

THE WORLD'S NEWSPAPERS.

A Woman Journalist Talks Intelligently About Them.

What She Thinks About Home and Foreign Papers.

The Papers of Paris and Those of Rome Contrasted.

The Wonderful American Newspaper as It Is To-Day.

Since I spent in various visits considerable time abroad—in all nearly a decade—I have often been asked how our leading journals compared with those of Europe, and at last I have concluded to answer the question, delicate as it is, and at the risk though it be of giving some slight offense. As an humble member of the newspaper guild, I hold I have a right to speak, and to speak plainly. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

With the French and Italian journals ours can hardly be compared. Indeed, the former can hardly be called newspapers, in a broad sense. They are vehicles of information on local, or at the best national, topics and interests and of art criticisms; or they are organs of political parties and the clerical "powers which be," or want to be. As a general thing, the appearance of the popular Italian dailies is not attractive—the paper and typography being poor and dingy, and the wood cuts of such as are illustrated execrable.

In France—that is Paris—journals have a more "goodly outside," though they are not to our taste, fair and neat and well arranged. They are less cosmopolitan than that of any large Italian city. For them the horizon of interest, political, social and artistic, shuts down about

It is true, if you are in a hurry—and if an American you are always in a hurry—you are inclined to cry out, "How long, O Lord! how long!" The writers seem to have adopted a rule of a distinguished American journalist who in his "salad days" edited a provincial weekly newspaper. He said, "As a critic on the work of my contributors and the local editors I judged like Rhadamanthus, and cut like Atropos, but when I buckled down to my 'leader' my rule was to write as long as my stationery held out."

I often hear it said that the English journals I have had such calm comfort in are not enterprising, comprehensive and up to the times, and I suppose the indictment will hold. I acknowledge that the great dailies of our cities are more interesting to readers' curiously inclined. They are brimful, bursting with fact, fancy and fiction—the first not always predominating—and there is so much of almost any one of them that you can spend over it the goldenest hours of the morning and day, can possibly squander on a certain bulky edition the whole of the Lord's day—some people do—and these prints are lively, O very lively! In wit, the very best and brightest are only equaled by the French—in humor, they are unapproachable, except by a few English and Scotch writers—and in a certain form of humor, that of extravagance, they stand quite alone.

They are perfect monsters of enterprise—lying in wait like the octopus, and tackling news with tremendous tentacles. They are mighty on the boom, and sublime on crimes and casualties, vices of men, and visitations of God. Their interviewers are as eager, as cunning and persuasive as a greengoods vendor, and as ferociously persistent, indefatigable and incorruptible as an Anna Katharine Green detective on the faint scent of a criminal.

My charge is that in the stress of rivalry, the struggle and strain after "news," they respect "no man, nay, nor woman either"—that for most newspapers most men and all women live in glass houses. There is no longer much sanctity about private life—if there be any private life nowadays, which I sometimes doubt. Even when a man is mercifully sent to hide great guilt and disgrace to prison, interviews may intrude on his penitential calm, and executives break in and pardon.

Domestic tragedies must be served up by the morning papers hot and spicy, though there be "death in the pot," and the headlines of the pitiless paragraphs must be startling and imposing—regular "scare heads." Personal misfortunes of however delicate a nature, and however

social and artistic, shuts down about Paris, along the line of the ancient wall. Tidings of events of momentous importance in America, or even in England, seem in reaching their columns to have suffered "a sea change into something small and strange."

As they have their scale of public interest, they have also their scale of morality, of decency—and it is a very adjustable one. The feuilleton, or serial story, which each Parisian journal gives, is the key to its moral position. Some of these stories are of high literary character, but most of them are shamelessly immoral, and all go into many French homes. One of the brightest and best, that is cleverest of its kind, is *Le Figaro*—but that is as wicked as it is witty, and quite conscienceless—a genuine Boulevardier.

Compared with the French, on the grounds of morality, taste and refinement, English daily journals stand out nobly. The proverbial "young person" can read them without a blush, if not without a yawn. They may be dull, but they are decent. Constrained by insular, not to say insolent, prejudices and presumptions, political, moral, and social, they are less broad in their scope, less alert, less sympathetic to "the general" than ours. Mostly they are "content to dwell in decencies forever," avoiding all offensive and unclean topics, all immoralities and improprieties, except when a high life scandal must be reported as a legal proceeding. Then the disagreeable task is gone through with faithfully, but very seriously—as a duty, not as a delectation.

A certain boastful Yankee on being reminded by a listening Britisher of a certain battle lost by us during the revolutionary war, replied "Waal, we don't make no account of them battles." English journalism doesn't seem, even since the Chicago fair, to make much account of England's lost colonies, overgrown into forty-four states, and sprawling out over a continent, and beyond. They, those proud and ponderous London journals, say little about us and our gigantic enterprises and mighty manifest destiny—which is trying, as we are too modest to glorify ourselves, and a little gracious recognition would encourage us; but one can really believe much that they print about themselves and their imperial affairs, and somehow they give you the impression that the entire editorial staff, even down to the literary, dramatic and musical critics, are full grown men, actually well acquainted with the subjects they treat and the language they treat them in.

Fewer women are employed on English leading journals than on ours, and they who aspire to good journalistic positions must be as well trained as newspaper

editors. Personal misfortunes or however delicate a nature, and however proud and sensitive their subjects, must commence their melancholy public parade with a grand flourish of typographical trumpets. I well remember how harsh and hard were some of the notices of the sudden unlooked-for failure, the result of illness and sorrow, of Mme. Gerster during her last engagement in New York, a failure which proved a lasting calamity to an admirable artist and an admirable woman. Those cutting paragraphs struck through her tearful eyes to her heart, and she said: "I think until I am quite my old self the public should be indulgent. Artistes after all are women, and pens can be very, very cruel."

