

THE PRESS IN THE PROVINCES

BY ALFRED F. ROBBINS.



WHEN Charles II. was wandering in exile, he complained, from his safe but needy quarters on the Continent, to his harried friends in Britain that he had to get all his Scottish news from "the London prints." The time was not then to be foreseen when the press in the provinces would relatively hold as important a place in the newspaper world as that of the metropolis. And yet, paradoxically enough, it was in the provinces, and in the reign of this restored king, that the immediate parent of the oldest existing London journal was born. It was likewise in the country, and before that same seventeenth century had run its course, that there were established the two English journals, which can fairly be called newspapers, that have

survived in unbroken continuity of issue to this day.

Provincial journalism, however, had its origin even before the early dates just indicated. It is claimed that 1639 saw the publication of a paper at Newcastle-upon-Tyne,



MR. J. T. BUNCE, EDITOR OF THE *BIRMINGHAM POST*.

(From a photograph by Whitworth Wallace, Esq., Birmingham.)

MERCVRIVS
AULICVS,
A
DIURNALL,
Communicating the intelligence and
affaires of the Court to the rest of
the KINGDOME.



OXFORD,
Printed by H Hall, for W. Webb.
Ann. Dom. M.DC. XLII

during the troubled period that Charles I. was in the North just before the outbreak of the Great Rebellion. A *Mercurius Aulicus* is asserted to have been printed in 1642 at Birkenhead, of all unlikely places, for issue by a bookseller "near Queen's College, Oxford"; and there was a *Mercurius Hibernicus*, not in Dublin but at Bristol, in 1644. But Tuesday, November 14th, 1665, is to be marked as the real red-letter day in the English journalistic calendar, for it was then that the first number appeared of the *Oxford Gazette*, a governmental publication issued in the university city because the Court had settled there for some period after the Great Plague. For eleven weeks it had an existence; but on February 5th, 1666, it gave place by the mere force of circumstances to the *London Gazette*, which venerable but absolutely unreadable print has its terrors for certain of the lieges until to-day. Yet the provinces had their revenge, for, while the *Morning Post*, the *doyen* of metropolitan journals, dates from 1772, the *Times* from 1778, and the *Morning Advertiser*

from 1794, there is still weekly to be purchased the *Lincoln, Rutland, and Stamford Mercury*, which, established in 1695, has maintained, with similar title, an unbroken issue of a full two centuries. In strict point of age this remarkable record is claimed to be beaten by *Berrow's Worcester Journal*, which, under another name, earliest saw the light in 1690. This aged but still active print proudly boasts, therefore, that it is the oldest provincial newspaper in the United Kingdom; it claims as among its special clients "the nobility, gentry, agriculturists, and professional classes;" and it may be thought to regard its competitor, the *Worcester Herald*, born in 1792, as little more than a lusty juvenile. The two earliest decades of the eighteenth century furnish similar instances of unbroken publication from Norwich, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and Leeds, and up to a very few years ago did so in another example from Nottingham. And thus, from a date distinctly anterior to 1726, when the important but scarcely absorbing *Lloyd's List* first drew breath in London, and remains the oldest private news enterprise the English metropolis knows, provincial journalism has not only lived but thrived.

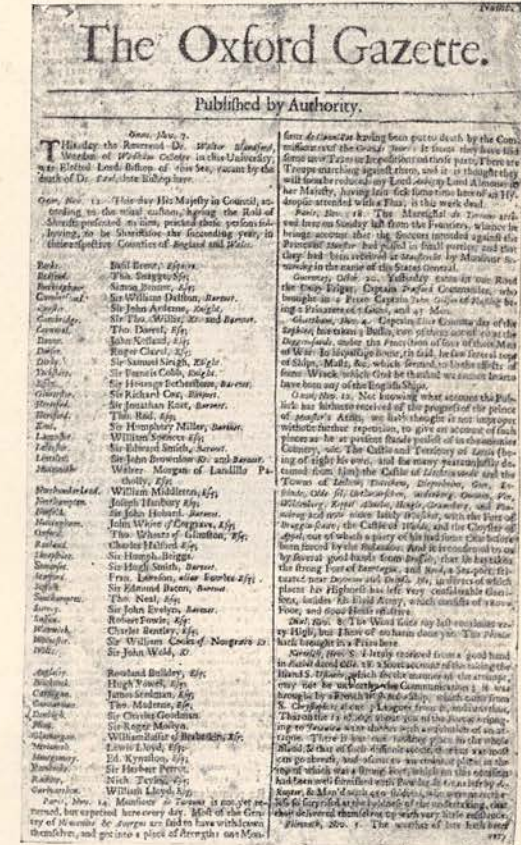
For a very long time after this early foundation, however, the country newspapers fed



MR. C. P. SCOTT, M.P., EDITOR OF THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.

