

XLVIII.

TELEGRAPH HEADQUARTERS, ETC.

PROFESSOR MORSE. — INVENTION OF THE TELEGRAPH. — MEN SLOW TO BELIEVE. — GOVERNMENT AID. — TELEGRAPH COMPANIES. — AMERICAN TELEGRAPH COMPANY. — NEW MODE OF WRITING. — SYSTEM OF BUSINESS. — A DOMESTIC CONVENIENCE. — EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN.

PROFESSOR MORSE,

THE inventor of the telegraph, can be found daily at the headquarters of this great system, which is located on Broadway. He is the son of a New England clergyman, Dr. Morse, of Charlestown. His father made his pulpit a fortress in the dark and trying times which beset his faith. He was remarkable for his courage and daring in all that he considered right. A village physician in Watertown, Mass., had introduced vaccine. The excited people insisted that he was about to turn people into cattle, by taking the virus out of a cow and putting it into a man. The practice of the doctor fell away. He dared not go out of his house nights, and his life was in danger. Dr. Morse espoused the theory of vaccination, protected the doctor, and gave the arm of his son to be operated on to remove the popular terror. These lessons of heroism and daring were not lost on the children.

INVENTION OF THE TELEGRAPH.

In the year 1832 Professor Morse sailed from Havana in a packet ship, bound for New York. Quite a number of eminent men were on board. The voyage was long and tedious. One evening a physician of Boston detailed some marvellous discoveries that had been made in connection with electricity. When the doctor closed his statement, Professor Morse quietly remarked, "If these statements are true, and such discoveries have really been made, then I can send a message by lightning round the world." He retired to his state-room, and from that time seemed lost to all things around him till he reached his native shore. He had been absent from his family and his native land three years. His family and friends were on the pier to receive him. He accepted their warm and cordial greetings with marked indifference. He made no inquiries, and seemed morose and insensible. He was big with a great discovery that was to change the face of the world. All his feelings and powers were absorbed in this. Till the telegraph was a reality, and established beyond dispute, he seemed not to walk among men. This great invention was born on the wide ocean, whose waters touch all climes and bind all nations in amity. It seemed to scorn the limits of state or nation.

MEN SLOW TO BELIEVE.

The public were slow to accept the great discovery. The monks persecuted Galileo, and refused to look through his telescope lest they should believe. Harvey

demonstrated the circulation of blood, and lost his practice for his pains. The man who cut the first types with his penknife out of wood, and exhibited the first printed page to the startled authorities, was nearly hung for being in league with the devil. Jenner fled from his indignant countrymen because he was successful in controlling the small pox. Gangs of men, grinning their incredulity, greeted Fulton with derision as he started his first steamboat from New York. Morse could expect no better fate. The invention of the telegraph was not perfect at the start. Difficulties were to be overcome, and months of patient trial needed, to make it a success. Facing all opposition, and breasting all scorn, the inventor pursued his way for a time almost alone. The attempt to get up a company to make telegraphing a practical success was met by ridicule and derision. Professor Morse went from office to office, and from man to man, but nobody would touch his scheme. Jacob Little was then the great bear of Wall Street. Being one of the shrewdest financiers, and a man of remarkable forecast, he was urged to embark in the new enterprise. After it became established, Mr. Little said, "At one time I might have controlled all the telegraph lines in the land." But when the proposal was made to him, he shook his head, and said, "I will give Professor Morse a hundred dollars to help him along, but not one dollar for investment." A few personal friends were willing to try their luck, but they were poor in purse, and without influence. But one man in the land except Professor Morse grasped the future of this great discovery. Mr. Butterfield, of western New York, so famous in

connection with express companies, and who ran the great stage lines west, grasped, with his whole soul, the inventor and his cause. He gave his money and his time to demonstrate the practicability of the discovery. Men laughed at his folly, and derided him for his gullibility. He defied his friends, and told them that the time would come when the telegraph would supersede the mail. Things went roughly and savagely enough for a long time. Poverty, like an armed man, came upon the inventor, and all associated with him. They dressed meanly and poorly, wore rough shoes, and had a hard battle to keep the wolf from the door and hold on to the great discovery.

GOVERNMENT AID.

That an experimental line might be run between Baltimore and Washington, the government made a very discreet proposition. If the thing was a success, and the lines could really pass a message from Baltimore and back, a certain sum should be paid the inventor; but if the experiment failed, the economical government was to pay nothing. It must be no bogus despatch, but a real one, sent to the satisfaction of the government. The message was sent, and the answer returned. John C. Spencer was then at the head of the Treasury Department. He was as intelligent as men averaged at that time. Yet so ignorant was he of telegraphing, and so little did he understand the system, that he asked Mr. Butterfield, when the subject was canvassed, how large a bundle could be sent over the wires. He wanted to know if the United States mail could not be sent in the same way. Nor were

the scientific men much more advanced. Not one of them knew that the earth formed the most perfect circuit. The work was delayed a long time from the supposed necessity of a canal from Washington to Baltimore to complete the circuit. But all troubles came to an end, and the telegraph took its place among the most beneficent discoveries of the world. The inventor placed himself high among the benefactors of his race. He found himself suddenly raised to affluence, as were all his friends who joined him in the dark day, and stood by him through his trials. The stock could not be presented so fast as men subscribed for it. Companies multiplied, and a network of wires spread under the whole heavens, and ran in every direction over the land and under the sea.

TELEGRAPH COMPANIES.

