The Press.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1863.

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON.

Valuable Books of Autograph Letters from Eminent Americans, Given by Colonel Forney to the Western Sanitary Fair—How Great Men Write—A Racy Letter from Buchanan.

(Special Correspondence of the Cincinnati Gazette.)

WASHINGTON, Dec. 16.

In one of the daintiest paragraphs of the first volume of his history, Kinglake, in describing the autograph collections of original papers which Lady Raglan had placed at his disposal, tells how the strategic plans of the much-contriving Emperor—still carrying the odor of the Havanas which aid the ingenuity of the Tuileries—and the papers of the enthusiastic nosologist who proposed to reduce Sebastopol by malaria, and of the antiquarian who wanted to take it with bows and arrows, and reports, and returns, and things precise, and the most hurried scrawl of the commander, laboring under the stress of deep emotion, all lay ranged together, flat, and flushed, and doketed.

I have been spending the evening looking over something of the same sort—not so varied in the subjects discussed, perhaps, but embracing familiar letters from a wider and higher range of men. It is a collection in two quarto volumes, of autograph letters from eminent public men, chiefly Senators, who have been in correspondence with the secretary of the Senate, assorted and arranged by Hon. John W. Forney, and by him presented to the Western Sanitary Fair, soon to be held in Cincinnati.

There would have been a manifest impropriety in using for such a purpose any letters but those relating to ordinary business matters, and hence the collection *gives none of those piquant revelations that might, at first thought, be expected.* Still there are bits of character cropping out here and there that give a most enjoyable zest to the pages of these volumes. Take the following for example, from the first letter in the second volume; and remember, as you read it, that the "Old Public Functionary" who talks so resignedly about *his* not struggling to retain office, only entered the scramble for it, and won the mission to Great Britain and the Presidency *after* this delicious bit of retiring humility;

"WHEATLAND (Near Lancaster),
"9th January, 1850.

* * * * * * *

"I hope to visit Washington, in the early part of the week after next, and anticipate much pleasure in meeting with all once more. I am much attached to Washington, but would not willingly be a member of the power, commence a new career in the Senate. *The most wonderful spectacle, to my mind, is that of a public politician who has had his day, struggling to the last hour of his life to retain office, and looking with a jealous eye upon the success of younger men. Thank God! I know how to be happy in retirement.*

"* * * From your friend, very respectfully,
"JAMES BUCHANAN."

Perhaps Mr. Buchanan knows how to be happy *now* in retirement, but if so, he must be endowed with rare freedom from annoyance of conscience. His writing, even then, was cramped and tremulous. The signature begins with a sprawling J, and the 1 is like the worst specimens of a school-boy's difficult beginnings.

In singular contrast are the few notes the volumes contain from Daniel Webster. The writing is coarse and irregular, but with a great deal of masculine vigor, and quite legible. A similar vigor seems to mark the irregular but easily-read notes of Thomas H. Benton.

David R. Atchison, badly eminent during the Kansas contest, as the President of the Senate, when the United States, writes a mere scrawl, cramped as well as illegible; near his letters are others, bearing the neat, round, and rather showy signature of John P. Hale.

Judah P. Benjamin contributes a letter or two, full of facile flourishes like the man. J. M. Mason, whose haughty departure from Richmond was lately deploring—not nearly so much as she rejoiced over getting him out of Fort Warren—writes a small scrawling hand, rather difficult to read. Near it is the cramped, illegible hand of Salmon P. Chase.

Charles Sumner's notes evidently come from a man who once wrote well, but though still rather neat, they suggest the marking pot and brush rather than a goose-quill.

Horatio Seymour indulges in flourishes. The body of his letter is smoothly and roundly written, very much as *his plausible speeches are delivered*; near his letter are one or two in the neat but careless chirography of "H. Clay," as the Sage of Ashland always signed himself. Next comes the rather good-looking, but difficult hand of R. M. T. Hunter, and next "Gov." Gee, the Arkansas Senator, with savage earnestness, that the newspaper clerk has been sending him the New York *Herald*, and that he has underlined in red ink, and stamped as he won't have it at any price or without price.

