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The Press.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 23, 1865.

THE NEWS.

Yesterday, nothing was done towards the trial of Captain Wirz beyond arguing the motion to quash the charges and specifications; the argument of defendant's counsel being, that they were too general and uncertain, and that the offences charged were cognizable by civil and not military courts." The motion was overruled. The Judge Advocate then suggested that the court adjourn, and the prisoner be remanded to the Old Capitol. The counsel, Judge Hughes, objected to this proceeding, but it was insisted on, and the court adjourned. The adjournment caused much surprise, and no explanation has as yet been given of it. It is thought the charges against Wirz will be amended, in several important particulars, by the prosecution. To this his counsel objects, Wirz having already pleaded not guilty to the charges on which he is arraigned.

Jeff Davis, in a letter to one of his counsel, D. H. Gillette, of Albany, says he is entirely ignorant, as yet, of the charges against him, and the time and place of his trial. A letter sent to the President by Gillette, asking for information on these points, still remains unanswered—so it is supposed that the President has not yet determined on his course. Davis asks an immediate consultation between Gillette and Charles O'Conor, of New York, so that they may be prepared for whatever is to come.

Reports of the destitution in the Southern States are fully confirmed by the observations of the Special Provost Marshal of the War Department, who has just returned from a brief trip through the Southern States, whither he went on official business. He found the people not only destitute, but exceedingly desirous of submitting to the United States Government. If the coming elections are fair, it is held that there will be little difficulty in reorganization.

Luther C. Gallagher, who was recently arrested in New York, charged with forging orders for commutation of rations of soldiers confined in rebel prisons, to the amount of $6,000, was yesterday brought before United States Commissioner Hallett, in Boston. On waiving an examination, he was held in $15,000 bail for trial.

Major General Hitchcock publishes in the Washington *Chronicle* a defence of the Government, against charges preferred against it by New York newspaper correspondents, showing that the cessation of the exchange of prisoners was not our fault, but that of the rebels.

A night express train from Iowa, on the Dixon and Fulton branch of the Chicago and North Western Railroad, ran into a culvert that had been washed away, on Monday night. The engineer, fireman, express messenger, and one passenger were killed. Others were slightly injured.

All the articles and all the excitement in Virginia, and especially in Richmond, are unnecessary, since a convention held at Alexandria some six months ago has done all that the friends of a new convention propose for it to do.

General Wheeler was badly beaten in Nashville yesterday by two Union officers, who during the war he had threatened to kill. He was in bad health when attacked. On the same day a riot occurred in that place, in which a contradiction is given to the reports we have been receiving every other day from the South, detailing gross brutalities on the freedmen. It is said that most of the narrations are gross exaggerations, got up for effect.

An insurrection among the negroes is apprehended by some of the South Carolina planters, on or about the first of January. They say the negroes are preparing, and they are too.

John K. Goodloe has been appointed by the President, U. S. Attorney for the district of Louisiana, and John J. Williamson Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee.

A large workshop on Blackwell's Island was yesterday morning burnt to the ground; loss $2,000. The property belonged to the city, and the fire was accidental.

Every effort is being made to complete the Toledo and Wabash Railroad. Eight hundred laborers were yesterday despatched to work on it.

George Gladevin, a native of Connecticut was yesterday arrested in New York, on the charge of having forged drafts to a considerable amount.

A call is published in the Louisville papers for a National Tobacco Convention, to meet in that city on the second Wednesday in September.

The Commissioner of Internal Revenue has addressed an important letter to Sheridan Shook, which will be found elsewhere.

Robberies and murders are constantly taking place around Memphis.

The stock market was somewhat improved yesterday, and there was a good demand for Government loans. The railway list is firm, but there is little doing. Oil stocks are still very much depressed.

Beef cattle sold at New York yesterday at from 5 to 17 cents. Sheep from 5¼ to 7 cents; and some from 12 to 12½ cents.

GUNPOWDER MADE HARMLESS.

The famous ROGER BACON, who knew more of natural philosophy than his namesake FRANCIS, the sage of Verulam, has been generally credited with the invention of gunpowder, and it is reported that cannon were first used, only five centuries ago, in the reign of EDWARD III., of England. It is doubtful, however, whether the Greek fire of the Byzantine Emperors and the yet earlier "terrestrial thunder" of China and India did not greatly anticipate the so-called "invention" of Friar Bacon. The explosive effects of a finely triturated blending of nitre, sulphur, and charcoal were known in Spain and other places, as early, at least, as the year 1216, at which time BACON announced his discovery. It may have been original with him, but he also may have derived it from others, and there is now to be seen in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, where it was discovered by the late Sir FRANCIS PALGRAVE, a letter from a Spanish friar, Brother FERRARIUS, who was ROGER BACON'S cotemporary, in which the materials of the Greek fire are detailed, differing only in proportions, and those but slightly, from real gunpowder. The first cannon was called "Crake," which is only a Norman corruption of Greek, and is preserved to this day in the work "cracker," which our young folks continue to consume in great abundance, on the Fourth of July and the twenty-second of February, in each year.

