

"You know," I added, "that I mean to show you up one of these days!"

"So grateful of you!" she said; "but indeed I hardly know what could be called our local peculiarities; I believe, however, that what they called 'loosing in the New Year' is really confined to these regions."

Neither of us knew to what she alluded, so she went on: "The first New Year morning after our coming here, I was aroused from sleep by a sound of music and singing, which appeared to be almost in the room. I began to think it was some warning meant specially for me, and was just going to tell my husband I heard a 'voice he could not hear,' when a most un-supernatural rapping at the hall-door wakened him also. Then the singing went on with greater vigour than ever; and, as George said, they might rap all night before he would go to them. After one more thundering peal, they sung themselves to another house. We learnt afterwards that these kind people had come to introduce the infant year to our inhospitable dwelling; but, as we perversely refused to receive him, we had to be dependent on the kindly offices of milkman or postman. Neither of the servants would have stirred from the house, not even to the well in the garden, till the year had been let in after the approved manner; and, by not taking him when first offered, we exposed ourselves to the fearful chance of having a woman as its first presenter."

"Would that be thought unlucky?" said Carry.

"Oh, marvellously uncanny. Also, a man setting out for his morning work, would at any time think it a wretched omen if a woman happened to be the first person he met. Many a collier has turned back and taken another road, after desecrating a daughter of Eve in the distance; and the wife of one who had met with an accident, told me the other day that it was so very unfortunate he had encountered a woman on his way to the works, and was too late to turn in another direction!"

"I am afraid," said I, "they have little sense of the sublime and beautiful."

"Apparently not much. Well, then, we have 'Mothering Sunday,' that I have heard of in other north-midland counties, but you know nothing about it. The fourth Sunday in Lent is here observed as almost a greater festival than Easter-day. Servants ask leave to visit their homes; married sons and daughters flock to their parents' houses; and all regale on roast veal and 'laid,' or, as we should call it, bread and butter pudding. The next day is also kept as a holiday, and called 'Fathering Monday.' Then we have 'Heaving Monday and Tuesday.' On Easter Monday and Tuesday there is rude play of the kind you may have seen in the Kentish hop grounds. 'Tossing in a blanket' would be mild treatment compared with the Black Country lifting. Tuesday is by far the greater heaving day of the two; the women are then the aggressors. It would amuse you to see great tall young men running as if for their lives. You had better not be in the way that day, Lewis. The masters and clerks hardly dare to visit the office, for it is

certain to be besieged, and it is by no means uncommon for a gentleman's horse to be stopped, while the rider is happy to escape his tormentors by the payment of a handsome bribe.

SMITHS' EXPRESS NEWSPAPER OFFICE.