Several of the thick, yellowish old sheets bear collections of signatures of the men of thirty or forty years ago, among whom one picks out Willie P. Mangum, Felix Grundy, Wm. C. Preston, John Tyler, Thomas Ewing, J. R. King, Hamilton Fish, Talladge, Talladfero, etc. As a rule these old-fashioned signatures are better written than those of their successors in our public places.

Among more recent ones, it is a little startling to come upon a very friendly epistle from Jefferson Davis, in the little, cramped, irregular, scrawling hand that he once sets forth to orders of the absolute chief of the greatest conspiracy in modern times. Near it are the great, sprawling characters of George Bancroft's signature; and next the little, delicate, nearly-like hand of Wendell Phillips. Character is often said to be read in the handwriting. If so, that of General Scott must be the exception which proves the rule.

Edward Everett's notes, of which there are several, are in an irregular but delicate hand. Wm. H. Seward's are a light scrawl, sometimes legible and sometimes not.

John Slidell's is manifestly the writing of an uneducated business man. He sends for documents on Canada; and with remembrance of the Trent affair, one cannot help thinking what congenial studies he inclined to.

George M. Dallas writes a small, delicate hand, reminding one, at first sight, of an irregular fancy copperplate.

That of Millard Fillmore, a more fortunate Vice President, is medium size and uneven, but quite legible.

Theo. Frelinghuysen's is a rapid, good-looking scrawl, and John J. Crittenden's cramped, but neat and legible.

Robert C. Winthrop's is showy—a strange contrast to Speaker Colfax's, the man who gives the Speaker's chair to Winthrop's worst and Allston's worst and the ugliest Forward among on the line, like the most of school-boy writing.

John Wright's was once a good round hand, but has been rendered a little angular by rapid writing. That of Lewis Cass is cramped, although heavy, leans forward very much, and is badly scattered. Stephen A. Douglas' is heavy and irregular; A. P. Butler's large and tremulous.

But I cannot enumerate more. If the people of Cincinnati and the Western Sanitary Fair Committee shall hereafter be held in execration of all true lovers of autographs.

AGATE.

English Estimate of the Chattanooga Victory.

(From the London Times, December 7.)

The reports are all Northern and official, but the facts cannot be wholly or even much misrepresented or boldly than usual if these assertions are liable to future contradiction. The minor details, however, must be accepted with reserve. The number of the killed and wounded by the Federals ranges from "five to ten thousand," figures too large and too round to be anything better than a guess on an occasion like this. The Confederate report appears to have been commenced before the Federals discovered it, it may be doubted whether a corrected report will ever "forty cannon" among the captures. On half the field the Confederates had no artillery, and on the other brought only a few light pieces into action, no more than sufficient to protect a retreat. Whatever reasons may have compelled General Bragg to abandon the heights, *the movement was not forced on him by the fighting, but apparently decided upon before it began.* General Grant himself speaks of the action in the curiously qualified terms so often employed by the Federal commanders. He "cannot conscientiously allow himself premature in announcing" a victory. He rather claims than asserts it. *But the result can hardly be disputed.* Bragg has given up an advantageous position, and has retreated with the penalty the Confederates pay for missing the opportunity presented to them after the battle of Chickamauga. The defeat of the Federal right wing, yet not the rout, *and time has recovered for the beaten army all it had lost.* Though the Government of the Confederacy does not dismiss sanguine hopes from its mind, it speaks as lightly as the Cabinet of Washington; the soldiers are smiles judge their commanders very much by results, and have their own opinions of the relative qualities of their superior officers. The last letters of our correspondent at Gen. Bragg's headquarters described a state of feeling in the Confederate army, and certainly shaken the confidence of officers and men in their chief. He was not "popular," nor had he authority enough to repress those jealousies that existed between the subordinate commanders. The discipline of the Western army was in every respect inferior to that of the Army of Virginia, under General Lee. The deficiency in moral material, had commenced before the battle of Chickamauga. The credit of that victory was given to General Longstreet, who had detached from Lee with a reinforcement. That the rout of the Federals, which equalled the panic and disorder of Bull Run, failed to lead to Longstreet's success earnest request naturally increased the discontent of the Confederate troops, and rendered Bragg more unpopular than ever. The soldiers generally like a strict, but feel acutely when a commander throws them away. Discontent thus created, is the severest trial of the discipline of an army. The feeling that existed before the battle of Chickamauga, had spread and deepened through the period of forced inaction in front of a beaten enemy. Our correspondent left the Southern camp in the last week of November, impressions, and a strong conviction that the retreat of the Confederate army and its commander had demoralized the troops. If the Confederacy, he thought, would find its position untenable unless he fought another battle, while he doubted the possibility of a commander so little assured of hearty support making a new and successful one. The battle was fought. Bragg has given up the ground gained by one of the most sanguinary engagements of the war. If he retires a few miles further to the south, he must recross the frontier of Tennessee into Georgia. Both sides have been receiving reinforcements during the last six weeks, though no authoritative statement of the numerical strength of the two armies has appeared. The Southern army, however, seems to have been for some time fatally weakened by distrust and dislike of its commander. The *morale* of the troops of all ranks was shaken, *and even if they escape a decisive defeat in the field, it is probable that for the Confederate the autumn campaign in the West will prove disastrous.*

