

## OUR NETWORK OF NEWS: THE PRESS ASSOCIATION AND REUTER.

By T. ARTEMUS JONES.



HE rapidity with which England's network of news draws in its daily haul received a capital illustration in the announcement of the assassination of President Carnot.

From Lyons, where the tragedy was enacted, the news was telephoned to Paris whence it was communicated in the same way to London. Here in the offices of our great dailies the assassination was known seventeen minutes after the fatal blow had been struck; within the hour the Press Association, which distributes Reuter's news in the provinces, had flashed forth the fact into the most distant corner of the United Kingdom.

On the other hand a recent episode may be mentioned to show the opposite side of the picture. About midnight some three months ago a ghastly outrage was taking place a few yards above Fleet Street at the very moment when that centre was busiest in drawing its sustenance from the four corners of the globe. Three hours before the London dailies may be said, roughly speaking, to go to press a double murder was attempted in one of the main arteries of London life. According to the latest journalistic creed the most trifling accident in the next street possesses an acuter interest for the British citizen than the fall of a dynasty abroad. Yet while the London Press was busily recording the recriminations of Italian or French deputies much more valuable "copy" was lying at its very doorstep. Not one contained a reference to the

attempted double murder until twenty-four hours later. (An exception must be made in one case, and that curiously enough the latest recruit to the band of London dailies, in which a special edition was produced some hours subsequently.) Such an incident proves, not inaction on the part of the newspapers or agencies, but rather the impossibility of covering, systematically and adequately, the vast congeries of cities which pass under the name of London. Still the mere fact that it is so rare as to be notable serves to point to immense progress made in the trade of news-gathering.

In one sense it is a mistake to speak of the supremacy of the British Press in the collection of reliable news as the result of gradual growth, of that kind of development which marks most of our national institutions. Compare the provincial newspaper of forty years ago with its issue five years later, or with a copy to-day. In following the development of news-reporting note how simultaneously in every paper the foreign and home intelligence grows up to date; how in one and the same year the provincial paper relies less and less on its smarter London contemporary. With striking suddenness the short paragraphs "supplied by Mr. Reuter" all over the kingdom merge into columns; "yesterday" gets substituted for "last week" and "the other day." In every instance this enterprise in gathering the body of daily information together dates from one and the same year, 1868. Then it is that London seems to step into its place

as the centre of distribution of the world's news.

It was in 1868 that the Government took over this country's telegraphy. Until that year no regular attempt at collecting news was made, except the feeble efforts of the Electric Telegraph Company, from whom our wires were transferred to the State. It furnished the provincial papers with meagre and very imperfect reports of accidents and murders, written by the company's clerks in a few of the provincial centres. This information, gathered in a most haphazard fashion, was supplied at a cost which offers a suggestive contrast to the present scale of charges. Then the fee for telegraphing news was a shilling for thirty words in the daytime

£100 a week, so great was the expense they incurred in getting the long telegrams they published of South African affairs. To the layman of course political excitement over foreign events must seem a source of enormous income to agencies supplying the public with the information for which it awaits with breathless interest. This little fact concerning the Jameson raid intensifies the mystery as to how a news agency pays.

In the case of the Press Association the explanation is forthcoming from the fact that it is a kind of co-operative society for the supply of news amongst the proprietors of provincial papers. With the opportunity which the telegraphic changes of 1868 opened up these made a combined movement towards securing an independent source of news. They sent deputations to wait upon the Postmaster-General of the day, and the result of their energies was such reduction in the cost for telegraphing news as I have indicated. With the founding of the Press Association, immediately followed as an independent enterprise by the Central News in 1868, ended the halcyon days of the penny-a-liner.