Whoever the inventor, gunpowder has continued, for centuries, to be a noble servant and a tyrant master. Restrained within the bounds it is all powerful, yet manageable; but let a single spark fall on it, and its effects, on life and property, may be as devastating as those of an earthquake. It has been reserved for modern science, applied by the ingenuity of a man who is stone blind, to deprive gunpowder of its hitherto irrepressible tendency to become mischievous and destructive. Mr. GALE, who has accomplished this, has made various public exhibitions of his discovery, and always with complete success. The latest of these was made, three weeks ago, in London, before the Commander-in-chief of the British army, a large number of military and naval officers, and a crowd of scientific gentlemen. *The Times* has given a full report of what was done, which we here condense:

"A strong fire contained in a temporary stove of piled-up bricks, and a large wooden table to support the materials about to be experimented with, formed the only appliances requisite, except some slow matches, fuses, and a red-hot poker. Mr. Gale, in the first instance, exhibited his own powder, which is now declared to be simply glass ground as fine as possible. He next proceeded to test its qualities when mixed with gunpowder in various quantities. Equal proportions of the ground glass and gunpowder, when placed together in a bowl, went off like a squib; and nearly the same result followed when the quantity of the separating powder was doubled. As regards, however, as the proportion had been increased from two to one to three to one, there was a visible slackening in the amount of combustion, which took a longer taking place; and four to one is stated to be the proportion by weight—though to the eye the bulk diffused into the powder looked larger still—at which the mixture may with impunity be subjected to the action of fuses and red-hot pokers. A good-sized handle of this diluted gunpowder—if the phrase can be applied to a mixture from which all moisture is excluded—was placed upon the fire; and, though the paper in which it was wrapped soon burned away, none of the results followed which might have been expected. Instead of a loud roar and destructive burst of flame from the bag extinguished by the dead weight of powder forcing it down; and it was only here and there that small puffs of dust flew out between the bricks, when isolated grains of the powder went off, disgusted as it were with the slothly prevailing around them. This experiment was repeated more than once, and each time with success. Finally, a keg containing some pounds of the mixture, which had previously stirred about with a red-hot poker without producing any ill effects, was placed amidst a pile of bricks, upon which some fuses were placed, and the whole was fired. The fuses burned to within a few inches of the keg, when the flame reached the powder, which, instead of bursting the keg and its contents to atoms, as would have been the case with any other gunpowder, merely burned a hole through the side of the keg, and, with a few sparks, came out at the other end, and fell upon the ground, where it burned away with a feeble flame, and left the iron hoop behind. The experiment was then tried of firing a keg of the powder with a musket bullet, which, instead of exploding the powder, passed through the keg, and, falling on the ground, burned away with the same feeble flame. The last experiment was that of firing a musket loaded with the powder at the keg, when the powder, instead of bursting the barrel, or even the lock, of the musket, or even the man who held it, burned with a feeble flame, and left the barrel of the musket free from any injury. The inventor then proceeded to explain the nature of his discovery, which, he said, was the result of a long and laborious chemical investigation, and was based on the fact that, in the ordinary manufacture of gunpowder, the ingredients were not reduced to a sufficiently fine state of division to insure the complete combustion of the saltpetre, which, in consequence, was found in a state of crystallization in the interstices of the powder, and was the cause of its explosion. He had found that, by reducing the ingredients to a state of impalpable fineness, the saltpetre was so completely consumed that it was impossible to make the powder explode by any of the means which had been so successfully tried in the presence of the Commander-in-chief. The inventor then explained that the effect of his discovery was to render the particles of powder so smooth that they could not be made to lodge in the touch-hole of a musket, or in the vent of a cannon, so as to explode by percussion, and that, even if they did lodge there, the friction of the ball would not ignite them. He then proceeded to explain the nature of his invention, which was to coat the grains of powder with a film of glass, which, by preventing the ignition of the powder by sparks from the flint, or by the ignition of the powder by the ignition of the cap, rendered it impossible to explode it by any of the means which had been so successfully tried in the presence of the Commander-in-chief. The inventor