every countenance. For these evidences of the applause of their fellow citizens, must have been remarked by the troops, and could not but have afforded them high gratification. Arrived at the battery; the whole were reviewed by Major General Clarkton and Brigadier General Giles. In commemoration of the same event, a national salute was fired at Fort Jay. After a few evolutions and firings, the duties of the day were concluded by a feu de joie.

We are happy in adding that not a single accident occurred, to interrupt or damp the pleasure of the scene.

VERGENNES, Nov. 13.

The Legislature of this State adjourned sine die on the 7th inst. Their next session is to be held at Newbury on the second Thursday of October next.

Our readers are mostly apprised of the loss of Mr. King's floop of Burlington, in the month of September last, which is supposed to have sunk near Stave island, on her passage to St. Johns, and all her crew drowned; we have not been in possession of the particulars to give an accurate statement of this melancholy occurrence in this paper is the reason of its being deferred to this late period. The particulars are as follows:— Mr. George King, Mr. Alexander Catlin, jun. Mr. Chance, of Burlington, and a Mr. Taylor of Williston, sailed from Burlington on the 25th September, for St. John's, in a weak crazy floop, of 17 tons burthen, laden principally with pot ash. The morning of their departure was calm, but a violent gale from came on; before noon they were seen by a Mr. Allen, near the Grand Isle; the floop was then labouring under a press of sail; in about 20 minutes he looked for her again and she had disappeared, the time being too short for her to run out of sight; it is supposed she sunk; only two of the bodies have been found.

For Norfolk and Richmond, The new schooner ELIZA ANNE, Willis Groce, master—lying at Jackson & Wharton's wharf—will sail post-ively on Saturday the 29th inst. For freight or passage, apply to captain Groce, on board, or to WALKER & KENNEDY. november 27 dat

SCHOONER Regulator, John Bagley, master, FOR Alexandria and Washington, To sail with all dispatch—now lying at Vine Street wharf. For freight or passage, apply on board, or to GEORGE ARMROYD, 109, south Water street. november 27 dat

BALL. MR. QUESNET respectfully informs his present scholars, and those he had the honor to teach formerly, that his Ball will be held on Thursday the 4th of December, at his Assembly Room, south Fourth street, and will continue every fortnight, on the same day, during the season. Mr. Quesnet continues to take scholars on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.—The attendance for Ladies are in the morning and afternoon, Gentlemen, every evening—the school being divided. november 27 1800

By Desire. New-Theatre. ON FRIDAY EVENING, November 28, Will be presented (for the third time this season) a celebrated Tragedy, in 5 acts, called PIZARRO; Or, the Spaniards in Peru. Written by Kotzebue. [Characters as before.] To which will be added (for the third time in America) a New Musical Entertainment, called St. David's Day; OR The Honest Welshman. Written by Thomas Dibden. [Characters as before.] On Monday, a celebrated new Comedy, called SPEED THE PLOUGH! with new Scenery and Decorations.—To which will be added, THE SPOIL'D CHILD. The Tragedy, of the LAW OF LOMBARDY, which was received with distinguished marks of approbation on Monday last, will be repeated on Wednesday next.—With (For the second time here) A TRIP TO FONTAINBLEAU.

Prices of Public Stock, PHILADELPHIA, NOVEMBER 27. Par amount of a share

Table with 2 columns: Stock Name and Price. Includes items like Eight per cent. Stock, Six per cent. Stock, Navy ditto, etc.

Table with 2 columns: Exchange Rates and Currency. Includes items like On London at 60 days, On Amsterdam, etc.

The subscriber having frequently heard complaints of the want of accuracy in the price current of public stock, has concluded to furnish the Gazette of the United States, occasionally (if called for) with what may in his opinion be considered the Market Prices of Stock, and the Rates of Exchange. M. MCCONNELL, Chestnut street, No. 143.