Weekly National Intelligencer.

WASHINGTON: SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1853. NO 658

THE WEEKLY NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER.

The subscription price of this paper for a year is THREE DOLLARS, payable in advance.

For the long Sessions of Congress, (averaging eight months,) the price will be TWO DOLLARS; for the short Sessions ONE DOLLAR per copy.

A reduction of 20 per cent. (one-fifth of the full charge) will be made to any one who shall order and pay for, at one time, five copies of the Weekly paper; and a like reduction of 25 per cent. (or one-fourth of the full charge) to any one who will order and pay for, at one time, ten or more copies.

No *accounts* being kept for this paper, it will not be forwarded to any one unless paid for in advance, nor sent any longer than the time for which it is so paid.

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER.

NOTES ON NEW BOOKS.

LECTURES DELIVERED AT BROADMEAD CHAPEL, Bristol, by the late JOHN FOSTER. Author of "Essays on Decision of Character," &c. 2 vols. Third edition, with Additions. London: Henry G. Bohn; 1853.

These volumes contain the last of the posthumous works left by their author in such a state of completeness as a due regard to Mr. Foster's memory would exact, in order to justify their publication. Many among our older readers, we doubt not, still recollect the impression made upon the public mind by Foster's "Essays" on their first appearance. In an age when, as was remarked at the time by Robert Hall, the writing of books had become almost a mechanical art, and a familiar acquaintance with the best models had diffused taste and diminished genius, it was impossible to peruse an author who displayed so great original powers without a degree of surprise. The "reading public" were ready to inquire by what peculiar felicity he was enabled to desert the trammels of custom, to break the spell by which others felt themselves bound, and to maintain a career so perfectly uncontrolled and independent.

The same cast of thought, original and sublime, the same unlimited command of imagery, the same style, varied, vigorous, and bold, which the contemporary reviewer designated as the distinguishing features of those very singular essays, are discoverable, though in a less degree, in the "Lectures" delivered at Broadmead Chapel by the same author. The origin of these Lectures is stated by Dr. Ryland, the editor of the volumes before us and the author of Foster's "Life and Correspondence," to have been as follows: After Mr. Foster's final relinquishment of stated services as a preacher, and his removal in 1821 to Stapleton, where he spent the rest of his life, several of his friends and ardent admirers formed a plan, which happily fell in with his own views, of a course of lectures to be delivered by him once a fortnight. It was anticipated (and correctly, as the event proved) that many individuals, of various religious communities, would gladly embrace the opportunity of listening to those original illustrations of the most momentous truths which a mind of so high an order would present. With such an audience Mr. Foster felt at liberty to take a wider range of subjects than in addressing an ordinary congregation, the majority of whom would require the familiar and reiterated presentation of the most obvious topics. In writing to a friend he described this engagement as being "much the kind of thing he could have wished;" but added that the labor of preparing a single discourse was scarcely less than that necessary for five or six sermons in the ordinary routine of a preacher's life.

The most striking characteristic of all Mr. Foster's writings is their originality, either in the thoughts themselves or in the mode of their presentation. He possessed in a remarkable degree the attribute of genius, as he himself has defined its highest faculty—the power of lighting its own fire. For the thousand-fold commonplaces of ordinary minds he seems to entertain a most undisguised aversion. Even commonplace *truth*, he somewhere says, is of no use, as it makes no impression; it is no more instruction than wind is music. The truth must take some particular bearing, as the wind must pass through tubes in order to discourse to any purpose. But it must be admitted that his conceptions are almost always grander and vaster than his power to give them expression. He seems to be perpetually travailing with thought. The children of the brain have come to the birth, but there is not strength to effect an easy delivery. Hence his style is almost the worst that can be conceived. His friend and admirer, Robert Hall, has very graphically likened his sentences to huge lumbering wagons laden with gold. Foster himself felt very sensibly this disability to give full utterance to his struggling ideas and emotions, and envied the literary facility which he observed in two of his contemporaries. He used to say that Hall commanded words like an emperor, but Coleridge like a magician. Foster was conscious that he could sway neither the enchanting wand of the latter nor wield the despotic sceptre of the former. Coleridge always seems to evoke as by a magic influence the most apposite and happy words in which to dress his grandest or subtlest thoughts. There is no realm of mind which his sonorous eloquence, with its pomp and prodigality of speech, cannot fill, and no nook or cranny of thought into which his sinuous diction cannot pierce; and yet all this seems the result of a native felicity rather than the product of an acquired power. With Hall the case is otherwise. Foster is right in comparing his command of language to the absolute dominion of an acknowledged emperor. His words fall into their ranks at his bidding, as though they were accustomed to naught but implicit obedience when the master deigned to open his mouth. There is not a gap in the whole line of his serried columns, and the march of his sentences, to continue the figure, is like the firm-paced and even tread of that "Old Guard" which a single beck from the Emperor of the French could turn whithersoever he listed.