(From a photograph by Franz Baum, Manchester.)

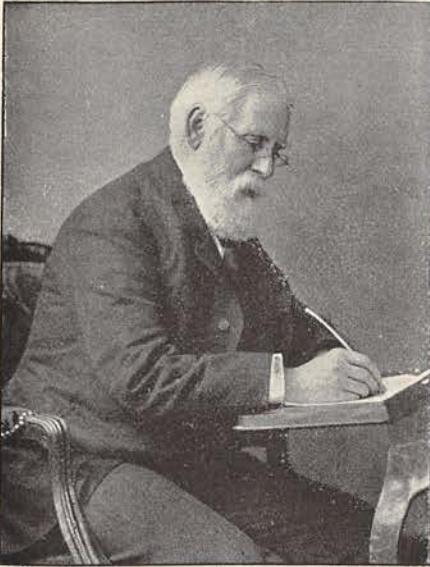
largely upon their London contemporaries. Local news was little sought for at first, and obviously the papers of the capital formed the most accessible quarry for general information. It was only gradually that this system of compilation was dropped; but with the increased facilities for communication, not



THE ORIGINAL OF THE LONDON GAZETTE.

only by train but by telegraph, it has practically vanished, and with that change has come a distinct elevation in the journalism of the provinces. Time was when the country newspaper, in regard to national affairs, was little more than the pale reflex of the London journal, in its opinions as well as its news. That state of things no longer exists; and although there still lingers in some quarters the tradition that England is governed by a few gentlemen who gather up in vapour in Pall Mall during the day the opinions they pour forth in flood in Fleet Street at night, those who know anything of the sturdy politicians of the provinces are aware that local organs of public opinion have a far greater electoral influence than any that come from the capital.

The truth of this can best be judged if there be taken as types of all that is best in provincial journalism half-a-dozen of the leading daily newspapers published outside the English metropolis. Were it possible, within the space that can be devoted to the subject, the list of six could be expanded to



MR. C. A. COOPER, EDITOR OF THE SCOTSMAN.
(From a photograph by W. Crooke, Edinburgh.)

sixteen or six-and-twenty; but even those which are omitted from the chosen half-dozen will scarcely object to the *Birmingham Daily Post* and the *Manchester Guardian* being taken as typical of the English provincial press; the *Scotsman* and the *Glasgow Herald* of the Scottish; and the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Northern Whig* of the Irish. While no one is likely to contend that the richest newspaper necessarily displays the ripest wisdom,



MR. CHARLES RUSSELL, EDITOR OF THE GLASGOW HERALD.
(From a photograph by W. M. Warnecke, Glasgow.)

or that the best advertising sheet is *ipso facto* the finest journal, it may be held, generally speaking, that influence and prosperity are in these matters closely linked. "I respect that paper," observed a leading actress of one of the best-known provincial dailies; "it makes me pay more for my advertisements than any other." And in this way of putting it there was more philosophy than, perhaps, the gifted lady thought.

Although, reckoned by years, the *Birmingham Post* is to be considered a young journal, dating only from 1857, it has the proud claim of being the first daily penny newspaper to be published in any provincial town. Under the proprietorship of Mr. John Feeney (with whom was long associated Sir John Jaffray, now retired from active public life) and the

N. 3150

GAZETTE DE LONDRES:

Publiée avec Privilège.

Depuis le Lundy 17, jusqu'au Jedy 20 Aoust, 1696. V.S.

D'Edimbourg, le 13 Aoust, 1696.

MY Lord Murray ayant été nommé Grand Commisfaire du Roy pour présider au Parlement de ce Royaume, arriva hier au soir en cette ville; My Lord Chancelier & plusieurs Seigneurs ayant été le rencontrer dans leurs Carroës à plusieurs milles d'ici, ainsi que plusieurs Gentilhommes & autres Personnes de qualité à cheval, avec le Lord Prevost & les Magistrats de cette ville vêtus de leurs Robbes de ceremonies, les Milices de cette ville citant sous les armes, ainsi que le Regiment du Colonel Mac-Gill qui estoient rangés en haye sur le chemin, lorsque son Excellence passa pres de Mulleburg.

