

From *William Makepeace Thackeray*.
The Comic Almanac for 1853

Taking into consideration the hourly increasing inquisitiveness of the Age, and the desire to pry into the secrets of Futurity, as evinced by the feverish agitation, on all sides, of vitally important questions, such as the following: —

What is to be done for the people?

Who's who?..

What next? —

SCRAPS OF INFORMATION, USEFUL AND ORNAMENTAL

... Air navigation on a scale hitherto unattempted will be the feature of the year. Madame Poitevin will go up ... attached to the bottom of the car of the Globe Balloon. The veteran Green, by the announcement of his balloon ascent will prove that, in spite of his vast age and experience, he is not yet old enough to know better. [...] A man of consummate genius will turn the invention of the balloon to considerable account.

[...] The usual excursion trips will commence for the season—the competition between companies leading to still further reduction of fares. Passengers will be booked through ...; with the privilege of hotel expenses for a week; ... instruction in the French language; ... and the right of smuggling.

JULY

The air being charged with electricity, ... July will be a very hot month. Several cases of hydrophobia will occur ... The theory of prevention, by muzzling or chaining up, will be suggested by many people, but will continue to be disregarded, as entirely opposed to the spirit of the British Constitution.



Providing of Dogs in Humble Circumstances with Muzzles.

A terrible act of injustice will be committed. A very sensible dog indeed will be killed as mad—for refusing to drink a drop of Thames water. [...] The Humane Society will be very active. Baths and wash-houses will be instituted for the benefit of individuals who may have been imprudent enough to bathe in the Serpentine [Pond, Hyde Park, London].



In Consideration of the Extreme Heat of the Weather, the usual strict Dress Regulations of the Opera will be suspended.

THE CHANGE IN THE WEATHER

Well, what do you think of the Weather?

The English climate, so long considered a capital joke, is becoming a very serious matter. They were not Dog-Days last summer; they were Hyena, Kangaroo, Elephant, Boa-Constrictor days. If so unnatural a state of things is to be repeated, England will no longer occupy her present position in the world. She will be somewhere else. We shall be all abroad ... Nationality will be at an end. With the loss of our climate, it is impossible that we should continue to be the same people.

... The heat of last summer made us so uncomfortable (we do not mean merely in a physical sense), that we thought it our duty to inquire into the matter. We have, therefore, condescended on this occasion to look into futurity with a weather eye, of which we hasten to present the reader with a few "shoots..." We regret to say our worst fears have been confirmed. The page in the *Book of Destiny* that has been opened to our inspection is closely printed, and presents the aspect of a number of *The Times*, dated *August 2nd, 1980*. We leave our readers to form their own opinions on the following extracts:—

The Weather and the Crops [in Britain].—The season continues to be unusually backward. The plantains in the neighbourhood of Wolverhampton have scarcely passed the flower. The cotton fields, however, of the West Riding are in a healthy condition—several trees being already in pod. It is feared that there will be a great loss in consequence of the dearth of labourers. It is true that immigration from Iceland, Nova Zemlya, and the manufacturing countries generally, continues to a great extent ... The prospects of sugar are far from satisfactory, the siroccos of the last month having completely devastated the plantations—the canes on Clapham Common present a disastrous spectacle! The bread-fruit trees on Blackheath promise an abundant supply of half-quarters. [...]

Frightful Accident.—On Wednesday last, Mr. Edward Jackson, landlord of the "Cocoa-Nut," Tottenham Court Road, London, having had the imprudence to bathe in the Serpentine, was attacked by a ferocious alligator, who devoured both his legs so as to make amputation, we regret to say, unnecessary.

[...]

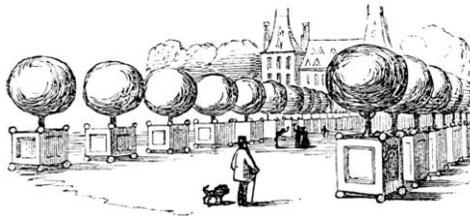
Health of the Metropolis.—The deaths in the metropolis during the last week ... are as follows:

Yellow Fever	1640
Black Fever	870
Green Fever	651
Ague	923
Coup de Soleil	130
Eaten by personal acquaintances (cannibalism being, we regret to say, rather on the increase ...)	24
Eaten by savage animals (e.g. tigers), stung by reptiles, &c.	18
Influenza (old English complaint) almost obsolete	1
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Total	4257

Altogether a most satisfactory return, showing a marked improvement since last week.

From **Mysteries of Paris, Totally Unexplained,**
by a Regular Briton.

... I should like to know why the French can't allow their trees to grow as they like, instead of cropping and clipping them, like so many whiskers on the face of Nature. These singular-looking terrestrial 419 spheres, planted in square tubs, in the Luxembourg Gardens, I am told are orange-trees. Very good. Their resemblance to oranges is certainly striking.



The French, I am told, down to the lowest grades of society, are proverbial for their gallantry and consideration for the fair sex. Appearances are certainly deceptive ... For instance, these individuals, I have ascertained, belong to the class *ouvrier* [working class]:—



To avoid the slightest mistake, I have hunted up the dictionary meaning of that word. I find it to be *homme qui travaille*—*industriel* [**Man** who works; worker]. They are certainly a strange race. How anybody can sleep, with [military] gentlemen parading the streets about a hundred at a time, before daybreak, and continuing their what's-his-name's tattoo every ten minutes, is a puzzler.

From **Sketchbook of Paris. The Fêtes of July**

... There is *ONE* benefit that the country has gained (as for liberty of press or person, diminished taxation, a juster representation, who ever thinks of them?)—*ONE* benefit they have gained, or nearly: no more wicked guillotining for revolutions. A Frenchman must have his revolution—it is his nature to knock down omnibuses in the street, and across them to fire at troops of the line—it is a sin to balk it. [...]

The sight which I have just come away from is as brilliant, happy, and beautiful as can be conceived; and if you want to see French people to the greatest advantage, you should go to a festival like this, where their manners and innocent gaiety show a very pleasing contrast to the coarse hilarity [sometimes exhibited] in our own country ... The greatest noise that I heard was that of a company of jolly villagers from a place in the neighbourhood of Paris, who, as soon as the fireworks were over, formed themselves into a line, three or four abreast, and so marched singing home.

PARIS, July 1839.