

FRIDAY, MARCH 30, 1883.

*SCIENCE AND THE NEWSPAPERS.*

WE hear a great deal about the educating influence of the press, and it cannot be denied that this influence is very great. Every one reads the newspapers, and is more or less affected by them. To say that the press exerts a great educational influence is, however, not necessarily praise; for this influence may be bad, and in some respects it undoubtedly is bad. Leaving out of consideration the obvious illustrations of this truth, it seems to be desirable to call special attention to one direction in which the newspapers, as a rule, signally fail in their attempts to educate the public; and that is, in reporting the transactions of the meetings of scientific associations. Fortunately the attempts are not often made; but, when they are, the results are quite different from what the editors probably desire. The intention of the editors is, we take it, really to inform the public, in an honest, straightforward way, what the papers presented at the meetings are about. Perhaps the gentlemen think that this is actually accomplished: nothing can be farther from the truth. Usually, instead of a clear statement, a column or two of the veriest nonsense is strung together by a young reporter entirely ignorant of the first principles of the simplest science. The matter passes into the office, and is accepted by an editor as ignorant of science as the reporter; and the result is, that science is belittled, and the public deceived—certainly not educated. When ignorance alone is exhibited in these reports, they may be regarded with equanimity by those who are informed; for the ignorance of the writer appears on the surface, and no one can or does hold the author of the paper responsible. But when, added to the ignorance, there is a tendency to ridicule, to turn matters of grave importance into petty jokes,—in general, to betray a flippant spirit in the treatment of the subjects discussed,—then it is time for science to enter a protest, not in the interests of scientific men (for newspaper reports, no matter how bad, do them lit-

tle harm), but in the interests of science itself.

When a newspaper in a semi-civilized region makes sport of death; when an execution is emphasized by mirth-provoking head-lines; when the most sacred things are ridiculed,—the refined members of the community are shocked. So, too, when the earnest efforts of investigators are used by strangely incompetent young men for the purpose of exhibiting their sophomoric humor, those whose senses in matters of science are in the least refined feel outraged. They feel that the newspapers which lend themselves to such abuses are guilty of a sacrilege for which they should be held responsible. The harm done is both positive and negative,—it is positive in so far as entirely false notions in regard to the work of scientific men are given currency, and ignorance is encouraged; it is negative in so far as the opportunity for really correctly informing the public is lost.

All who hold science in reverence; who believe, that, through scientific investigation in every direction open to us, the truth will at last be reached; who believe that the spread of correct ideas concerning natural phenomena will eventually dispel that superstition which is now the great enemy of progress,—all such cannot but deplore any thing which in a tangible way is opposed to the development of scientific culture. We call upon the editors of our great daily newspapers to carefully consider the subject, and to endeavor to remedy what must be regarded as a grave difficulty. Better no reports at all than such as are usually furnished; but the work of reporting might easily be well done, and, if well done, would be of value.

*THE PRESENT STATE OF SCIENCE IN BRAZIL.*

THE last ten or fifteen years have witnessed a marked awakening in Brazil to the importance of scientific research, and the inauguration of what may fairly be termed a new movement, of which, so far as the writer is aware, no account has yet been given to the outside world; while Brazilians themselves are