Le Conseil Privé s'estant assemblée aujourd'huy, My Lord Murray leur a fait savoir la volonté du Roy, qui est d'ajourner le Parlement jusqu'au huitieme du mois de Septembre prochain, & en consequence de cette resolution, il a été ordonné, qu'on fera publier une Proclamation, pour requier les Deputés au Parlement de se rendre en ce tems là, à l'Assemblée.

De Falmouth, le 15 Aoust 1696.

On vid hier à la hauteur de ce Havre, environ quarante voiles qu'on

croid être les Navires Marchands destinés pour les pais Estrangers, mais le vent étant violent au Sud, ils furent obligés de retourner sur leurs pas.

De Plimouth, le 15 Aoust 1696.

Le 13 de ce mois, le Vice-Amiral Mitchell partit de ce Port avec l'Escadre qu'il commande, pour aller à l'Ouest. Les vaisseaux de la Majesté, le Montague, le Severne & le Medway sont venus ici du Ouest, ayant pris trois Capes François de 8, de 18 & de 20 pieces de canon; Ils s'enrainerent tous au Medway qui les attaqua d'abord. L'une de ces Prises fut envoyée ici le 10 du courant, & les deux autres y ont été amenées aujourd'huy; Le 15, ces trois vaisseaux remirent à la voile, pour aller à l'Est; Le Trident & deux vaisseaux de guerre Hollandois enterrent ici le mesme jour, avec environ trente Navires Marchands & Bâtimens des Cotes sous leur convoy, allant en Irlande, à Chester & à Falmouth; Les vaisseaux de guerre le Dreadnought ou l'Intrepide, l'Oxford, le Falkland & le Virginie-Prise y font aussi arrivés, avec plusieurs Navires Marchands chargés pour la Virginie, Terre-Neuve & autres lieux; Et plusieurs autres Bâtimens y entrent à cette heure.

De Hull, le 17 Aoust 1696.

Il parait hier du Humber, une Flotte d'environ

A FRENCH EDITION OF THE LONDON GAZETTE.

more than thirty years' editorship of Mr. J. Thackray Bunce, the *Birmingham Post* has made a position not only in the Midland capital but in the Midlands generally which not even the violent political storms of the last twelve years have served to shake. Entirely independent of all influences, whether of

person or party, outside its own walls, the *Post*, under the editorial guidance of the historian of Birmingham, has realised what is understood to have been its unspoken ambition of becoming the *Times* of the Midlands. It has preserved, with a rigidity remarkable in these days of flux, those traditions of "the old journalism" which demand that the opinions expressed shall be sane, the language in which they are couched chaste, and the intelligence which accompanies them true. Eschewing the more vulgar methods of attracting the attention of the million, and resolute in the determination to present to its readers a newspaper which can be laid upon every table and read by each member of the household, Mr. Thackeray Bunce and those associated with him in the various departments of the *Birmingham Post* have at least shown how success in journalism can be attained without the purveying of scandal, and without subserving the interests of truth to the transient necessities of a party, a class, or a clique.

Deserving in every way of the high praise that can be given for a sustained stand in support of all that is best and purest in journalism, whether London or provincial, is the *Manchester Guardian*. This fine newspaper, which is one of the glories of the English press, is not merely distinguished for the fulness and variety of its local intelligence, but for its desire to rival that attribute of the *Times* described by Thackeray: "She has her ambassadors in every quarter of the world, her couriers upon every road." To its credit as an enterprising journal is to be laid the fact that it is not content to share with others its information as to what is passing in the great centres of the world's affairs. It has not only its own correspondent in the English metropolis; it is specially represented in more than one foreign capital; and in time of war it presents its readers with despatches prepared by those of its own staff who, having one eye on the battle-field, have the other on Manchester. Outsiders whisper with bated breath as to the distinguished personages in politics and journalism who at one time or another have contributed to the *Manchester Guardian*. The judicious always preserve a reasonable amount of dubiety about legends like these; but no one who reads this newspaper can doubt that Mr. C. P. Scott, the editor—now member for the Leigh division of Lancashire, after more than one severe fight to enter the House of Commons by another door—continues to surround himself with a staff which daily presents to the readers of that newspaper an amount and variety of information which more than one London journal of established

reputation has apparently never dreamed it possible to secure.

