

“ON THE SAFE SIDE”:

A VISIT TO THE STRONG-ROOMS OF CHANCERY LANE.

BY B. M. O'REILLY.

Illustrated from Photographs by the London Stereoscopic Company.

WHEN once I had quite recovered from the first inevitable feeling that I was in a prison I enjoyed my visit to the Chancery Lane Safe Deposit immensely. It is really one of the most interesting of London's sights—for such, indeed, it may be called. As I was escorted through by the courteous manager, Mr. Evans, I much wished that walls could speak

another contained thirteen sackfuls of postal orders during the trial of the missing word competition.

Although I have been rude enough to commence this article by comparing my sensations, when admitted to these precincts, to those experienced on one's first entrance into a prison, the impression was certainly not caused by want of beauty in my sur-



ON THE "SAFE" SIDE OF CHANCERY LANE.

—we all know they have ears—that I might learn the history of the vast treasures hidden in the safes and strong-rooms of which I was privileged to see the outside covering. One safe contains between £30,000,000 and £40,000,000 of value; £5,000,000 is quite a common deposit. Besides money value these safes contain interesting records—Shakespeare's folios were in one for years,

roundings, for the building is both artistic and beautiful. The entrance is of polished red granite, with handsome wrought-iron gates, and a portcullis in grille, which is lowered from above when required, protects the upper external vestibule. A staircase of marble and mosaic leads down to the lower external vestibule, which is a work of art in its decorations. The ceiling is of

enamelled iron, beautifully designed, and the walls are of varicoloured marbles, with a dado of grand antique. The entrance to the vestibule is carefully guarded, and no person is admitted without an order.

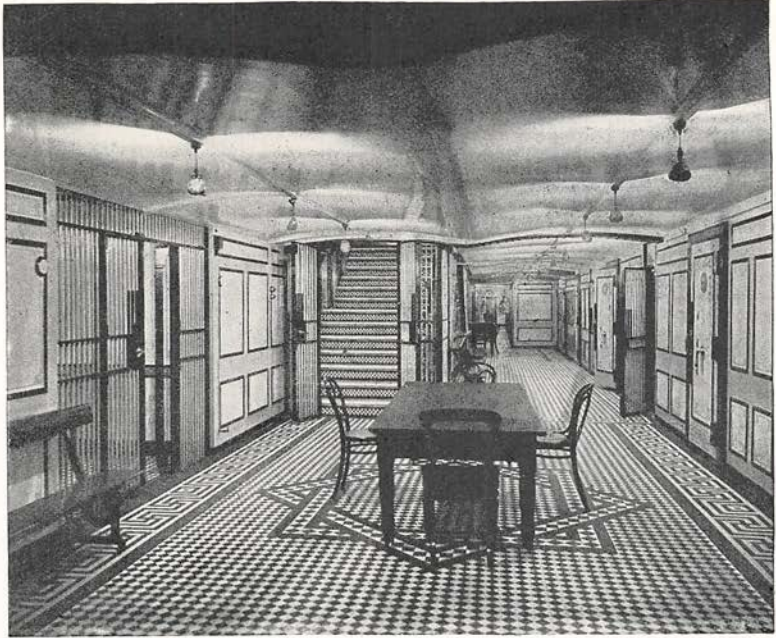
At the end of the upper external vestibule are comfortable waiting-rooms stocked with newspapers, books, and writing materials—one for ladies, one for gentlemen, and another promiscuously labelled "general," in the language of the railway companies.

Having passed through the inner gates of the lobby, I was escorted to the "safe" vestibule, where the various strong-rooms occupy three sides of the area, which is

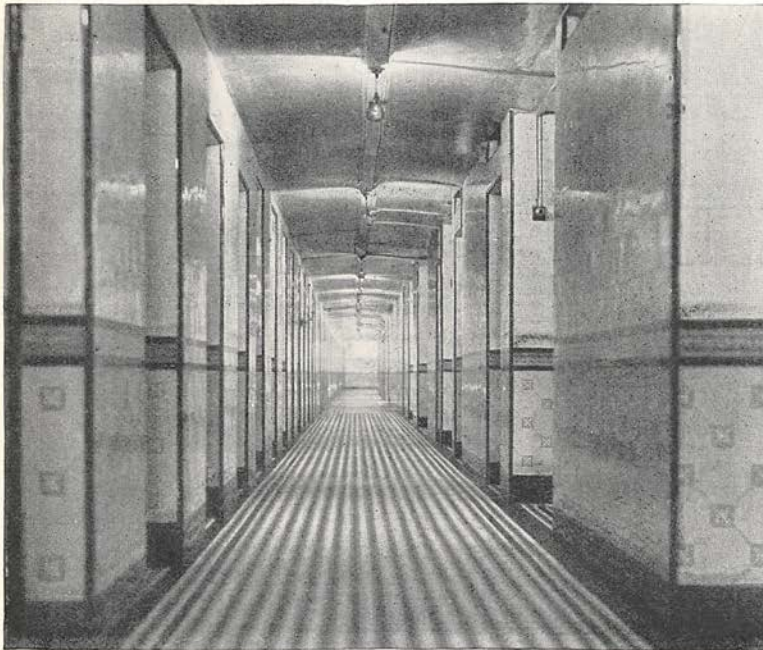
tastefully decorated with bright tiles. On the right-hand side is a strong-room for the deposit of plate, which is cared for at a trifling cost for travellers who wish to leave it there when away from town.