For a time everybody seemed rushing into the business. Three great lines, however, embraced the telegraphing. Morse's company took the lead; House's line printed the words; but Baine's was the most curious of all. It took down the message, and by a chemical process obliterated part of the words, and in an instant changed the characters. The three companies interfered with each other, underbid, and created a rivalry, by which the public were badly served, and the companies kept very poor. A consolidation was called for, and a company was formed, known as the Six Nations Telegraph Company, and so named after the Six Indian Nations. The business was divided between the parties composing the new organization. To the American Telegraph Company was assigned

the seaboard from Halifax to New Orleans, with its headquarters at New York, and branches running to Canada. The consolidation introduced a new era into the business. It called into the service of the lines the ablest talent. It produced harmony and concord. The public were better served, and the tariff of prices reduced rather than raised. Telegraphing became a necessity. Its boon was brought to every man's door.

AMERICAN TELEGRAPH COMPANY (WESTERN UNION).

The headquarters of this company are on Broadway, corner of Liberty Street. It has a capital of over two millions of dollars, employs over twenty thousand miles of wire, has eight hundred offices, and the names of two thousand on its pay-roll. Its annual expenses are over half a million of dollars a year. The business demands men of talent, intelligence, quickness, and parts. These men cannot be had without being paid for. For messages alone thirty thousand dollars are paid annually. The same sum is paid for the mere cups and batteries of telegraphing. The headquarters smack of mystery. Everything is systematized, and order and quiet rule. The endless click of a hundred instruments sounds like a distant cotton factory. All the instruments—Morse's, House's, and Baine's—are used.

NEW MODE OF WRITING.

The old style of taking down the message and then writing it out, is abandoned. The operators understand the click of the machine, as well as they do the utterance of a man. As an accurate reporter takes

down the speech of the orator as he speaks, so the message is written down as it comes clicking over the wires. The ear is more accurate than the eye, and fewer mistakes are made in the new system than in the old one of words or symbols. So written down, the message is ready for immediate distribution. Bank checks are not recorded with more accuracy. All messages are numbered, together with the name of the party who sent, the name of the party who receives, and the date. They are important in court trials, and become a material part of legal evidence.

SYSTEM OF BUSINESS.

To be a success, telegraphing must be run as systematic as railroads. The cupola of the building is full of mystery. Two thousand cups or cells, the complication of the wires, the network of lines crossing and recrossing each other, seem all confusion. But to the master hand that controls all this it is simplicity itself. As in a station there are tracks for incoming trains and tracks for outgoing trains, so is it with messages. There are special wires assigned to special business. The line for the Brokers' Board has no other business sent over it. Express-men, railroad companies, the press, the police, and the markets have each a wire. One line is devoted to Philadelphia, another to Boston. That messages may not be interrupted, they are sent by one instrument over one line and returned by another. With wonderful accuracy message follows message with the speed of lightning. A curious instrument is used in the American Company's office, which is called a *telegraph*

switch, operating somewhat like a switch on a railway track. With it a message can be switched off at any moment, at any point, to let an incoming despatch have the track.

A DOMESTIC CONVENIENCE.

It was the purpose of the far-seeing men who systematized telegraphing to make it a common necessity — like Croton water, the express, and the post office; to bring the tariff of prices within every man's means; to bring a wire to every man's door, that the whole community might buy, sell, and travel by electricity. The American Company cover the whole country — from Halifax to New Orleans, from Sandy Hook to Montreal — with a network of vibrating wires. But the local and domestic use of the telegraph is scarcely less important. The company have forty offices in this city. Every person, within a circuit of twenty miles, can, if he will, be connected with headquarters. If a lady is sick, she telegraphs her husband to come home and bring the doctor. If a man of business concludes to go to California, or to Europe, he telegraphs for his carpet-bag to meet him at the steamer at noon. A merchant invites a friend to dine with him, and he informs his wife of the fact by lightning. Contracts are made, money paid, the payment of checks stopped, consultations held, and millions of stocks change hands, through the subtle agency of the wire. The General Superintendent of Police sits in his office and converses with his captains thirty miles away. Some men have special wires assigned to them, connecting their home and store.

EMPLOYMENT FOR WOMEN.

In the early history of telegraphing, it was discovered that it was a work peculiarly adapted to women. They were invited to enter the field. Rooms were provided for their instruction, and if they were worthy of it, employment and good pay secured. The room in the central office in which women are instructed in the art is very handsome, well furnished, airy, and cheerful. The lady superintendent, who has this department in charge, has been many years in the employ of the company, and draws the handsome salary of one thousand dollars a year. On the line of railroads, at the stations, and in small country towns, women are employed. They have a liberal salary, and can do their sewing, pursue their studies, and yet perform all the duties of the office. They make the best operators. They are more reliable than men, more trustful and accurate; their ear is quick, their fingers ready. None but first-class women are employed. Their neat and tasteful dress, and the order in which they keep their office, make their rooms very attractive. Their influence is felt all along the lines. Men are more attentive and civil in their duties where lady operators are employed.

LIX.

GEORGE LAW.

THIS gentleman was born near Cambridge, Washington County. He came to New York a penniless lad, and reached mature life before he made his mark on the city. He obtained his start financially by his contract to build the High Bridge for the Croton Aqueduct. He obtained several other contracts equally profitable, and then became a speculator in Wall Street. His connection with the ferries and railroads, especially Harlem, Eighth Avenue, and city roads, enabled him to amass a colossal fortune.

Mr. Law resides in a fashionable residence on Fifth Avenue. He is a huge man in size, ponderous as well as tall, with an immense face and head, which seems swollen, it is so huge. His features are coarse, and one, from his general expression, would judge him to be a hard man to deal with. Like most men who started poor, Mr. Law has very little sympathy with the masses. He is probably as unpopular a man as can be found in New York. He has the control of several railroads and ferries, and he runs them to suit his own pleasure. The public are nothing to him but contributors to his fortune. If he wants a ferry, and can get it in no other way, he will start an opposition line, reduce the fare,