Could poor Gerster have known that some of the severest of her critics were callow youths, with the merest smattering of musical culture, would she have found comfort or aggravation in the knowledge?

I hold that the chief dangers to popular American journalism are first, a growing desire to be startling and sensational, leading to gross exaggeration, at times to something more reprehensible—even to the sin of Ananias—without its penalty, unhappily; next, a fierce determination to be the first to bring out the latest gossip, or scandal, this leading to exhibitions of bad taste and often to cruelty; and last, and worst of all, esthetically, if not ethically, a fixed and solemn resolve to be funny, at any cost, on any topic, under any circumstances. It is this pandering to the frivolity of the average American public, and that public's satiable demand for fun, farce, caricature and horse-play, that are doing immense, if not irreparable injury to the drama, to literature and true art. I sometimes think that we must have some great national, universal calamity or scourge to sober us, put an end to the eternal fooling, flat or coarse, of the unmitigated "funny man" of the stage and press, and to the giggling and guffawing of their admirers, and rouse us all up to at least a partial sense of the pathos and tragedy of this mysterious, awful human life of ours—underlying all its gayety, brightness and beauty. Pagan Rome recklessly given up to games, shows and unspeakable luxury—Athens, in her passionate demand for "something new," were never much more frivolous and reckless than is New York and Chicago on the verge of the two-thousandth year of our blessed, crucified Lord.

The time must come, though I cannot hope to live to see it, the American public being so joined to its grotesque and grimy idols, when such gaudy fun as now shocks or sickens, in many a journal not avowedly comic, will be checked in its reckless, demoralizing course, when

who aspire to good journalistic positions must be as well trained, as respectable and reliable as are the men, filling like good positions, though of course with a difference in the matter of salary. No society beauty, or gossip, no "highflyer at fashion," no scandal-monger and assuredly no "slouch," need apply. As signatures are not appended to even the cleverest articles the unwholesome temptation of notoriety is quite lacking. There are women on the London press filling enviable places, having proved themselves capable of not only writing light, graceful pictorial sketches of important scenes and the actors of them, but of buckling down to hard work, and of grappling with serious and profound questions, social, moral and even political. Their personalities are few, and usually delicate and discreet.

I don't think I ever saw in London any first class political newspaper illustrated even sparsely with wood cuts or other pictures. English people pronounced this American fashion "bad form," and I agreed with them and agree with them still. This turning out great dailies into boardings for patent medicine advertisements, theatrical show bills, and annexes of rogues' gallery, seems to me a useless vulgarization of literature and knowledge as well as of art.

For a long time I reposed in comfort and confidence on the dignity and neatness, the dear old-fashioned wholesome aspect of *Mine Ancient*, a certain famous New York daily—an honest newspaper founded long ago by an honest old-fashioned journalist, but one of the greatest that ever was, or ever will be; and since I have beheld that fair sheet also breaking out with an eruption of "ugly wings," I have fallen into low spirits. Yet I know that if in business one will not wag on as "the world wags" he will have to wag all alone by himself, in a slow and profitless way.

If English journalists could be inoculated with a little American dash, vivacity and humor—and American journalism with something of English coolness, reserve and respect for authority, political and religious—there would ensue, I think, a gain on both sides. As it is, the English journals of high social standing and political importance are not sensational nor funny, not consciously and purposely funny—that is, at least they never "make fun" of sorrows, disgraces or calamities.

The "leaders" of leading London journals have rather a heavy and portentous look, but after mastering some of the mysteries of English politics, I enjoyed them for their accuracy of statement and temperance of style, for their general good temper and habitual good English.

its reckless, demoralizing course, when the charge of the grave chief to the local editor, or to the new reporter, will no longer be "Make fun, humanly and decently if you can, but make fun!" or "Be sensational, honestly if you will, but be sensational!"

I am most grieved when I am told by my young sisters of the press of such charges being given to them by their chiefs of carefully prepared, truthful sketches, paragraphs and items thrown back on their hands as "too literary," or "not spicy enough," or as having a word or two over, or under measure. Such experiences are discouraging and to a degree demoralizing. Left to themselves, women journalists are less inclined to deal in idle gossip, not to say scandal, than their brothers of the press. They are ambitious of excellence, and their morals and methods are usually pure and legitimate. With a few unhappy exceptions, they shrink from details of crime, disaster and dishonor—from studies of vice and shame—choosing wholesome and cleanly topics when they are free to do so. But how few working-women are free anywhere? and sadly few are the women of the press who can have a choice in the matter or the manner of their work.

When I find a reporter seeming to actually revel in and exult over the story of an appalling crime, a shameful fall or a cruel fatality, as a "jolly good scoop," I do not look upon him as wicked or hardened, but as young, feather-brained and ignorant. When, as is too often the case, he treats the Conqueror of us all jocosely and cavalierly, as "the grim old fellow," I am reminded of Wordsworth's lines:

"A simple child, dear brother Jim,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What can it know of death?"

Now that awakenings, religious and political, are in order, may we not hope that American journalism may yet rouse to a full realization of its responsibility as a great factor in Christian civilization—to its duty and mission to revive some of the old, simple, honest, direct methods for reaching the national heart and conscience—to labor for the refining of public taste and the elevation in morals and manners of that strange, conglomerate estate we call "society"?

GRACE GREENWOOD.

The Two Little Girls in Blue

are happy now. They are sporting pretty white silk kerchiefs given them by the "Two Little Boys in Red," who have been saving the hands from the "Irby's Bouquet" and "Cotton Exchange" cigars.

The World's Newspapers.

Grace Greenwood

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