Foster could do nothing like this, but he sometimes unconsciously exerts the magical power of a Coleridge, though, like the magicians of Egypt in their rivalry with the more potent demonstrations of a Moses, he often signally fails. The strength of human language seems to bend and waver beneath the weight and burden of his mighty thoughts. We cannot doubt that he derived from his own consciousness the following queries, which we find among the stray and fragmentary jottings of his journal, as published by Dr. Ryland:

"Are the powers, the capacity (he asks) of human language, limited by any other bounds than those which limit the mind's own powers of conception? Is there within the possibility of human conception a certain order of ideas which no combinations of language could express? Would the English language, for example, in its strongest possible structure, absolutely sink and fail under such conceptions as we may imagine a mighty spirit of the superior or nether regions to utter—*so* frail as not to make these ideas distinctly apparent to the human mind, supposing all the while that the mind could fully admit and comprehend these ideas if there were any adequate vehicle to convey them?"

Shakspeare, says Foster, had perceptions of every kind; he could think *every* way. His mind might be compared to that monster the prophet saw in his vision, and which *had eyes all over*. But Shakspeare, although Foster does not go on to add this much, was the greatest *expresser* that ever lived. As has been beautifully said by a modern critic, if he may have had rivals in the art of imagining situations, he had no rival in the power of sending a gush of appropriate intellectual effusion over the image and body of a situation once conceived. From the jewelled ring on an Alderman's finger to the most mountainous thought or deed of man or demon, nothing suggested itself that his speech could not envelop and enfold with ease. If Foster had had as many eyes as Shakspeare, "the myriad-minded," he would never have been able, like Shakspeare, to "body forth the form of things unknown," or with the poet's pen to "turn to shapes" the flitting shadows painted on his mental retina.

The intellectual riches of some minds are hoarded up in rouleaux of coin ready stamped and prepared for immediate use; of others the wealth seems to be hidden in quartz rock, in deep mountain gorges, or pent up in dark and subterranean veins, from which it can be extracted only by dint of pick-axe and mattock; the precious metal is disintegrated by a slow and laborious process indeed, but it leaves upon the mind of the observer an impression of untold and exhaustless treasures still lying fathoms down in their native beds. Minds of this stamp, in fact, differ from those of the former much as a perennial spring, to change the comparison, differs from a stagnant reservoir, which, however capacious, seems inadequate to supply the ceaseless draughts which may be drawn from Nature's ever-welling fountain. The intellectual stores of Foster were developed and amassed by hard labor. His processes of thought, like those of Rousseau and Chalmers, as described by themselves, were "slow but ardent." In a letter to his mother we find him dolorously bewailing his "extreme and invariable repugnance to all literary labor of every kind, and almost all mental labor," in terms which remind one of the sturdy beggar who, when asked why he did not work, replied, "Ah! you don't know how lazy I am!" But a greater difficulty than this mental *vis inertiæ* impeded his intellectual movements. "About finding proper words, (says he,) and putting them in proper places, I have more difficulty than it could have been supposed possible any one should have after having had to work among them so long; but the grand difficulty is a downright scarcity of matter—plainly, the difficulty of finding any thing to say. My inventive faculties are exactly like the powers of a snail." His mind, like our anthracite, kindled slowly, but when ignited burned intensely.

It would be a great mistake, however, to suppose that this protracted gestation of his intellectual conceptions argues a want of the fecundative power which constitutes the real strength of true genius. To the prolific rabbits of literature, who would reproach him with comparative barrenness, he might retort like the lioness in the Greek fable, when taunted for its solitary suckling, "only one, but it is a lion." His horror of commonplaces prevented him from inundating the world with a "weak and washy" flood that might have satisfied a meaner genius; but, since he turned away from such swill with loathing and disgust, and since his was not the magic rod which could smite the rock that it should gush forth in streams of living water, he was perforce compelled to sink deep his shafts with slow and tedious boring; but the sluices which he thus arduously opened were fed by currents which had their sources in far and still pools on high table lands, or in deep tarns which drain the mountain summits. Unlike his friend Hall, as he has described him, he was given oftentimes to visionary modes of thought; to musings exempt from all regulation; to that fascination of the mysterious, captivating by the very circumstance of eluding; to that fearful adventuring on the dark, the unknown, the awful—those thoughts that wander through eternity. On these high table-lands of the soul the spirit of John Foster breathed a native and congenial element. "One object of life," says he, in his journal, "should be to accumulate a great number of grand questions to be asked and resolved in eternity. We now ask the sage, the genius, the philosopher, the divine—none of these can tell; but we will open our series *to other respondents;* we will ask angels—God." And how he loves to brood and muse over "the superlatively grand and consolatory idea of death!" "Without this radiant star," he writes to a friend, "without this delightful morning-star, indicating that the luminary of Eternity is going to rise, life would, to my view, darken into midnight melancholy." The self-questionings with which his spirit vainly essayed to peer into the "dark hereafter" have in them a sort of charmed and unearthly solemnity, like the "supernatural soliciting" with which the weird sisters on the Blasted Heath haunted Banquo and Macbeth. He wonders at it as "one of the dark things in the Divine government that revelation, considered as intended to *impress and influence* our minds, as well as to inform them, in regard to our concern with hereafter, should have limited the communication to so very narrow an extent beyond the mere fact." While weeping over the unburied form of his son, he checks the flood of grief to exclaim, "How many things by this time he knows which no books can tell!" And the nearer he approached in advancing age to "the grand experiment," the more "restlessly inquisitive" he describes himself respecting that other scene and state of our existence. After the death of any friend he always seemed especially impatient to be made acquainted with the secrets of the invisible world. "They don't come back to tell us," he said, on an occasion of this kind, shortly before his own death; "but we shall know *some time*," he presently added, with a look of intense seriousness.