ANALYSIS OF MR. LINCOLN'S CHARACTER.—The Rev. Henry Fowler, of Auburn, New York, in a Thanksgiving Sermon delivered at that place, thus spoke of the President:

The explanation for his every act is this: He executes the will of the people. He represents a controlling majority. If he be slow, it is because the people are slow. If he has been a foolish act, it was the stupidity of the people which impelled it. His wisdom consists in carrying out the good sense of the people. His growth in political knowledge, his steady movement toward emancipation, are but the growth and movement of the national mind. Indeed, in character and culture he is a fair representative of the average American. His awkward speech, and yet more awkward silence; his uncouth manners, his grammar self-taught and partly forgotten; his style miscellaneous, concreted from the best authors, like a reading book, and yet oftentimes of Saxon force and classic purity; his humor an argument, and his logic a joke, both unseasonable at times and irresistible always; his questions answers, and his answers questions; his guesses prophecies and fulfillment ever beyond his promise; honest, yet shrewd, simple, yet reticent; heavy and yet energetic, never despairing and never sanguine; careless in forms, conscientious in essentials; never sacrificing a good servant once trusted, never deserting a good principle once adopted; not afraid of new ideas, nor despising old ones; improving opportunities to confess mistakes; ready to learn, getting at facts; doing nothing when he knows not what to do; hesitating at nothing when he sees right; lacking the recognized qualifications of a party leader, and yet leading his party as no other man can; sustaining his political enemies in Missouri to their defeat, sustaining his political friends in Maryland to their victory; conservative in his sympathies and radical in his acts; Scotch in his style and Saxonic in his method; his religion consisting in truthfulness, temperance, asking good people to pray for him, and publicly acknowledging in events the hand of God, he stands before you as the type of "Brother Jonathan," a not perfect man, and yet more precious than fine gold.

BYRON IN UNDRESS.—Leigh Hunt's description of his intercourse with Byron while in Italy, is very entertaining. The noble poet, he tells us, sat up late at night writing "Don Juan," with a bowl of gin and water at his elbow. He did not rise till late, and then only to lounge about the garden, whistling or singing, chewing tobacco to prevent his growing corpulant, or indulging in jocular conversation with those he liked about him. He wore a nankeen jacket, white vest and trousers, and a small velvet cap. Their difference of opinion did not prevent good-humored banterings and discussions; and they joked each other on the fact that there was only one book which both greatly admired, and that was Boswell's Johnson. Byron, in his jocular moods, used to imitate Johnson for sport, in his manner and conversation, as well as other men of note.