This interesting individual it has been the business of the news agencies to supersede in the same way that the small trader has been ousted by the universal pro-

vider. Formerly absence of competition enabled the liner to deal with editors pretty much as he liked. Mr. Robbins, the manager of the Press Association, tells of a time when it was customary to drag out public interest in a murder over a period of several months. Forty years ago, for example, a bag containing a human skeleton was found on Waterloo Bridge. For four months the "Waterloo Bridge Mystery," as it was then termed, was the chief topic in the newspapers. Whenever the liner came across an interesting fact or an important piece of information he worked it off on the public gradually and economically. In these days, when the topics of the hour are reported and described with such completeness and comprehensiveness, a matter like the Waterloo Bridge mystery



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THE TELEGRAPHIST AT THE PRESS ASSOCIATION.

for each message and forty words at night. Nowadays news is wired away at seventy-five words a shilling in the day and a hundred words at night, the message being duplicated, with the only additional charge of a few coppers for each separate paper. Every editor availing himself of the Electric Telegraph Company's services had to pay, not only the whole cost of telegraphing the message, but a weekly sum of £1 for the information telegraphed. At the present time, owing to the stress of competition amongst the agencies, newspaper proprietors get more than one service for a price which hardly covers the cost of telegraphing.

During the exciting days which followed the Jameson raid the Press Association through Reuter's lost money at the rate of

would not receive any great attention for more than a week.

Prominent amongst the points of difference in the present system of news supply as compared with the old is its classification of news. Instead of the miscellaneous hotch-potch served up in the old days in a rough and ready way, irrespective of the particular requirements of each paper, the news of the day is now classified according to its characteristics and despatched on systematic lines. The events of the morning and afternoon, as they reach the Press Association over the wires or the telephone, or by the Association messengers on bicycle, bus or boat, are comprised in the service which feeds our small army of evening papers, while the evening service caters for the morning newspapers. In the "night turn," extending from midnight to the ordinary breakfast hour, the London papers, as they are issued in the small hours of the morning, are carefully scanned for "exclusive information," which is despatched into the country soon enough to appear in the express (or later) editions of the provincial papers. The "general" service of news, covering all sorts and conditions of occurrences, from a murder to a personal paragraph, has existed from the beginning, but out of it have grown more than a dozen offshoots, the news in all cases going "fully" (with all details), or summarised, or thirdly, in a very abbreviated form.

Within recent years, for example, with the exodus of City workers to the seaside there arose a demand for daily weather reports from popular resorts. Papers requiring this information now find it supplied in a separate service which takes cognizance of nothing else between Whitsuntide and September. A few years further back the meteorological office was established; its official reports afforded a special branch of news.

In this manner has the line of public vision taken within its range those matters of daily occurrence which help to represent the interests of commerce, sport, science, art, literature, research, and other institutions of the age. The result of course, in so far as the general public is concerned, is that there is a marked similarity and likeness in the news given in all the newspapers.

This news is collected from every town, even of the least importance, throughout the kingdom. The Press Association has its duly accredited agent in every town of importance. Last year these correspondents

numbered close upon 1200, and their remuneration for messages, together with other reporting expenses, amounted to the considerable sum of £6931.

In a few important provincial centres the messages there are sent direct to the clients of the Press Association. It is fortunate that this is not the case in every instance for the language of a few correspondents, particularly those in Ireland, requires considerable revision.

Here is a sample. The report is that of a suicide: "*It is believed that the deceased put*



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THE TAPE MACHINE AT WORK IN THE PRESS ASSOCIATION OFFICE.

*the rope round his neck as a joke and found, when too late, he had made a fatal mistake."*

From Skibbereen came a brief message recording the drowning of a young farmer who was described as being "6 feet 2 inches in height." The report went on: "*He went to bathe in a river about four feet deep, but seems to have walked out of his depth and was drowned."*

In another part of Ireland a drunken shepherd lost his way on the mountain side and was found dead in a stream next morning. Here is the verdict of the jury as recorded by the local correspondent: "*The jury were of opinion that the deceased wandered on the hills and lost himself, and falling into*

*the river died from drowning, caused by an over-consumption of whisky."*

These are the messages that are improved into presentable shape by the editorial staff. Important speeches in the provinces are sent to all clients direct. Reuter's messages reach the Press Association over the tape machine (an illustration of this being given on the previous page), and a corps of telegraph clerks receive the messages placed upon the wire. Then these are written out on "fimsies" and despatched by pneumatic tubes to the General Post Offices, often reaching a distant client in the provinces within the hour.