Such speculations indicate the "wrestling thews" of a mind that recoils from grappling with none of the mighty questions which relate to the *whence, why,* and *whither* of the human race. *Whence* came I? Why here? Whither do I go? His spirit fretted and chafed and sometimes pined within its narrow prison-house of clay. He longs to burst away from these fleshly clogs and fetters which hold him down in "durance vile" from that superior world where "knowledge will beam into the soul without the slow labor of difficult acquisition." How pertinent and natural is this conception of heaven, as formed by a man of Foster's intellectual habits and aspirations!" "Rest!" "Rest!" "Such is *my* idea of Heaven," said Robert Hall, as he lay upon his back, writhing beneath that intense pain along the spine which was his life-long thorn in the flesh. "In Heaven we shall do nothing but love," said the amiable and kindly-affectioned Wilberforce. "I go from a world where all is confusion to a world where all is order," exclaimed the dying Hooker, who through a long life had devoted himself to the exposition of that divine thing which he called Law—"whose voice is the harmony of the universe, and whose seat is the bosom of God." But Foster, who prized knowledge more than rubies, and who gained it only by unremitting toil, looked forward with joyful hope to that upper world in which knowledge should beam into his soul "without the labor of difficult acquisition." And, in his own words, "how many things *he* now knows which no books can tell!"

We have said that his style is one of the worst; but this statement needs perhaps an explanation similar to that we have already given in accounting for the slowness with which he excogitated his ideas. Never did one more strikingly exemplify the saying that "the style is the man." His language is a perfect mould of his mind. "How often," he says in a letter to his friend, the Rev. Joseph Hughes, "have I spent the whole day in adjusting two or three sentences, amidst a perplexity about niceties which would be far too impalpable to be even comprehended, if one were to state them, by the greatest number of readers." "And yet," he naively and truthfully adds, "the work is sometimes done very awkwardly and erroneously." Certain sapient theorists of modern times, by diligently inspecting the "vestiges of creation," fancy themselves to have discovered a *nisus naturæ* by which all animate beings have developed themselves from ultimate and original monads; and, as the *experimentum crucis* which establishes this theory, they tell us that they have occasionally been so fortunate as to find certain of the animal creation in the very act of developing themselves by a vigorous *nisus* out of one scale of being into another; that is, from a lower to a higher. While in this transition state they still retain some of the exuviæ of that animal existence whose coil they are on the point of shuffling off, and have not yet fully realized their "manifest destiny," but have gone far enough in the progress to give sure presage of that manner of animal which they are striving (by the *nisus naturæ*) to become. Now, whatever we may think of this ingenious speculation in a physical or physiological point of view, we intend to use it in order to illustrate our notion of John Foster's genesis of ideas, as evinced by their expression. We can detect in his style the exuviæ of that cumbersome speech which his vigorous intellect vainly endeavored to slough off in attempting to rise to the height of his grand conceptions. The whole process reminds us of the generations which the muse of Milton beheld, when

"The earth obey'd, and straight
Opening her fertile womb, teem'd at a birth
Innum'rous living creatures. * * *
The grassy clods now calv'd; now half appear'd
The tawny lion, pawing to get free
His hinder parts. * * *
Scarce from his mould
Behemoth, biggest born of earth, upheaved
His vastness."

But yet, with all its drawbacks, the style of Foster has certain peculiarities which mark it as the natural dress of a master mind; and he, without intending it, has passed a compliment on himself in the following observations:

"Of all the kinds of writing," he remarks, "that appears to me incomparably the best which is distinguished by grand masses and prominent bulks, which stand out in magnitude from the tame groundwork, and impel the mind by a succession of *separate strong impulses*, rather than a continuity of agreeable sentiment. One has read and heard very sensible discourses which resembled a plain handsome brick wall. Give me, on the contrary, a style of writing that shall resemble a wall that has the striking irregularity of pilasters, pictures, niches, and statues."