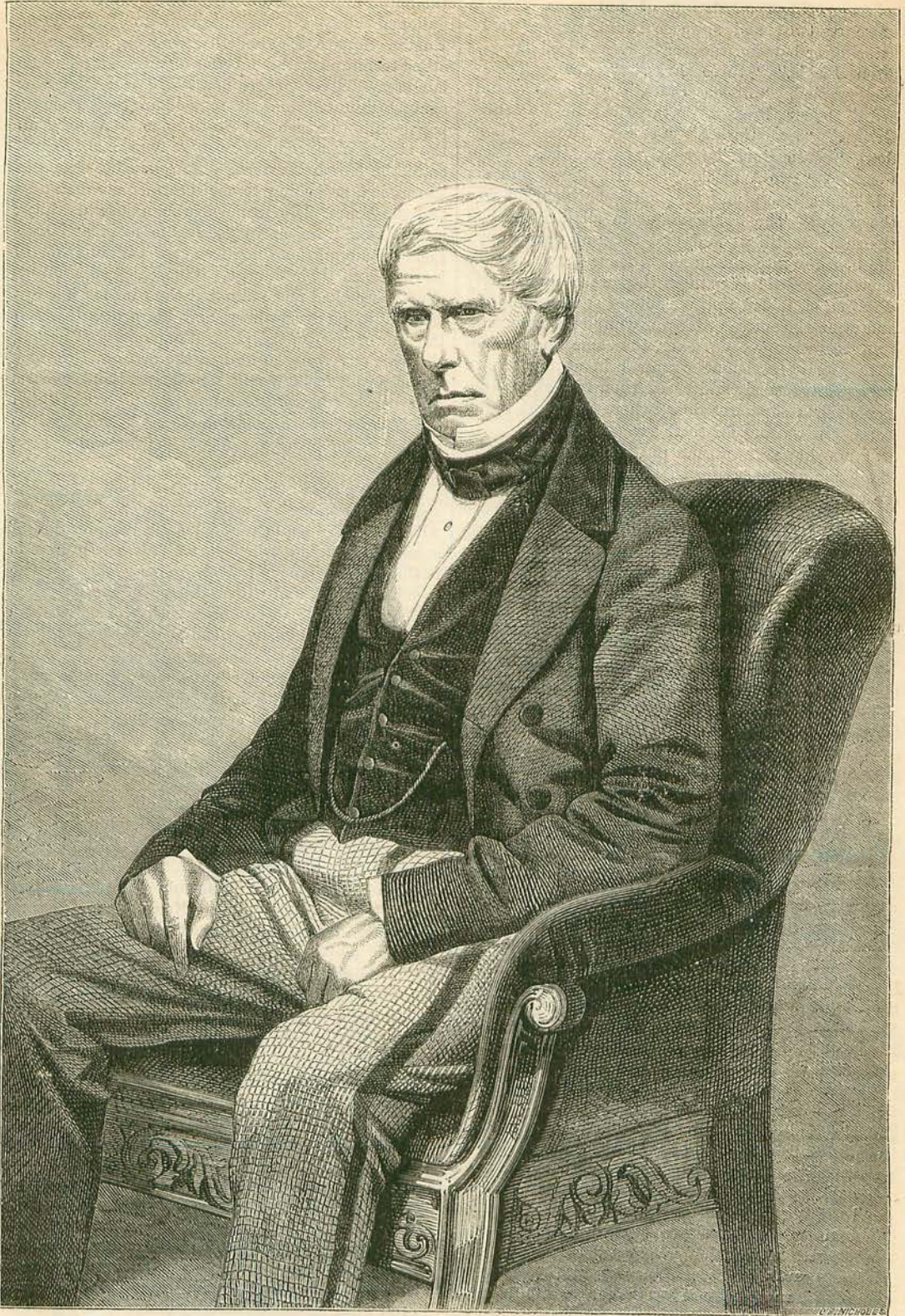
THERE are no skylarks in London, to wake one in the fine summer morning; but at 3.30 railroad time I am trudging through the deserted streets.

"The very houses seem asleep,
And all the mighty heart is lying still."

It is, indeed, the stillest period of this gigantic mass of life. The millions rest. Yet some must wake. There is a stir in a few isolated spots. They are the smallest of specks, and the action in them is the slightest of observable motions. But from these just visible and audible centres a voice is issuing, which will be heard, within a few brief hours, all over the British isles, and rapidly penetrate the utmost corners of the civilized world. Talk of magic, and spiritualism, and supernatural powers! What magic can create, what spiritualism can communicate, what powers can command, such wonders as this? And what and whence is it? Simply the Printing Press at its incessant toil! Some bits of metal are put together, a dark substance is distributed over their face, a number of wheels rotate, and the products of the soul and intellect of man are spread on wings of light to inform and instruct, to influence the opinions, to guide the footsteps, to shape the course, and to rule the conduct of the human race.

But why should I have been threading the silent streets at this unseasonable hour, almost like the "last man" wandering alone upon the solitary earth? I had an object. I had heard much of the newspaper establishment of Messrs. Smith and Son—of the extraordinary amount of its operations—of the marvellous dexterity of its arrangements—and of the facility and certainty with which it despatched a business of such infinite detail and enormous magnitude as to be altogether incredible without the conviction of ocular demonstration.

Possessing a courteous permission of entrance, I was duly at my post at four o'clock one Saturday morning, and even at that hour the bustle had begun. A large hall, forming all the back part of the extensive premises (behind the counting-houses), and surrounded by two galleries, was occupied by above a hundred and sixty men, either at the long tables or benches which run along the floor, or darting from post to pillar. The galleries were also filled by circles of most active coadjutors, from whom every now and then small parcels or reams of wet journals were showered upon the heads of claimants or clamants below. And it was this incessant clamour for supplies from every corner, and apparently addressed to nowhere, that struck me as the most remarkable feature of the labour. To witness perfect order emerge from such a scene of apparently utter confusion was like conjuring. Suppose twenty individuals scattered about at the tables making up packages of the newspapers, some almost too heavy to be lifted, and



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others perhaps consisting of not more than a quire or two; and suppose twenty voices to be uttering or bawling the words, "a hundred Times," "ten Fields," "three Eras," "twenty Telys" (Telegraphs), "fifteen Stars," "fifteen Standards," "four Presses," "three Armies," "three Critics," "two Gasses," "twenty Revs." (London), "seven Revs." (Sat.), "three Mists" (Economists), "two Worlds," "six Ill. News and six Ill. Times," etc.; and to such a babel, what was the reply? The flying about in all directions of the supplies still wanted, and their alighting upon the benches into the hands whence the vocal calls have proceeded! By them they were immediately disposed of, folded up into oblong square bundles; and when the entire order was completed according to a list before every packer, the same was by another prompt assistant wrapped in strong brown paper covers, ready addressed, then corded, and despatched to the outer door, where the light flying carts were waiting for their several cargoes.