Forty years ago that shrewd gossip and accomplished contributor to the quarterly magazines, Abraham Hayward, wrote to Mr. Gladstone: "In Scotland and the far North the cheap papers have gained enormously on

NUMB. I. THE LUDLOW-ATMS.

 **LUDLOW** 
Post-Man.
 OR THE
Weekly Journal.

Being a True and Impartial Collection of the most material Transactions,
 both at Home and Abroad.

FRIDAY, October 9. 1719.

GENTLEMEN,

Have here undertaken to Print a Weekly NEWS-PAPER, which I intend (with God's Permission) to Publish every Friday Morning at Ludlow, and will be dispers'd 30 or 40 Miles round, by Men employ'd for that Purpose: It is generally expected when such Things are undertaken, that some Apology should be made, and not begin abruptly; I therefore desire to acquaint all my Friends and Countrymen, and all those who will favour me with their kind Perusal of it, that I shall use my utmost Endeavours to make a True and Impartial Collection of all the most remarkable Passages, in Foreign Countries, as well as our OWN.

News-Papers, and News-Writers, ('tis true) are now-a-days, in this critical Age, under many scandalous Censures and Reflections of imposing upon the World with Falshoods; but this I have to say in Behalf of them, That the World is eager of being acquainted with the News as soon as possible; and therefore, we (to please 'em) are apt to catch hold of Reports which sometimes do not prove true. However, (lest I should be thought to side with Falshood) I'll leave that to the Judgment of the wide World, hoping some will give their favourable Opinion; and let them know that I shall Print for my Credit, as I hope to meet with Encouragement; and shall avoid all fraudulent Inventions to humour Parties, and tell the plain Truth on both Sides, without Favour or Affection.

I shall endeavour likewise, to please the Fair Sex, by inserting, (now and then) some Entertainments for their Diversion. So (hoping to find their Pleasure, by their Encouragement) I conclude, at present with the Motto of the Quack Doctor,

Head, Tongue, and Ears, Had I I Leg,

Never believe him more; who begs Leave to subscribe himself, one that is ambitious to be pleas'd

Your Favourite,

Humble Servant, and

TYPOGRAPHER

A "FIRST NUMBER" OF LAST CENTURY.

the London press; but this is more owing to the telegraph than to the reduction of the duty. Within a given radius round Aberdeen, for example, you get all the most interesting news twenty-four hours before the arrival of a London paper; and so in proportion round Edinburgh, Glasgow, etc. etc. I myself actually ceased taking in a London paper whilst I was in Scotland." If so diligent a student of the daily journals as Hayward could so refrain at the end of 1855, what is to be said of the chances of such a course now? The answer is that in the interval the Scottish newspapers have advanced by strides while their London rivals have been content to progress only by steps; and it would lower the almost Chinese pride of certain of these latter if for once they

allowed themselves to look over their own self-created Great Wall, and see how far the outer Barbarians have overtaken the metropolitan Celestials.

The wholesome discipline this would ensure



MR. W. H. BRAYDEN, EDITOR OF THE FREEMAN'S JOURNAL, DUBLIN.

(From a photograph by Werner & Co., Dublin.)

could be imagined from a perusal of the *Scotsman*. That newspaper, of course, has never been ranked even by the most inveterate Cockney journalist among "the mere provincial rags" of his untutored imagination. Its influence as a literary no less than as a political organ has been great and growing ever since its establishment as a bi-weekly journal in the second decade of the present century. Among its editors have been such a renowned political economist as McCulloch (a personage not far removed from the M'Crouty so despitely used by Carlyle); such a historic journalist as Alexander Russel ("Russel of the *Scotsman*," as he will always be known); and such a typical Scotch wit as Robert Wallace, now the representative in Parliament of East Edinburgh. Under the present editorship, that of Mr. Charles Cooper, once of the long-departed *Morning Star*, the *Scotsman* has lost none of its force, though, perhaps, it has added a touch to its traditional gravity which almost approaches to dourness. And it sustains its reputation for the contents of its open correspondence columns, which are not merely of great and varied interest, but which are palpably not manufactured in the office or started with a home-made letter, printed in large type and of singular sameness in style, whether supposed to be written

by a briefless barrister or a woman of society, a struggling artisan or a clerk out of employ. In this particular, as in many another, it has a formidable rival in the *Glasgow Herald*, which, with Mr. Charles Russell as editor, has touched in these later days the highest point of both literary and commercial success it has yet reached. For fulness of reports and admirable arrangement of news, it may be doubted indeed whether the *Glasgow Herald* has ever been beaten in the provincial press; while its advertisement columns perpetually present the appearance, temporarily claimed for South Africa and "Westralia," that of a vast and virtually inexhaustible gold-mine.