He could not have given a better description of his own style in this respect if he had had himself in view when writing it. But we have no particular reason to allege much in defence of Foster's composition as a whole; on the contrary, we rather owe him a grudge for having, as our professor of rhetoric once assured us, contributed by the infection of his example to the contortions and inversions which mar our own diction. And for this same reason he is not an author whom we would recommend to those in early life who are seeking to cultivate the amenities of a graceful and easy phraseology. If they make him their model they may become strong writers, but will certainly fall short of Addisonian elegance.

It remains for us to add that Foster was quite as uncouth in his manners and dress as in his style of composition. He wore an old brown wig with frizzled curls; astride his nose was a pair of large silver-mounted spectacles with circular glasses as big as penny-pieces; he usually sported an old blue coat with bright brass buttons, which hung *baggingly* about his large bony frame; below was a pair of corduroy breeches, a good deal too short in the legs; and shoes that would have been fatal to a *cordonnier français*. Such was the clerical attire of this distinguished preacher, thinker, and author, to whom and to Robert Hall the English Baptists so long pointed with just pride as the great lights of their denomination and the glory of British dissent. And there are not wanting those who still prefer the prose of Foster, with its lumbering and unsteady movement, to the faultless harmony of Robert Hall's matchless periods. The eloquence of Hall is majestic, but it is majesty in repose; the intellectual play of Foster is that of a Titan, tumbling down massy fragments of originality, to use his own words, and making not only the stagnant stream of men's thoughts to foam and flash, but crushing many creeping things—small buzzing objections, slimy worldlinesses—found in the way.

THE COMEDIES OF ARISTOPHANES. A new and literal translation, from the Revised Text of Dindorf, with notes and extracts from the best Metrical Versions. By WILLIAM JAMES HICKIE, scholar of St. John's College, Cambridge. 2 vols. London. HENRY G. BOHN, 1853.

These volumes form a part of that valuable series of literal prose translations of the Greek and Latin classics which compose what is popularly known as "Bohn's Classical Library." These translations, so far as we have been able to examine them, or may be capable of judging, seem to be executed at once with a scholarly fidelity and elegance, transfusing in a high degree the spirit of their matchless originals into genuine and idiomatic English. In the present version of the Comedies of Aristophanes it has been the translator's aim to render the very words of the Greek comic poet into English as closely and exactly as the idioms of the two languages admit, "passages of extreme indelicacy" (of which, be it admitted, there are not few) forming the only exception to this rule. These Mr. Hickie has very prudently decided to "paraphrase;" otherwise we fear his publisher would have been deemed guilty of a violation of that statute which forbids the utterance of immoral and obscene publications; for Aristophanes, like a vile heathen it was his misfortune to be born, not only calls a spade a spade, but gives a good many other things which should not be breathed to "ears polite" their plain proper names, without *ménagement* or circumlocution. It is proper to add that three of the plays of Aristophanes—the "Lysistrata," "Thesmophoriazusae," and "Ecclesiazusae"—are here for the first time given in English prose. To those familiar with the originals we need not observe that it is in these three comedies that Mr. Hickie finds most frequent occasion to deviate from a strictly literal rendering of his author. And we are glad that the translator has paid this homage to the public morality, and not acted on Leigh Hunt's principle of preserving such blemishes in a writer because they draw but the more attention to what he has done in a better vein; a principle which doubtless seems very proper to a man who can say that the older he grows the more he admires such a writer as Rabelais, but which most people, we fancy, will deem it any thing but expedient to practise or creditable to confess.

Before proceeding to offer a few remarks on the comic muse of Aristophanes, we would essay to remove a prejudice which in our fast age may be deemed to attach to him because of the remote antiquity of the time in which he lived and flourished; for though Aristophanes was born about five centuries before the Christian era, yet he is at heart a modern, and that of the first and fastest water. Indeed, the age of Greece, in which his lot was cast, was essentially a modern age, as has been very justly argued by Dr. Arnold, and as was argued by Giovanni Battista Vico before him. All nations which have attained to a state of civilization, refinement, and literary culture have, at their point of maximum development, reached a civil, social, and intellectual status which partakes largely of those distinctive features which give to modern times their most marked characteristics, the appliances of practical science being perhaps only excepted. A period such as that so philosophically analyzed in the historical pages of Thucydides is certainly modern in all its most salient traits, and is pervaded by a spirit kindred to that which breathes in the tinkerings and strivings of man at the present day. In philosophy the Greeks of that age were as profoundly idealistic as the metaphysical Germans of our times. In politics we find the same disturbing and counterbalancing elements as those which exist in France or the United States. In literature and in art the Grecian writers, painters, and sculptors of the Periclean times certainly need not shrink from a comparison with the products of this boastful nineteenth century. In religious truth we of course have the advantage, because of that divine revelation which has brought life and immortality to light—a revelation, however, the necessity of which was seen by Socrates, if his pupil Plato may be deemed to have rightly represented the views of his master; for, in the second Alcibiades of the great Greek philosopher, we find Socrates expressly inculcating the indispensableness of some authoritative revelation in order to the proper adjustment of man's relations to the gods, and predicting the advent of some illustrious teacher who was destined to instruct mankind in this highest domain of knowledge, a prediction which had its more than fulfilment in the mission and ministry of Him who spake as never man spake.