I am, however, rather putting the cart before the horse, as the saying is. I ought to have stated that every ten or fifteen minutes the vehicles (conspicuously painted "Express Newspaper Office," with the proprietors' name and address), with piles of the "Times," had been driving rapidly up and down from Printing House Square with loads, as fast as they could be got from the machine, and first of all with the advertisement sheets of the supplement only, which are thrown off whilst the latest, or interior news sheets, are finishing for the press. Thus every "Times" paper requires two manipulations in folding for transmission to its destination.

Contemporaneously, trucks and porters are delivering deposits of other journals; and how they are arranged, so as to be readily hurled about in the manner I have described, does vast credit to the multifarious arrangement of this extraordinary system. Men staggering in under heavy burdens, and others going out with packages of all sizes, look as if inextricably complicated, and yet the whole is perfect order. The outgoers find the conveyances for the different Northern, Great Western, South Eastern, etc. stations, waiting for their freight under the superintendence of a manager, who has all their hours of starting marked, and all the number of parcels that are to be sent to them. His charge is a very important one, and calculated to minutes. The time necessary for the transit from the Strand office to the rail runs nearly as close as a horse-race. Where needed, in consequence of streets being paved, or obstacles from buildings, or laying down gas or water pipes, or any other interruption of the right of way, previous surveys are made, routes changed, and farther time allowed, as the case may be. Sometimes outriders are sent to clear off such hindrances as London is exposed to from locks of market carts, wagons, cabs, and all the interruptions of its mighty traffic; that is, as the morning advances, for the earliest despatches up to six o'clock are little likely to fall in with aught in the way before them. In this work sixty horses are employed, and their sleek condition does credit to

their feed and efficiency. Should any of them have galloped away on their errand to Paddington, Euston Square, London Bridge, King's Cross, or other terminus, without being able to wait for some late stray delivery, there is a brave pedestrian race against minutes, and it is seldom that a single paper fails to reach its destination. At 5.30 all the Great Westerns are *en route* for the six o'clock train, the North Westerns follow, and the others in succession, according to the intermediate distances and the hours. In short, every man does his duty; and it would be an indescribable mess and confusion if any of them neglected even a minor detail intrusted to their charge. One chief superintendent overlooked and animated the whole. His eye seemed to be everywhere, and his orders to reach the four corners of the place at once; and, if he had the eyes of Argus, so he had the arms of Briareus, for, at a pinch, he would step forward and put his own hands to expedite any piece of work which the hurry of the case demanded. There were no hitches under his comprehensive vision and prompt example.

By five o'clock, the absolute whirl all about the spectator is enough to excite that sort of giddiness which is felt in a factory where a complication of steam and endless wheels are at fight, only here it is the human agency that is getting through the wonderful task, and with a degree of steady speed which is difficult to reconcile with the nature and amount of the labour. And so good-humouredly too. Everybody looked as if almost at play—jocund, laughing at petty contretemps, and joking at awkward mishaps, and their instant remedies. It was an excellent sign of the relations between masters and men. I should not look for a strike, hardly for a dismissal, in this admirably-conducted establishment.

Sometimes the "Times" cannot be furnished fast enough for the earliest trains, and you hear the order "half Times," or "a third Times" issued to the packers, thus limiting the first transmissions, while at the same time "Posts," "Chronicles," "Heralds," "Daily News," pour in, and bales after bales are disposed of with astonishing celerity and accuracy; the galleries continuing their sleight-of-hand evolutions, and the parties below making exceedingly short work with the goods thus provided for them. Cart after cart is filled from the back, the driver is already mounted, the folding-doors are slammed to, the word is given, and away rattles the carriage, just to be two or three minutes within that limit when the inexorable whistle tells that, but for this punctuality, it would have been too late. Few can form an adequate notion of the inconvenience and disappointment that would be created by the misadventure of one of Messrs. W. H. Smith and Son's bright red carts.

A partial interregnum ensues, and advantage is taken of it for the discussion of hot, hearty breakfasts—tea, coffee, cocoa, rolls, etc.—which are swallowed while a reduced activity in arranging goes on.