Last year the Press Association's bill for telegraphing and cabling exceeded £41,000,

revenue drawn from recording his speeches. Needless to say the gap caused through his retirement remains unfilled.

In a very small way however Lord Rosebery has done something to occupy the vacancy. There is always a literary flavour about his speeches that the public like; his graceful and entertaining treatment of topics outside the political world—especially those pertaining to literature—seems to have rendered his speeches very acceptable to newspaper readers.

Upon this point perhaps a fact may be mentioned which should set his admirers rejoicing. So far as the demand for Lord Rosebery's speeches is concerned the public are now more curious than ever to learn his views on the topics of the day. It is only fair to infer therefore that the ex-Premier's importance in the public eye is increasing and not diminishing as some of his critics insist.

The experience of the news agencies tends to the conclusion that political reputation is the product of careful engineering. This truth it may be said is already familiar to those whose ambitions lie in the direction of public service. Here however is a less known but equally important fact: the public ear once gained must not be bored. The late Lord Randolph Churchill



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THE BOYS' ROOM AT THE PRESS ASSOCIATION.

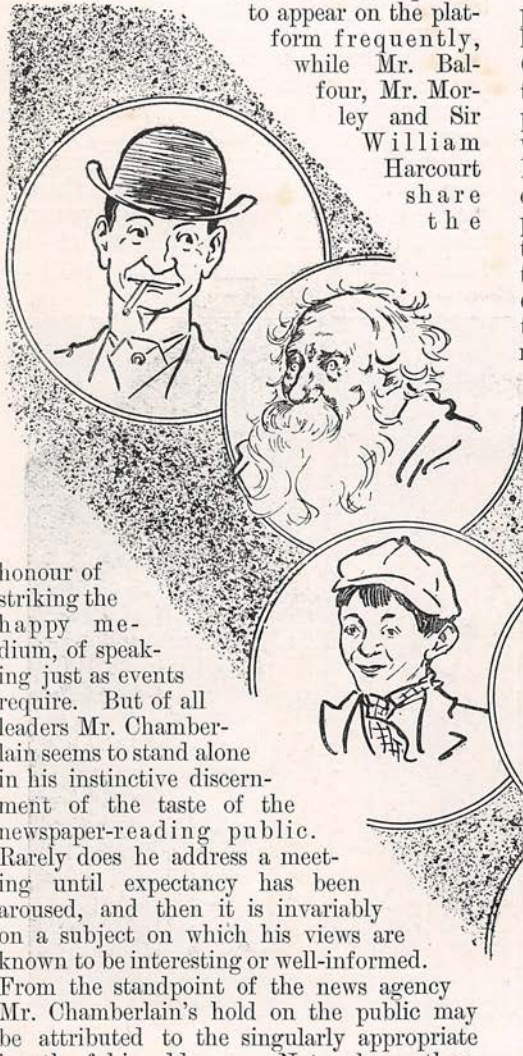
and for the use of Reuter's telegrams it pays yearly £8000.

To politicians a news agency reflects even better than the polls the position of statesmen in the public esteem.

Some facts given me by the manager of the Press Association are interesting in the light they throw on the relative importance of the leaders of the two great parties. Mr. Gladstone's retirement, it is well known, meant a loss to the Press Association of over £2000 a year. The veteran statesman's almost unique hold on the attention of the public (even now complaints are received if his speeches are not given fully), with the universality of the topics in which he was interested, gives the only explanation of the

should be a warning to ambitious politicians. At the outset of his meteoric career in Parliament no paper could be satisfied with less than a verbatim reproduction of his utterances. Almost the very first indication that he was losing his grip on the public interest may be found in the orders for the reports of his speeches. With its fingers ever on the public pulse a news agency becomes aware of two very palpable facts: the first is, a speech must not be too long; in the second place, a speaker must not be always addressing the public ear. With all his acuteness Lord Randolph ignored these facts, and as a result his speeches were condensed into summaries and gradually shorn of their former importance.