If such was the age in which Aristophanes lived, we may safely say of him, as was said by Montesquieu of Voltaire, that he had more than any body the spirit which every body had in that age. ["*Il a plus que personne l'esprit que tout le monde a.*"] Bentley, who should have the merit of first fairly introducing Aristophanes in his true character and merits to the notice of English scholars, styles him "the most ingenious man of an age fertile in great wits." Before Bentley's day it had long been the fashion to decry Aristophanes as a mere "buffoon," a sort of merry-Andrew of the Grecian stage, remarkable only for the impiety and obscenity which he embalms in the purest Attic. But latterly he has come into the greatest vogue among both English and German scholars, and the danger now seems to be that his eulogists and defenders will err as much on the side of excessive laudation as their predecessors in his depreciation. Even the "passages of extreme indecency" which seem to have appalled the literal fidelity of Mr. Hickie have found apologists among these later admirers of the comic poet. We are assured that it was not the bent of his mind to be immoral, though, like Swift, he might not care to wade through a little nastiness for the sake of a joke. His assaults on the character of Socrates in the play entitled the "Clouds," where he represents the great heathen sage as a mere philosophical mountebank and peddling trickster in the logical art, have furnished a much more thorny and intractable difficulty for the champions of Aristophanes to justify or explain. Many of them, however, have not hesitated long to throw Socrates overboard in order to save their newly-begotten idol, and it is hinted by one that "the character of Socrates is a little more open to remark than some admirers, in their ignorance, are aware of, and more than some, in their knowledge, are willing to bring to light." Another ransacks the *Memorabilia* of Xenophon, and thinks he finds in a certain chapter quite enough to prove that Socrates was no better than he should be; in fact, that he was quite a town rake while so loud at the corners of the streets in the praises of temperance and continence.

Now, it is a part of our own opinion that Socrates was not the immaculate character in which the nimbus of traditional history would fain represent him. There are many saints enrolled in the christian calendar who, we fear, would never have been canonized if all the truth about them had reached the Apostolical Camarilla. And Socrates, too, we are inclined to suspect, was after all, what it would be strange if he had not been, a pagan of the fifth century before Christ. A man may lift himself above his age, but no man can lift himself out of it, except it be saints of the Simon Stylites order, who, however, (unlike the Grecian sage,) do not stand so high now-a-days as they did while yet in the flesh. But while we exclude the name of Socrates from our hagiology, and deem it hazardous to imitate the devotion of those who have not scrupled to exclaim "*Sancte Socrates! ora pro nobis,*" yet it is asking a little too much of us when we are requested to cast down the sin of Sophroniscus in order that the "exemplary but maligned Aristophanes" may take his place. If the limits to our credulity are too narrow to take in all the pretensions of Socrates, where shall those of Aristophanes be placed? On what grounds are we called so suddenly not only to disenchant ourselves as to the spotless purity of Socrates, but also to magnify and exalt in the highest his parodist and calumniator, as we have always been taught to believe? We suspect no better reason can be alleged than that Aristophanes was a great genius and wrote in the finest Attic Greek. Hence, we infer, the origin of his worship and apotheosis among certain scholars in these latter days. But let us pass from the man to a hasty notice of his comedies.

These are considered, we believe, pretty "hard reading" by the under-graduates of most American colleges. And it must be confessed that much of Aristophanes is sufficiently obscure, after making all necessary deductions for the wit and humor that have become unintelligible to us at this distant day, from our ignorance of those passing events of the times on which the poet so much loved to animadvert. Porson has said that a single Athenian newspaper would have thrown more light on these plays than all the commentators put together, and Porson undoubtedly is right. But since it was not customary for the "fierce democratie" of Athens, during the administration of Pericles or of Creon, to have "organs" like those of their American namesakes, we are compelled to forego all the instructive comments which might, according to the idea of the British critic, be culled from the columns of "The Athenian Democrat." Instead, however, of sighing for what is not to be had in the way of Athenian newspapers, we prefer to reverse the speculation of "the great Porson," and to consider the comedies of Aristophanes as a substitute for a whole file of the journal aforesaid; for what are these plays but a series of rident diatribes on the men and things of the Aristophanic period? And what is the Parabasis of Aristophanes but an editorial leader written with quite as much pith and condensation of style as any to be found in our neighbor, the "Union?" We do not hesitate an instant to hazard the assertion that more can be learned of Athenian life and manners from the dramas of the great comedian than from the pages of all the Greek historians, just as Roman life can be seen in the Letters of Cicero better than even in the pictured page of Livy.