BRITISH PORTRAIT GALLERY.—An interesting article appears in *All the Year Round*, descriptive of the chief portraits in the collection of one hundred and sixty-four now constituting the new British Gallery. We take the following extract:

What a blow is administered to the science of physiognomy—considered as a science—by the well-known profile portrait of Wolfe exhibited in this gallery, from the extreme tip of a little, neat, turn-up nose, the line of the profile recedes, at full gallop, to where the still retreating forehead is lost in the crooked hair; while the lower part of the face falls away almost more violently from that same point of departure, the end of the nose. The upper lip recedes from the nose, and the under lip recedes from the upper lip, and the chin is so small and so retreating that it is, as a feature, almost wanting; it might be one of the folds of skin about the neck. And this is Wolfe—Wolfe the heroic, the wise—the man whose judgment and discretion were so early proved, that he was entrusted, at the age of thirty-four, with that great and important expedition against Quebec, in the successful crisis of which he, to use his own words, "died contented."

Another remarkable instance of a head calculated to surprise the student of physiognomy is the portrait of Jeffreys—Chancellor Jeffreys, the cruel and unjust judge. This small, violent, drunken judge, has, at first sight, the countenance of a holy, sensitive, reflective person, with regular, handsome features, and an expression of refined melancholy. Close scrutiny, however, reveals something cruel as well as melancholy in the heavy eyes.

These, however, are exceptional cases; in most instances, the portraits in the collection are wonderfully true to the preconceived idea of the persons represented. Take, for instance, the beautiful, tender head of the Queen of Scots, which might be taken for a portrait of Jeffreys. Take the head of Hampden: "It would be difficult to imagine anything finer. Indeed, the head is almost ideal in its splendor. This bust of Hampden is replaced as a pendant to one of Cromwell, and it is interesting to study the difference between the two men, allied in a common cause. The energy expressed in the bust of Cromwell—which was modeled from life—is so intense that you almost expect the cold clay to burst into action as you look at it. To stand before it is like being near a loaded Armstrong gun—a steam engine waiting for the twist of a handle to tear along the road—a race-horse held back at the starting-place. To change the destinies of a great country, to convulse it from end to end, and from side to side, seems too small a work for the thousand-man power of such a giant. Hampden's face and head are of a different type. With less of energy than Cromwell—though with enough, too, Heaven knows—there is more of refinement, more feeling. He looks a true gentleman, in contrast to a second even to Cromwell, in honor and integrity unimpeachable. When one takes with these two the portrait of Ireton, also in this collection, Ireton, "taciturn and reserved," the man who was "never diverted from any resolution he had taken," one can wonder at nothing which their united efforts may have achieved. It would be a curious thing to compare these three heads of the men who headed an English revolution, with those of the chief actors in the French Reign of Terror.

Widely different from these portraits of Cromwell and Hampden is a painting of the celebrated Earl of Chesterfield, the author of those renowned letters to his son, which were once thought to embody the perfection of (worldly) wisdom. In one respect this portrait is superior to those of Hampden and Cromwell, for it carries out one's previously formed idea of the man as completely as each of theirs does. Cold, refined, symmetrical features, the dark eyebrows contrasting with the powdered hair, a cold, courteous, composed countenance could belong surely to nobody but this man, distinguished in literature, in the world of fashion, and in the drawing-room; the prince of courtiers.