The strong-rooms proper for documents and valuables form the most interesting portion of the Safe Deposit. These rooms weigh 500 tons and have doors which weigh two tons each. They are divided into about 500 separate iron safes, which are arranged in tiers called "integers." The locks of these "integers" are so arranged that the key of the lessee as well as that of the custodian is required before an opening can be effected.

Each "integer"



THE "SAFE" VESTIBULE.



CORRIDOR BETWEEN STRONG-ROOMS.

is fitted with a tin box, which can be taken out by the renter and examined at his leisure. Small rooms are provided for that purpose, where renters can go over their belongings shielded from prying eyes. All the strong-rooms are built on iron columns in the vaults beneath the building, and are completely isolated from external walls, so that armed patrols can walk round, over, and under them, and there is an arrangement of mirrors which shows

the surroundings from every side, so that a watchman cannot be surprised even should a burglar effect an entrance. On each door of the strong-room there is a clock-



"INTEGERS" OR LOCKERS INSIDE A STRONG-ROOM.

work arrangement by which the door can only be opened at a given hour once it is locked. At a particular hour of the evening the doors are locked by the manager, and no



"TO THE STRONG-ROOMS."

person can open them until the hour on the following day for which the clockwork locks are set, and on Saturday they are set so that the doors cannot be opened until Monday morning. No key can open them until the appointed hour. The armour-plating of the strong-rooms consists of iron and steel intersected plates, and a steel building encloses all the strong-rooms.

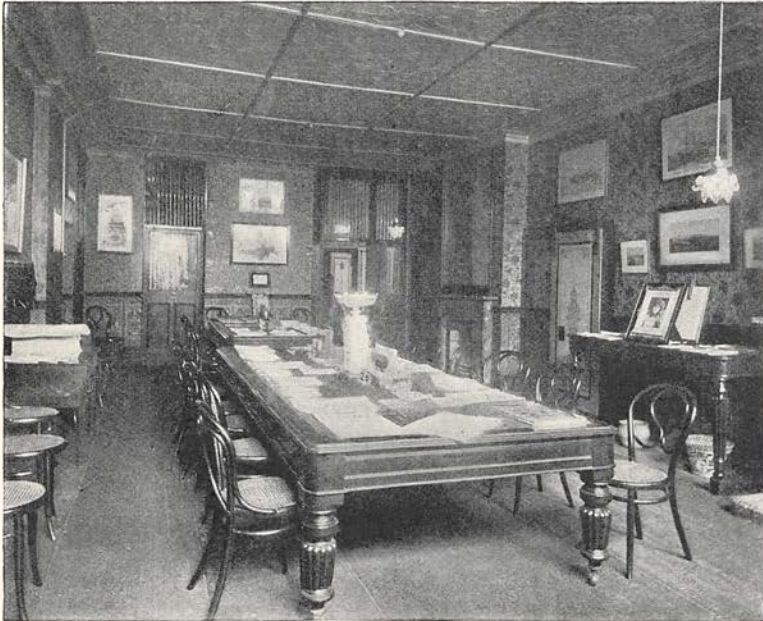
The Deposit is lighted by electricity, with gas in reserve. Every modern improvement has been utilised, and everything done regardless of expense. It is fireproof as well as proof against burglars. When the manager and staff leave for the night the building is handed over to an armed patrol.

Some of the safe doors differ from the rest, having been put up by the desire of the owners. One of these is the famous Chubb's, which won a gold medal at the Edinburgh Exhibition—it cost its owner £2,500. The day I was there a service of gold plate was being taken out by the owner, for the night, as the Prince of Wales was to dine with him that evening. Ladies who have valuable

jewels leave them there and call for them when they want to wear them. Keys can also be registered at the Safe Deposit for the small sum of one shilling a year, and if the subscriber loses his keys they will be returned in twenty-four hours or one pound paid over to replace them.

The charges for renting safes are very moderate and vary from £1 to £100 a year. Some of the large safes could hold the furniture of a house. Every comfort is provided for the anxious souls who seek the security of these strong-rooms for their treasures, and their letters are received and forwarded to any given address.

It seems odd to those whom Fortune has not afflicted with similar riches that there should be quite a number of people whose only permanent address in London is "The Chancery Lane Safe Deposit," but as one looks around at the extremely comfortable and even luxurious arrangements made for the convenience of the institution's patrons, one feels that it is certainly a very "safe" sort of club to keep as a *pied-à-terre* in town!



SITTING-ROOM FOR THE USE OF DEPOSITORS.