Mr. WALSH, one of the poetic translators of Aristophanes, has expressed great regret that Attica contained no volcanoes about the time of Socrates; for had there been any, he thinks we might have stood a good chance of ransacking and rummaging among the ruins of some Greek city, say Athens itself, just as we fortunately have been able to do at Herculaneum and Pompeii, those vulcanized relics of town-life among the Romans. But since Greece was as bad off for volcanoes as she was for newspapers, Mr. WALSH proposes to make the comedies of Aristophanes answer for "the Pompeii of Athens," just as we propose to consider them newspapers in lieu of the wish expressed by Porson. And indeed the comedies of Aristophanes will be found to induct the reader into "chambers of imagery" quite as descriptive and life-like as any frescoed wall which has been disentombed from the lava cerements of Herculaneum or Pompeii. They are picture galleries in which is hung an invaluable collection of portraits and caricatures, which throw almost as much light on the men and things of Athens as the sketches of Hogarth still do on the life of his contemporaries in London.

Do we wish to know something about the democratic tendencies of the Athenians at this period? What more lively picture of the "very age and body of the times" can we find than in the "Knights" of Aristophanes? If we desire to learn the tone of popular feeling at Athens in regard to the Peloponnesian war which so long wasted the blood and treasure of the State, where can we learn it so well as in the "Acharnians," the "Peace," or even the "Lysistrata" of the great comedian? The sophistries of the Athenian philosophers and the philosophical subtleties of the Athenian sophists are portrayed in the "Clouds" by a master-hand, though we can never pardon the jester and bard for making Socrates the foot-ball of his pungent wit. The morals and manners of Athenian women are limned with a dashing freedom in the "Ecclesiazusae" and the "Thesmophoriazusae," to say nothing of the "Lysistrata." In the "Wasps" we have an admirable *exposé* of the litigious proclivity of the sprightly and spirited Athenians; in the "Plutus" we have an allegory on the unequal distribution of wealth and property, showing that Athens, like Paris, had her Proudhons. The "Birds" is an inimitable burlesque on the national mythology of the "men of Athens," whom five centuries afterwards the great Apostle of the Gentiles pronounced "in all things too superstitious."

We have said that Aristophanes was a modern, and his age a modern age in all its great leading characteristics; for what do we find him satirizing in his comedies but those very follies which addle the brains and sophisticate the common sense of divers men and women in this nineteenth century? The agitation of "woman's rights," we learn, is no new development of our own "progressive democracy," nor is it a phenomenon peculiar to our American civilization; for in the "Ecclesiazusae," as was ably expounded by a distinguished classical professor in the course of Smithsonian lectures during the last winter, we have a detailed account of a petticoat government attempted to be instituted over the "lords of creation" in Athens; and in another play we actually find the "strong-minded women" of the Attic city banded together in a league of provisional and temporary misogamy in order to fatigue the sterner sex into a compliance with their measures.

But, whatever may be thought of these topics, it will be universally admitted that the genius of Aristophanes is of the highest order in comic art. Such plays as he has composed would have been impossible creations in any city save Athens, and in any age of Athens save that of Aristophanes. The time and place were exactly suited in the unrestrained license which they admitted to produce and foster a comic poet who should give loose reins to a wild and frolicsome imagination, for Athens was in reality a city quite as wondrous as the *Nephelococcygia*—the Cloud-Cuckoo-town—which our poet feigns in the realms of air, with its motley of priests, poets, demagogues, soothsayers, geometers, law-givers, sycophants, and philosophers. The Athenians were as capricious in their literary taste as in their political policy. It was the same people which banished Aristides because they could not bear to hear him called "the just," and which fined Phrynicus because his tragic dialogue was too pathetic and touching for their nerves to endure; which voted the freedom of their city to the descendants of Chœriphilus because their father sold such excellent salt fish, and which starved Anaxandrides to death because he satirized their Government in his comedy; which deserted Alcibiades in the midst of a speech to run after a bird, and which went to the theatre one day to weep over the tragedies of Euripides and thronged it the next to laugh over their parodies by the comic Aristophanes. It was the same people which listened to the teachings of Socrates in the groves of Academus, laughed him to scorn in the basket and clouds of Aristophanes, egged on Melitus in his prosecution, condemned the sage to drink the fatal hemlock, and deified him when dead. A populace so fickle and lawless, so witty and acute, so contemptible and admirable, the world has never before or since produced.