Mr. Chamberlain, with Mr. Asquith, stands at the opposite extreme. The latter is too effective a speaker to appear on the platform frequently, while Mr. Balfour, Mr. Morley and Sir William Harcourt share the



honour of striking the happy medium, of speaking just as events require. But of all leaders Mr. Chamberlain seems to stand alone in his instinctive discernment of the taste of the newspaper-reading public. Rarely does he address a meeting until expectancy has been aroused, and then it is invariably on a subject on which his views are known to be interesting or well-informed. From the standpoint of the news agency Mr. Chamberlain's hold on the public may be attributed to the singularly appropriate length of his addresses. Not only are these delivered at a pace so smooth and easy as to be a delight to the verbatim reporter, but they occupy just the right space of time, enabling the reportorial army to put the speeches on the wires early enough to suit the convenience of the sub-editors at the other end.

Measured by the space assigned to the speeches in the newspapers, the House of Lords appears to possess precious little interest for the British citizen. With Lord Salisbury, Lord Rosebery is the only member of that assembly who enjoys the distinction of a verbatim reproduction of his speeches. There is a steady demand too

for the weighty utterances of the Duke of Devonshire.

If any single individual could claim to possess supreme hold on public attention the honour must surely be paid to the Queen. Of her Majesty's movements, according to the experience of the Press Association, the public demands the amplest details. Never was this more so than at the present moment. For papers published in out-of-the-way districts of the United Kingdom the most piquant of parliamentary proceedings and the most gruesome of murders are condensed to find room for local matters. The only exception to this rule, strangely enough, is in the case of the usually dry records of Court movements.

By the way it may be news to the reader to learn that her Majesty is herself not unacquainted with the duties of the sub-editor. Every day a draft of the Court Circular (as the report is termed) is drawn out by the official who acts as the Court newsman, and before being issued is submitted to her Majesty, who sees that the record is such as she desires. Then it is wired from Windsor,



Osborne or Balmoral, as the case may be, to the London newspapers and agencies. The movements of the Prince and Princess of Wales seem to be equally popular.

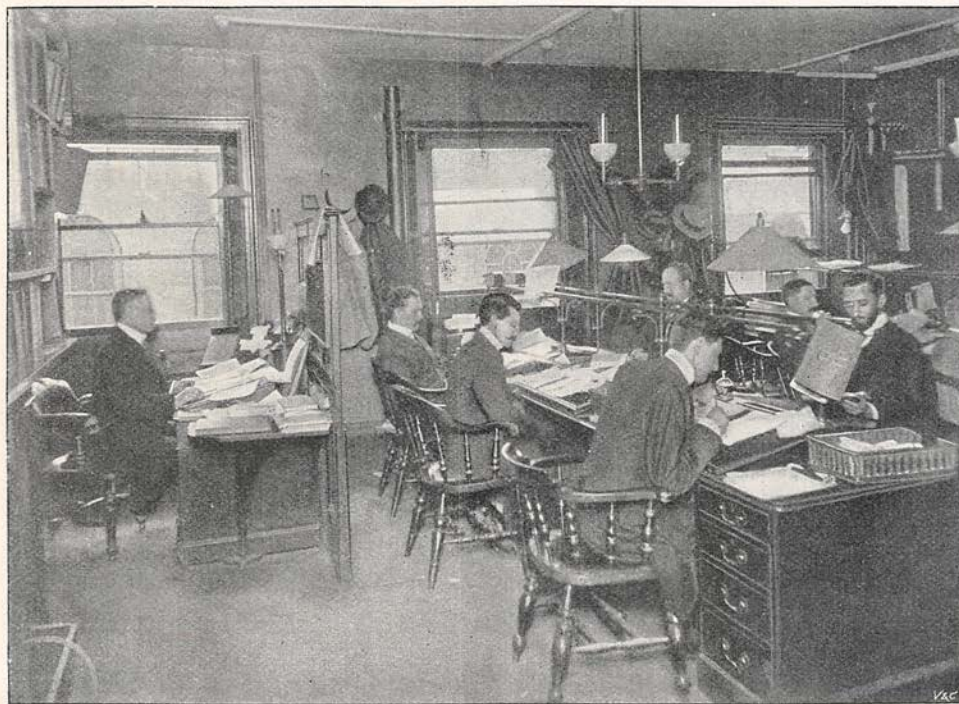
In endeavouring to cover the daily events of our vast metropolis the work of the Press

"CALLERS."

