

# The Gleaner

AND  
NORTHUMBERLAND SCHEDIASMA.

VOLUME III.]

"Nec aranearum sane texus ideo melior, quia ex se fila gignunt nec noster vilior quia ex alienis libamus ut apes."

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## THE GLEANER.

FROM THE LIVERPOOL ALBION.

### REMARKS ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE PRESS.

PERHAPS IN NO instance which has occurred in the history of this country has the influence of the periodical press been more seasonable and beneficially exerted than in the line of remark adopted by it on the present occasion of the recent rejection of the reform bill by the House of Lords.

No one acquainted with the degree of feverish excitement which prevailed while the bill was pending, and especially while the final issue of the measure hung in suspense, could have imagined it possible, that a people actuated by feelings so deep, so general, and so concentrated, should, generally speaking have received the announcement of the disappointment of their fondest hopes, not only without any demonstration of violence, but with a calmness and moderation which, were we not well assured to the contrary, might be mistaken for apathy and indifference to the cause of reform itself. In this crisis the newspaper press promptly came forward, and, with scarcely a single exception, united in recommending to the people patience under disappointment, and the adoption of pacific and constitutional measures. Their call was listened to, and disorder and anarchy, for the time, effectually averted.

Disposed, as we may naturally be expected to be, to assign to the moral influence of the press its full share in influencing the public mind, we are not so enthusiastic as to imagine, that to this cause alone is to be attributed the absence of outrage and violence on that occasion. Other causes, doubtless, concurred, but that of the press of the country contributed very materially to effect this consummation will be sufficiently obvious, if we for a moment reflect what would have been the probable consequences, had this organ of the public opinion chosen to indulge in a contrary course of conduct. It cannot be questioned, that, had the conductors of the newspapers been so disposed, they might, consistently with the liberty of the press, have, instead of checking the ebullition of public feeling, adopted a line of remark tending still farther to aggravate and prolong that feeling; and we put it to any man of common sense to say, what, in the event of such a simultaneous expression, would have been the result. Could it have been ought else than the endangering of the very existence of all that we deem valuable and important in the constitution of the country?

There exists, indeed, between the press and the thinking portion of the community, an identity of feeling and a sympathy of the most intimate kind. The press is not, however, the originator of public opinion; it is rather the echo and expression of that opinion, and exists solely in consequence of its performance of that function. A press opposed to public sentiment, by failing to represent that which gave it birth and continued nutriment, must, in the nature of things, speedily die a natural death. But, while thus dependent on public feeling for its support, it, notwithstanding, exerts on the mass of the people a powerful reciprocal influence, if it cannot control, it does to a very great extent, direct popular opinion: and it is in this way that we conceive the energy of the press in this country is chiefly felt. It serves to determinate the channel in which men's minds, especially on political subjects, shall run,—a power thus sufficiently formidable to merit the serious attention of our statesmen, and which it would be their wisdom to conciliate, so far as conciliation would not involve a direlection of prin-

ple, rather than needlessly to seek to counteract or oppose it.

A very striking exemplification of the truth of the preceding remarks may be found in the proceedings connected with the late Liverpool election. It is well known, that, on this occasion, by far the greater portion of the local press warmly advocated the cause of Mr Thomas Thornely, there having been five of the papers in his favour, while only two recommended the claims of his opponent;—the weekly circulation of the former averaging, probably 7,000 papers, and that of the latter only about 1,900. Yet, notwithstanding this superiority of the advocacy of the press on the side of Mr Thornely, the election was carried in favor of Lord Sandon by a large majority. We adduce this fact merely to corroborate the position we have already laid down, that there are limits to the influence of the periodical press; that, however powerful it may be to direct and augment the current of popular feeling when once excited, it is impotent and ineffectual, when it is counteracted by persons who exert, whether for good or for evil, the influence which they derive from character, from station, or from wealth on the electoral body, an influence which, appealing, as it invariably does, appeal, to the selfish feelings of our nature, overbears the force even of conviction. While on this subject, we may just remark, that our advocacy of Mr. Thornely, which we maintained throughout, was chiefly grounded on a principle, the policy and expediency of which are so obvious as to carry conviction to the mind of any who are not utterly blinded by party prejudice,—we mean, the desirableness of having, as one of our representatives, a man thoroughly acquainted with the local interests, and intimately versed in the routine of the trade and commerce of the town; or, in other words, an experienced Liverpool merchant.