The Athenians "organized" their pleasures. Pleasure was a part of their daily business, and theatrical amusements a principal part of their pleasure. In their economy the theatre was not, as among us, the resort of idlers who lounge on cushioned seats amid the glare of gas and foot-lights, after the day's allotted tasks are ended. They always attended the theatre in the morning, and there, beneath the southern wall of the Acropolis, seated on benches of stone scooped out of the solid rock, with the sunlight streaming in from the sky above, the Parthenon hanging overhead, and the valley of the Ilissus lying beneath, the population of Athens "assisted" at the tragic drama of Sophocles, and made merry over the banquet of wit so profusely spread by the comic Aristophanes. The fondness for literary excitement and passion for novelty furnish, we fancy, a clue which enables us to thread the labyrinthine mazes of Athenian dramatic art. With this clue we can comprehend how the same people might venerate Socrates at the Lyceum, and yet think him fair game for a joke at the theatre of Bacchus; how they could applaud Euripides one morning and chuckle at his caricature (by Aristophanes) the next. They listened to plays much in the same spirit and for the same end as we "moderns" of the present day read hot-spiced romances like inimitable and unapproachable "Uncle Tom."

But, to return to Aristophanes, we may venture to charge him with too often deserting the humorous and witty for the censorious and satirical. It is acutely observed by Coleridge that when serious satire commences, or satire felt to be serious, however comically dressed, the true ludicrous ceases; and laughter, losing its heartiness, becomes sardonic. Instead of Attic salt, Aristophanes sometimes deals in aquafortis. Euripides is certainly not our favorite among the Greek tragedians, as he was Milton's; but yet we cannot help thinking that the author of the "Frogs" is a good deal too hard upon him. There is nothing that Euripides writes which Aristophanes does not forthwith decompose into the materials for comedy. His caustic wit fastens upon him as instinctively as a falcon on its quarry. There is nothing in the genius, birth, circumstances, character, or works of Euripides that does not pass in malignant and ironical review under the hands of the great Athenian "buffoon," as Bishop HURD styles him. There is brilliant genius and flashing wit displayed in these inimitable caricatures, but they are qualities of the head purchased at the expense of the higher and nobler feelings of the heart.

The plays of Aristophanes, founded, as we have intimated, on vague yet telling hints at passing events in the political or social world of Athens, or on the ingenious parody of Euripides, or often on both combined, enable us to measure and appreciate the subtle and piercing genius of the Athenian populace, who, without the aid of show-bills or programmes or of newspapers, never missed a single point of the poet's satirical and comic wit. That a species of drama, as Schlegel has observed, intended solely for popular amusement in one particular city, should have admitted or hazarded so rich a display of poetry, this is a circumstance which must give us the highest possible idea, if not of the general respectability, at least of the liveliness, wit, and correct taste of the masses in that remarkable State, which formed the focus and central point of all the eloquence and refinement, as well as of all the lawlessness and all the corruption, of the Greeks.

RIOT AND LOSS OF LIFE.—A riot took place among the laborers on the Illinois Central Railroad at Lasalle on Thursday, growing out of a reduction of their wages. About two o'clock an altercation arose between ALBERT STORY, a contractor, and a party of laborers, during which one of the latter was shot dead. Shortly afterwards Story's office was attacked and pillaged, and Story, who had concealed himself in a barn, was found and brutally murdered.

The Sheriff of the county was speedily on the spot, and after some resistance, during which one Irishman was shot dead and two wounded, thirty of the rioters were taken. The ringleader of the rioters escaped, but measures have been taken for his apprehension.

SHOWER OF METEORS.—We see by a paragraph in the Wheeling Argus that the citizens of that city were entertained with a shower of meteors on Sunday morning week. They are said to have fallen thick and fast, and that "for a moment it seemed as if the heavens, suddenly shaken by a mighty wind, were about to drop their stars as an aronaut to maintain a certain altitude does his ballast."

FROM OUR PARIS CORRESPONDENT.

PARIS, DECEMBER 1, 1853.

We have no news of interest from the East since the last steamer. You will have learned by that since the date of my last letter the military operations on the Danube, which were commenced with so much spirit by the Turks, have all at once subsided into the insignificance which two months ago we did not suppose would cease to characterize them during the winter. The Turks have positively abandoned all their positions upon the left bank of the Danube, except perhaps Kalafat, opposite Widin. It would seem that they still have a force there, though some accounts, and perhaps the most authentic and probable, report that OMER PACHA has ceased entirely to occupy any portion of the left bank, and will during the rest of the winter confine himself to occasional cannonading across the river. But I consider it certain that if he does not voluntarily retire to the right bank Prince GORTSCHAKOFF will make constant, strenuous, and probably successful exertions to compel him to do so. Until Turkey signs the Russian ultimatum the Czar will not tolerate a divided military occupation of the Principalities. As for the other Powers, their several positions are becoming more and more strongly defined, and of the character I have all along anticipated. I am more than ever persuaded that a general European war will not grow out of this question, at any rate till next spring, nor then either, unless some unexpected events in the West should occur to induce the Powers or some of them to modify the policy which they now pursue, and with apparent sincerity profess, viz. to restore peace between Russia and Turkey, or to confine the war strictly to those two Powers.