The earlier morning trains have been fed—so have the men and boys—and a second act follows, similar to, though not quite so stirring, nor requir-

ing such energetic exertion, as the first. To the repetition, however, is superadded, upstairs, the folding of thousands of single papers for the post. But as this is the same operation as is practised at the publication offices of the widely-circulated journals, I will not enter into particulars. The stupendousness of the effort, and the effect of the production, are the great elements which impress themselves on the mind; and perhaps the most gratifying conclusion from the result is the intense satisfaction derived from the view of well-deserving individual enterprise meeting with its just recompense, while its contributive stream flows on to swell the great flood-tide of national wealth, prosperity, and power. It is one of those centres which the spirit of the age calls into being; consistently with progressive development. A free and cheap press—the diffusion and demand for information—the growth of intelligence in a popular sense—the facilities for intercommunication among all classes of the community, combine to dwarf old methods and customs, and to render new plans, inventions, and extensions necessary. And the country must rejoice to witness, in every branch of its commerce, some of its people rise with the occasion, and, to use a hackneyed phrase, show themselves masters of their situations. Setting aside the electric wire as unapproachable by any other mortal device ever brought into action, it is still marvellous to think that words spoken in Parliament are within two hours rolling from the printing-press in indelible characters, conveyed under excellent arrangements to an establishment so skilfully organized as this of Messrs. Smith, and thence within other two hours committed to the pressure of steam, and spread with incredible rapidity over the limits of the British isles. One hundred miles from the capital, at eight o'clock, country residents are perusing the most important utterances which transpired there only five hours before, and the most recent news from every quarter of the globe are an immediate and daily portion of their common enjoyments.

On this Saturday morning, a hundred and twenty thousand public journals were, between four and nine o'clock, thus transmitted to a hundred and nine railway stations, agreeably to a list published for Messrs. Smith's Subscription Library. All the day long the posting of journals is continued, and the preparations are going forward for the morning effort. The wrappers are addressed and laid in order. I counted fifty or sixty individuals thus employed at noon, and on the evenings of Friday an immense number of what are called Saturday and Sunday papers (though circulated beforehand) are disposed of by the rail; and every day, more or less, according to the times of publication, there is an endless flow from this source to irrigate the land (if I may so express myself) with torrent rapidity, wherever the thirst for intelligence exists. The commanding position of the "Times" secures for it (I believe through some contract with Messrs. Smith) the accommodation of sale at all their railway book-stalls, at the price of fourpence, as daily notified in that journal; others, I fancy, must risk provincial agencies and

news-venders, in the usual old fashion of agreement. But

I opened my eyes,
And I asked with surprise—

"Are no 'Leisure Hours,' no 'Sundays at Home,' no 'All the Year Rounds,' no 'Once a Weeks' sold out of London?" "Oh, yes," was the response; "but they come within the category of books, and are sent with all the new works in Library Parcels."

I procured a catalogue, and, to my astonishment, found that, in addition to the gigantic undertaking, the management and direction of which I had just witnessed, this firm had established a circulating library in connection with their numerous railway bookstalls, with a continual change of books free from charge beyond the subscription; and that, in fact, readers living three hundred miles off were, by means of their machinery and capabilities, made next door neighbours, for accommodation, to Paternoster Row. And I said to myself, "When will wonders cease? Here is another of the gratifying examples of the best spirit of the age."

THE PUZZLES OF PARTY IN THE UNITED STATES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE ENGLISHWOMAN IN AMERICA."

UNTIL the middle of November, when the presidential election will be held, America will continue in an ever-increasing frenzy of excitement. The election of a chief magistrate is in itself important; but mammon enters into the contest, for 22,000 offices, with their lawful gains and unlawful spoils, may change occupants with the election, from the white-haired minister who represents the genius of republicanism at St. James's, to the semi-barbarian post-master who dispenses letters and corn spirit in the western wilds. It is not an unfitting time for the heir of the mightiest of earth's monarchies to witness the working of republican institutions. The "nominations" are over, and the contest has begun. To the partial exclusion even of dollars, the election is the all-engrossing topic of conversation. The country is divided into hostile camps. "Wide-awake" and other clubs for electioneering purposes are formed everywhere; popular orators "stump" every State, and rave about the American eagle; "mass meetings" are held in monster "wigwams" and in the open air; torch-light processions, two miles in length, parade the cities, with bands of music and yells of triumph and defiance; huge flags from countless committee-rooms are hung across the streets; the air is filled with the sounds of national music, the roar of guns, and the ravings of frenzied orators; expectants of thousands of government offices raise the ardour of faction to furnace heat; the whole nation throbs with excitement; "campaign" journals start into being; the papers run wild; language loses its meaning, and all ordinary forms are broken through. The frenzy is focussed at New York, which is kept alive during the torrid heat of this season by campaign orations, the ravings of