When we cross the Irish Sea, it is to find a number of journals of historic renown and political consequence. There is, perhaps, no paper in these islands which possesses a longer tradition of fame than the *Freeman's Journal* of Dublin, now edited by Mr. W. H. Brayden, who, when the *National Press* was amalgamated with it some three or four years since, succeeded Mr. W. J. McDowell in the chair. The *Freeman*, as it is popularly called, has been ranged on the Nationalist side throughout its long career of not far short of a century and a half; and among its directors to-day are such prominent Irish politicians as Mr. Sexton and Mr. Dillon. It has of late years seen a rival Nationalist organ, the *Daily Independent*, with Dr. Byrne as its editor, arise and keenly contest the supremacy; while Dublin has two other morning journals in the *Irish Times*, which may be regarded more especially as the organ of the commercial



SIR EDWARD RUSSELL, EDITOR OF THE LIVERPOOL DAILY POST.

(From a photograph by Elliott & Fry, Baker Street, W.)


classes, and the *Daily Express*, which, under the editorial command of Dr. Patton, represents the more rigid Conservative element. But the Irish capital has to yield a certain pride of place to the great "linen city" of the North in regard to journalistic enterprise; for while the *Belfast Morning News* claims to have been the first penny paper established in Ireland, the *Belfast News-Letter* submits that, founded in 1737, it is the oldest newspaper in that country. The *Northern Whig*, of the same city, which is edited by Mr. Thomas McKnight (as it has been for the quarter of a century that has elapsed since Mr. Frank Hill exchanged an editorial chair in Belfast for one in Bouverie Street), is interesting as continuing to embalm in its title a party-name which was once so powerful, and is now well-nigh as dead as Tacker or Abhorrer, Nonjuror or Robertsman. Belfast, from the point of view of its Parliamentary representation, is politically all of one colour; but its newspapers represent every phase of the faction-fighting which has disturbed Ireland for centuries.

It is at best, however, but an imperfect sketch that can be here presented of the varied forms of provincial journalism and of the forces they embody—how imperfect can be judged from the necessary omission of details concerning such a newspaper as the *Liverpool Daily News*, with which the name of Sir Edward Russell is identified, or the *Newcastle Chronicle*, with which that of Mr. Joseph Cowen will be as perpetually associated. The *Leeds Mercury*, which gave to London the journalistic services of Sir Wemyss Reid, and the *Northern Echo*, which was not so selfish as to permanently deprive mankind of the guiding-hand of Mr. Stead, would similarly not be forgotten in any lengthened record of provincial journalism. It is to that phase of newspaper enterprise that London owes not only such publicists as those just mentioned, not even alone such men of mark as Mr. Justin McCarthy and Mr. T. P. O'Connor, and such a typical journalist of the best type as the late James Macdonell,

Stamford Mercury:
BEING
HISTORICAL and POLITICAL
OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
Transactions of Europe.
TOGETHER WITH
Remarks on TRADE.

Thursday, September 6, 1722

Vol. XX, No. II



Printed by *Will. Thompson, and Tho. Baily, at Stamford in Lincolnshire. 1722.*
(Price Three Half-Pence)

A VENERABLE PROVINCIAL NEWSPAPER.

but a very large proportion of the best sub-editors, reporters, and other hard workers that the metropolitan press can boast. It is, indeed, a London journalist *pur sang*, in the person of Sir Edwin Arnold, the leading literary figure of the *Daily Telegraph*, who has celebrated in song the glories of the modern Press, under the name of Ephemera, the Tenth of the Muses. But provincial journalism can claim to have its full share in the cry of triumph concentrated in the lines which tell how its votaries are

"Never once ashamed,
So we be named

Pressmen—Slaves of the Lamp—Servants of Light"