A great cry has of late years, been raised by the opponents of reform against the alleged tyranny, or licentious influence of the press. According to these gentlemen, this organ of the public voice is an engine productive of almost unmixed evil, fraught with consequences the most pernicious to the morals and best interests of the community. It is very consistent, certainly, for individuals circumstanced as they are, opposed to all innovation, and who assume it as an axiom, that "whatever is, is right," to hold this language; but it is not a little extraordinary, that they possess not discernment sufficient to see, that this very licentiousness, of which they so loudly complain, owes its existence and strength to those abuses in our political economy of which, if they themselves were not the authors, they, at all events, serve, by their influence to uphold and perpetuate. To use the words of the Lord Chancellor Brougham, in his late memorable speech on reform, when addressing the House of Lords,— "So long as the people are not duly represented, so long as they have no other organ or channel for stating their grievances, the press is, will be, and ought to be all influential. It is, therefore, your own bad system which has erected the tyranny you complain of. The remedy, the safe, and efficacious, and constitutional remedy is in your hands. Remove the causes of that state of public excitement to which the undue influence of the press is wholly owing, and you destroy its tyranny. Give the people a pure representation; enable them to give expression to their own grievances, in their own constitutional way, and you necessarily do away with all that is formidable not only in the periodical press, but in the several unions, and meetings, and associations, and leagues against the exchequer, and secret societies, on which the changes have been rung during the present debate."

The remedy, then for the abuses of our periodical

press is already in the hands of our men in power. Remove political grievances, and you destroy the ailment on which the licentiousness of the press exists; or, in other words, satisfy the people by conceding to them their reasonable and rightful demands, and their press, instead of being formidable and mischievous, will become, what in an enlightened state it should always be, the friend and ally of the government, and the strenuous advocate of what ever can tend to improve the civil and moral condition of mankind.

### ENGLAND.

The taste of the English in the cultivation of the land, and in what is termed landscape gardening, is unrivalled. Nothing can be more imposing than their park scenery. But what most delights me is the creative talent with which the English decorate the unostentatious abodes of middle life. The rudest habitation, the most unpromising and scanty portion of land, in the hands of an English man of taste, becomes a little paradise. The residence of people of fortune and refinement in the country has diffused a degree of taste and elegance in rural economy, that descends to the lowest class. The very laborer, with his thatched cottage, attends to the embellishment. The trim hedge, the grass plot before the door, the little flower bed bordered with snug box, the woodbine trained up against the wall, and hanging its blossoms about the lattice; the pot of flowers in the window; the chest winter of its dreariness, and throw in a gleam of green summer to cheer the fireside;—all these bespeak the influence of taste, flowing down from high sources, and pervading the lowest levels of the public mind. If ever a lover of rural elegance, delights to visit a cottage, it must be the cottage of an English peasant.

The proneness to rural life among the higher classes, has had a salutary effect upon the national character. I do not know a finer race of men than the English gentlemen. Instead of the softness and effeminacy which characterize the men of rank in some countries, they exhibit a union of elegance and strength, a robustness of frame and freshness of complexion, which is inclined to attribute to their living so much in the open air, and pursuing so eagerly the invigorating recreations of the country.

The effect of this devotion of elegant minds to rural occupations has been wonderful on the face of the country. A great part of the Island is level, and would be monotonous, were it not studded and garnished with castles and palaces, and embroidered with parks and gardens. It does not abound in sublime prospects, but rather in little home scenes of rural repose and sheltered quiet. Every antique farm-house and moss-grown cottage is a picture; and the roads are continually winding, and the view shut in by groves and hedges, the eye is delighted by a continual succession of small landscapes of captivating loveliness.

The great charm, however, of English scenery is the moral feeling that seem to pervade it.—It is associated in the mind with ideas of order, of quiet, of calm and settled principles, of hoary usage and reverend custom.

It is a pleasing sight on a Sunday morning, when the bell is sending its somber melody across the quiet fields, to behold the peasantry in their finery, with ruddy faces, and modest cheerfulness, thronging to church; it is pleasing to see them in the evenings, gathering about their cottage doors, and appearing to exult in the humble comforts and embellishments which their own hands have spread around them. It is this sweet home feeling, this settled repose of affection in the domestic scene, that is, the parent of the steadiest virtues and purest enjoyments.