Association and the other agencies has called into being one of the most singularly interesting of the many strange occupations which flourish in the London streets. Between the hours of one and six every morning queer characters bring into Fleet Street from all corners of the metropolis first word of fires, murders and suicides. They have received the designation of "callers." Nearly all belong to the pitiable class of life-failures who may be seen wandering about the London streets at all hours of the night.

At the time of the "Ripper" murders of course their activity was at its highest; but

One Saturday night he brought news of a particularly ghastly suicide in Commercial Road, Whitechapel. First taking the news to the Sunday papers, he brought it last to the agencies, with whom the evening happened to be slack. That night—it being customary then to pay the caller his fee immediately—he was richer by many shillings. Three days after a thin, sharp-featured youth, hailing from Whitechapel, turned up and demanded "his share." "Arranging" the suicide with his younger friend, the caller had, for the use of the latter's name and address, agreed to pay him



From a photo by]

THE EDITORS' ROOM AT REUTER'S.

[A. B. Hughes.

their reckless abuse of the news-editor's credulity, the almost appalling equanimity with which they manufactured heart-rending outrages, caused the agencies to take a drastic step to preserve their reputation. The chief offender was an elderly man, who received five pounds for delivering very prompt information of a "Ripper" murder. On the strength of this reward he blossomed into a fully-fledged liner—something more indeed, since he smartened himself into a presentable appearance. Time came however when our friend failed to draw even a paltry half-crown for a trifling fire.

halves. It was his failure to fulfil the latter part of the obligation and his subsequent exposure that caused the agencies to abandon the system of immediate payment. Now callers have to wait for their money until a reporter has cabbied it into the district and investigated the report. During the first few months' operation of the present system some amusing discoveries were made. One instance may suffice. News reached us of a big blaze in Camden Town, the caller giving the name of the street and the locality of the spot. A reporter was despatched in a cab, followed later by several messengers to bring

back reports at intervals. The report was correct; an outburst had occurred in a mean-looking shop at a meaner street corner where the reporter found the *débris* of a burnt soap-box.

Even now impudent attempts are made to pass off false reports upon the news agencies. Very probably the most impudent on record was the one I had to deal with concerning the execution of the Muswell Hill murderers. At a quarter past seven two "callers" turned up at New Bridge Street. One was a bronzed, upright Irishman, who seemed to have served in the army; the other, a shifty-eyed, pockmarked, round shouldered individual, was unmistakably Cockney in type. According to their story they had, as warders, been guarding the condemned men since the previous evening, and concerning the latters' last night on earth they both possessed useful information, which they were willing to impart for a consideration. Of course the lie was almost painful in its obviousness; yet the fullest details were given of the condemned men's restlessness, of their calling out at intervals to know the time, of their want of appetite, and of their mental attitude at the moment that the *soi-disant* warders took their leave. "Milsom," I was told, "was repentant and calm." Fowler had confessed to "another murder, and was very low-spirited." These details of course I accepted with apparently bland credulity. It was when I cross-examined them that their resources proved unequal to the occasion. Just to lend an air of verisimilitude to the story the Irishman was tempted to say that Fowler in bidding him good-bye had kissed him on the cheek. Something more probable than this, I explained, must be given for two guineas—the fee they demanded. They were indignant at my refusal to pay. "To fink," I heard the Cockney observe to his companion as they stepped into New Bridge Street, "to fink that silly-faced snipe should a bin pumpin'."