Pray let me, before I forget it, correct a statement relative to the late appearance of our Chargé, Mr. SANFORD, at the Court of the Tuileries in a black suit. I stated in a recent letter, and as I supposed at the time truly stated, that Mr. S. wore upon that occasion, in conformity with instructions from Mr. MARCY, a plain black coat, but one of *formal French cut*, such as is worn on ceremonial occasions. I am glad to learn, and I now amend my former account by stating, that the coat worn by Mr. SANFORD was of the *ordinary* cut, and dissimilar in no respect from the coat that any gentleman would wear to any private evening party. I am also happy to state, from unquestionable authority, that Mr. SANFORD did *not* ask the Minister of Foreign Affairs *if he would be received in such attire*. He only, and this all sensible men will admit was right and proper in him, notified the Minister beforehand that it was his intention to wear upon the occasion referred to a suit of plain black. I desire to make this correction in justice to Mr. SANFORD as well as to myself.

The musical season has opened in Paris this year with extraordinary promise. Saint Cecilia's Day (22d November) was marked as usual by the religious concert for the benefit of the Association of Musical Artists of the Capital, of which the time-honored veteran, Baron TAYLOR, is the President. This concert has been usually given in one of the churches of the capital. Last year the musicians of the French Opera, unable to agree with the other members of the association touching some of the details of the celebration, severed from the main body of the society, and got up a celebration of their own in the church of the Madeleine, while the society itself, with its whole army of performers, repaired to St. Eustache. This year again witnesses the same want of harmony among the musicians. But, truth to say, this discord among the lovers of concord answers so completely all the ends of the celebration—those of profit to the association and those of gratification to the music-loving public—that one is tempted to believe that it is, after all, only one of the paradoxes of the capital—the result of an agreement to disagree. The public is gratified with two concerts instead of one, each by first-rate performers, and possessing peculiar attractions. Two immense edifices are opened, affording space for double the number of auditors that either one could accommodate. As for the association, two collections instead of one are taken up, and it is probable that the receipts are doubled. One cannot help remarking, in support of the probability of this artistic *ruse*, that it is effected by the separation of the association into the only two divisions—the operatic corps and the main body of the society—capable of producing these favorable results. This year, as the last, the association, Baron TAYLOR at its head, performed at the church of St. Eustache the Mass composed by AMBROSE THOMAS. Six hundred musicians composed the orchestra; and the *solos* were admirably performed, as heretofore, by Mlle. LEFEBVRE and MM. MASSET and BATTAILLE. TILMANT, the elder, of course led the orchestra. The operatic company at the church of St. Roch performed fragments of several masses composed by CHERUBINI, under the lead of GIRARD.

The concerts have commenced too in public and in the private saloons with unusual brilliancy. Mde. DREYFUS, who has just returned from a tour in England with MARIO and GRISI, is now in Paris, and will doubtless be heard in all the aristocratic saloons whose mistresses make any pretention to *dilettantism*. This lady is one of the most ardent advocates of the *orgue melodium*, a new harmonic instrument invented and manufactured by the well-known harmonium-maker, ALEXANDRE, for the pianist LISZT. It is the intention of this celebrated performer to introduce the instrument this winter to the public of Paris and London. The *orgue melodium* is attached to the body of ERARD's grand piano, filling up the space between the body and the floor, but so adapted to the form as not to increase at all the space which that instrument alone would occupy. The instrument, however, which realizes this new and powerful combination, would seem to be destined for the use of robust men only. Performance upon it will require an amount and kind of physical exertion inconsistent with lady-like grace and dignity of deportment, if not actually beyond female muscular capacity. Feet, knees, hands, and voice of the performer are all employed to produce separately or simultaneously the effects of vocal music of the piano and of the full orchestra. The bellows attached to this apparatus are so easily and perfectly managed as to produce the force, decision, and instantaneous distinctness of expression hitherto capable of being rendered only by first-rate artists with the bow on stringed instruments. With those advantages the new instrument combines the perfect *sostenuto* of the organ, with the subdued effect of a number of muted violins, oboes, (hautboys,) &c., composing a full orchestra. Mde. DREYFUS will, it is said, dare to play in public upon this formidable instrument, which at present promises to open a new, large, and attractive field, both to musical composition and performance.

THALBERG, PRUDENT, HERZ, ROSENHAIN, LACOMBE, and other distinguished pianist composers are already in Paris for the winter. But let me cite among the devotees of music and aspirants for fame in operatic life, who are expecting to commence their professional career this winter in Paris, a young American lady, Miss JULIANA MAY, who promises from all accounts to give to the musical firmament a *star* of the first magnitude, and to Washington the credit of having produced the most distinguished American singer. She has spent two years in Italy pursuing under the most eminent masters a severe course of professional study. At Florence she was an object of special interest to the great *maestro* ROSSINI himself, and frequently enjoyed the advantage of his advice and instruction. Miss MAY is now in Paris for the purpose of making her *debut* as an operatic singer, and I have no doubt that I shall soon have occasion to chronicle the first successes of our young countrywoman in her professional career.