A CITY IN THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS.—The resident population of Virginia, Nevada Territory, on the 1st of July, was estimated at 15,000, the daily average number of transient visitors being as many more. Main street, which is the Broadway and wall of the city, is some three-quarters of a mile in length, crowded with every grade and description, a large proportion being elegantly-dressed males and females. The buildings of Main street are mostly brick, the first story iron, open in front, and lighted by the gas manufactured in the city. The stores, especially in the night time, when brilliantly lighted with gas. Many of the buildings in the city are furnished with vaults and safes. Some of the four and five-story brick and front fire-proof now going up, all have one or both of these indispensable appurtenances. Some of the streets are so blocked up with lumber, brick, and mortar, that teams are at times unable to get along. Common laborers get from $2 to $4 a day, without board. The city supports four daily newspapers, a theatre, *opera-house, several churches, any number of negro* minstrels and melodists, to say nothing of the institutions already enumerated above. At Wells & Fargo's banking-house and express office it is not uncommon to see tons of "silver bricks" wheeled in and out by a common laborer. Some of these bricks in shape resemble the ordinary fire-brick; but are much larger, and from nine hundred and eighty-five to nine hundred and ninety-five per cent. fineness, which is from ten to fifteen per cent. pure silver, averaging some $1,300 each. The sight drafts sold frequently amount to $50,000. Sums of $20 and upward are usually paid in $20 pieces. No paper currency there, nor in any of the mining towns west of the Rocky mountains—Salt Lake City being the only place where paper circulates for money.

A Plea for the Men-of-War's Men.

To the Editor of The Press:

SIR: The great naval episodes of this war have shown to the world that the American navy has lost nothing of the noble prestige that it gained in 1812 with Great Britain, and, before that, with Tripoli. Look over the gallant lists of naval exploits, and where will you find the equal of the stealthy reinforcement of Fort Pickens, the stern obstinacy of the Cumberland's brave crew, who went down at their place in the face to a power which, like the mailed-clad monster; the Varuna firing her last gun as she sunk beneath the turbid wave of the Mississippi; the passages of Fort Jackson, Vicksburg, and Port Hudson; the reckless demolition of the complet, Fayaski, and McAllister; the patient endurance of the tedious blockade, with all its necessary and trying privations? Search the pages of history, and where will you find a class of men that have done their duty, under wrong, privation, and insult, truer and more patriotic than the American men-of-war's men in this the great ordeal that has tried our country? We have done our duty when traitorous officers, recreant, gold-handed politicians, and a corrupt Government, have shown no disposition to do so. We have done our duty when the navy, with old, our duty; we rallied round the stars and stripes. We ask now from Congress a few acts of simple justice:

1st. We want a restoration of our grog, that little drink of comfort, which, in the exposure of our stations, and is invaluable to us, giving an appetite for that most vile concatenation of indigestible substances, the navy ration; it warms us when cold, it sustains us in battle, and cheers us in moments of victory. Give Jack his grog.

2d. We want a fair distribution of prize money. While a few favored cruising vessels gain thousands, the iron-hearted men who have braved the battle and the storm receive nothing.

3d. We want an honorable retiring system, so that after a man has spent the best of his life in the service of his country, he may be relieved quietly from the old worn-out man-of-war's man can return, like "Ben Bolt," and be buried 'neath the buttonball trees, with the schoolmaster so grim and so gray. As Jacob of old said, "Let me die in the land of Canaan, and be buried by Rachel in the Cave of Macphelah; and why should not we, who have spent our lives away from home and hearthstone, have the poor privilege of sinking to the graves by the fireside of our childhood, and the churchyard where our fathers?

4th. We want some mode of appeal for a redress of grievances. The pickpocket and burglar, the midnight assassin and wretched debauchee can appeal to the laws for justice, but we whose whole lives are spent in privation, battle, and sacrifice for our country, have no tribunal to appeal from the *ipse dixit* of our officers. The only appeal now is open mutiny, and every one knows the disastrous termination of the mutinies of the Nore and Spithead; when the world was convulsed, and all England paralyzed, because that her men-of-war's men were driven to extremity.

5th. We want a fair chance for promotion from the ranks. While the débris of the merchant and dejunct whaling services are placed over us as volunteer officers, we want a chance for promotion, or that any one who thinks himself competent can offer himself for promotion, provided that he is qualified, and that he is recommended.

There are a few things that we ask. Cannot Congress grant them? God save our country.

"BERTH DECK."