In its marvellous collection of foreign intelligence Reuter's Agency has made a wonderful contribution to the development of the Penny Press. One fails indeed to imagine where our notions of foreign affairs or what the state of the financial markets would be if Reuter were not in existence. Here you get at the very heart of the world-wide organism which has its delicate fibres running into every corner of the earth. Previous to 1851 the British Press obtained next to nothing in the way of prompt and impartial accounts of what was going on

outside England. We were but a shade better off than the Continent at that period. It was in 1849 that the practical working of the telegraph between Aix-la-Chapelle and Berlin (the first section open to the public) suggested to Paul Julius Reuter, who was then connected with the electric telegraph system, that a new epoch was about to begin in correspondence. Forthwith he established in Aix his first centre for the collection and transmission of news. This he developed as various telegraph lines were opened. In 1851 was laid the cable between Calais and Dover, an event that induced Mr. Reuter to transfer his chief offices to London. Then he stationed agents in all parts of the world to supply him with news. In such a brief chat as this it is impossible to describe the difficulties which impeded the gigantic scheme at the outset; the suspicions and racial misgivings that had to be outlived; the climatic terrors the agents had to face; the distances that had to be destroyed, and the chronometers that had to be beaten. At that period of course cables were in their infancy, though the development of news-collecting has had not a little to do with the 152,000 miles of cables laid during the brief period of thirty years at a cost of about £40,000,000. Of no single country was the Press sufficient to render such an undertaking possible; so in France Reuter is affiliated to the Agence Havas; in Italy, to that of Stefani; in Austria, Correspondenz Bureau; in Germany, Wolff Bureau; in America, to the Associated Press. In the large cities of Europe Reuter is directly represented by its own agents—chiefly experienced journalists. In less-known and remoter parts the work is done by the local correspondents and the agencies to which Reuter is affiliated. Such an arrangement as this is indispensable if every corner of the globe is to be covered.

Of the achievements which must by means of this system be credited to Reuter the general public sees daily evidence in the expeditious manner in which he reflects the hourly temperature of the world's pulse. Such an event, for example, as the bombardment of Zanzibar is detailed in the London papers a few hours after its occurrence, despite the fact that the cables and wires must have been almost blocked by Government and official despatches. No sooner does a vessel like the *Drunmond Castle* founder, or any other sudden calamity pierce the public ear, than Reuter's own agent turns up on the spot in a few hours from the nearest centre

where he may be stationed. Within recent years it has organised a special service for detailing world-stirring occurrences of this description under the direction of Mr. Joseph Watson, who acted as "Reuter's Special" at the Moscow Coronation and similar ceremonies.

Here again, as in the case of the Press Association, a striking contrast is presented by a comparison of the present with the former condition of news supply.

In the busy little building in Old Jewry, the scene of Reuter's headquarters, the heart of the world never ceases to throb at any moment of the day. At all hours messages pour in reflecting the fluctuations of the financial markets abroad, the political situation in Africa and elsewhere, and other incidents which attend the world's revolution. In the retransmission of messages a delicately-balanced judgment is absolutely necessary. It is only natural, for example, that a correspondent at Hyderabad, say, absorbed in local matters, should suppose that a purely parochial matter possesses soul-stirring import for the rest of the world. How many thousands of pounds are wasted

every year in this way must be an interesting speculation, though it can be anything but agreeable to Reuter's. Once the messages are passed by the editorial staff the clockwork mechanism of the tape machine, with its typewritten wheels rotated by electricity, sends them to the London papers at the rate of forty words a minute. Afterwards they are "manifolded" and despatched by the small army of messengers to the various offices. One of the features of the editorial department is the room in which the French and German stenographers receive messages by telephone from various cities in Europe. All round the stenographer as he sits in front of the instrument the chamber is thickly padded, and another arrangement for subduing sound affixes a pair of telephone tubes to both his ears, after the fashion of a helmet. Most European news reaches England in this way in the French and German languages. But from America, Asia, Australia, Africa, in fact every other quarter of the globe, the messages come over in English. You could not find stronger evidence of the predominance of the Anglo-Saxon race.



*From a photo by]*

[A. B. Hughes.

A GROUP OF REUTER'S CYCLIST MESSENGERS,