THE RUSSIANS AT A BARGAIN.—There is an amazing number of Jews in Russia, who decidedly belong to the enterprising class. These people are industrious and as desirous of turning a penny as they are every where else. The Russians have quite adopted their manner of trading. Let us illustrate it by an occurrence of our own city. You enter a shop, and ask the price of a portmanteau. "Nine rubles." "Nine rubles! I'll give you five." "Five! It cost me more than that." "Come, I'll give you a half." "No; you may have it for eight." "No; I'll give you five and a half." "Impossible. Less than eight I cannot take." "Now, I'll tell you what I'll do—I will give six rubles, and not a kopeck more." Well, now, say seven and a half, and you can have it." "Impossible." "Well, I'll take it on for a long time; the shopkeeper will make frequent and energetic appeals to Heaven, and will extol his goods to the utmost, until, your patience being exhausted, you prepare to quit the shop, when he will call you back and say: "Give me your money." The loss of time attending these transactions appears to be of no consideration; it is astonishing what time and eloquence they will waste in order to gain a few kopecks more than the value of the article.

The Russian is remarkably cute at driving a bargain. According to careful calculations that have been made, it is calculated that it takes two Jews to do a Russian. We have often marvelled at the impudence of tradesmen in Russia asking such exorbitant prices for their goods. What with their cupidity, and the enormous duties, nearly everything is charged at a fabulous rate. This renders Russia the most expensive place in the world to reside in. A small family living at St. Petersburg, and studying the strictest economy, will require an income of £300 a year. While on the subject of business, we may state that the Russians have a way of contracting with their debtors, these gentlemen do not have a regular fee, but are paid according to the patient's means.

Among the customs of the Russians is a very sensible one for New Year's day—everybody is expected to pay everybody else a complimentary visit. Everybody expects a present at Christmas; even tradesmen make their clerks handsome presents.

We were at first much astonished at the children games they have at some of their parties; for instance, games somewhat resembling blindman's buff, in which old and young all join. In short time you become accustomed to this, and enjoy it as heartily as the others.

WHITTIER dedicates his new volume of poems, "In War Times," to Samuel E. and Harriet W. Sewall, of Melrose, in these fine lines:

Ofor Iacunus queries: "Why should we
Vex at the land's ridiculous misrule?"
So on his Usk banks, in the blood red dawn
Of England's civil strife, did careless Vaughan
Bemock his times. *Oh friends of many years!*
Which faith and trust are the best guides to clear
And the signs promise peace with liberty,
Not thus we trifle with our country's tears
And sweat of agony. The times are not
Is certain as God's truth; but, meanwhile, pain
Is bitter and tears are salt; our voices take
A tone of wail from our very household songs
Are heavy with a nation's griefs and wrongs!
And innocent mirth is chastened for the sake
Of those who weep for the dear ones that nevermore shall beat,
The eyes that smile no more, the unreturning feet!

HOMELY HINTS FOR HUSBANDS.—If you fall in raising the wind abroad, that is no reason why you should kick up a breeze at home. Do not favor the cultivation of spare time so well as the domestic hearth. Beware of hiding the family bread-basket in your wine-merchant's humor. Keep your passion flowers outside the walls of your homestead. If cultivated within doors, they are apt to scatter seeds of dissension around the family table. Embrace a "golden opportunity" with caution; like a fashionable friendship, it too often turns out a "golden fleece." If your wife pins a fresh rosebud in your button-hole when you go forth to business in the morning, be careful to present her with heartsease on your return at night. Some men grow suddenly ashamed of an unassuming pot of fragrant mignonette if a wealthy friend happens to present them with a few flowers from his conservatory, and hide it away in some obscure corner, to make room for the brilliant but scentless exotics. Wives are not unfrequently treated after a similar fashion; and perhaps it would be well for their fastidious "lords and masters" to jot down the following lines upon the tablets of their memories:

As the myrtle whose perfume enriches the bower,
Is prized far beyond e'en the gaudiest flower;
So a wife, who a household can skillfully rule,
Is a jewel of price to all men—save a fool.

THE VALUE OF IMAGINATION.—Without imagination, indeed, there can be no just and comprehensive philosophy; and without this there can be no true wisdom in dealing with practical affairs of life. Napoleon, we may state that the Russian