

HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

No. XLIV.—JANUARY, 1854.—VOL. VIII.

A WORD OF APOLOGY.

FOR the first time since the establishment of HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE, the Publishers find it necessary to apologize for delay in its delivery, and for deficiencies in its mechanical execution. The last sheet of the present number, illustrated with its usual pictorial embellishments, had just been sent to the press on Saturday, the 10th of December, when a fire broke out which not only consumed the printed sheets, stereotype plates, wood-cuts, and copy of the Magazine, but, in a few hours, laid their entire establishment in ruins. The fire originated, strangely enough, in the excessive carefulness of a plumber, who had occasion to make some repairs of water-pipes in the press-room. Having lighted his lamp from a gas-burner, and not wishing to throw the paper which he had used upon the floor for fear of fire, he looked about for the means of extinguishing it; and seeing what he supposed to be a pan of water in a small room adjoining, devoted to cleaning the press rollers, he thrust the lighted paper into it. The pan, however, contained *Camphene*, used in the cleansing process, which at once took fire, and the flames spread with a rapidity, and blazed with a fury, which rendered it impossible to check them. The proprietors feel that they have abundant cause for gratitude to God that, among the many hundreds of persons, male and female, employed at the moment in various parts of their establishment, not a single life was lost, and only one person sustained any serious injury. All the buildings occupied in the various departments of their business, the machinery, and their entire stock of books, valued in the aggregate at over a million of dollars, were entirely consumed. Their stereotype plates, stored in vaults under the street, were saved. But the destruction of their presses, and all the other mechanical facilities which have enabled them hitherto to issue the Magazine in all parts of the United States on the first day of every month, and with satisfactory elegance of style, has compelled them to the unwelcome task of apologizing for defects, unavoidable under these circumstances, in the present number.

It would be affectation in the Publishers to pretend any degree of insensibility to this misfortune. The pecuniary loss is very heavy; but

this can be repaired by the same means which rendered it possible. Some six hundred persons, having parents, brothers and sisters, or wives and children, dependent on their labor, have been for a time thrown out of employment, though this suspension of their resources will be but temporary. The large circle of booksellers and book-agents scattered throughout the United States, who, to a greater or less extent, have looked to this establishment for their books, will find that supply cut off; but the lapse of a few weeks will, it is hoped, remove this check on their business pursuits. All these losses, serious as they are, can be repaired, and may, therefore, be contemplated with a courage made cheerful even by the sense of energy and vigor which the effort to repair them calls forth. But the establishment itself, with its large collection of machinery, its complete arrangements for applying the perfected methods of art in all its branches to the production of books, and its vast accumulation of printed volumes, which they had come insensibly to regard as at once the result and the monument of their united labors in this wide field of public usefulness and of private enterprise, has been swept by the blaze of an hour from the face of the earth. This loss is one which time can not repair, for it is a loss of time itself. The labor and energy which would have contributed to its enlargement, must now be devoted to replacing it. The task is one not wholly pleasant; but as the proprietors of the establishment have not learned from the lessons of life to indulge largely in the luxury of unavailing complaint, they are inclined to regard it with any feeling but one of dismay.

The Establishment of Harper and Brothers, it is believed, was the largest of its kind in the world—that of Brockhaus, in Leipsic, ranking next. It differed from that and from all others in the fact that it combined all the departments of labor necessary for the production of books in their perfected form. Upon the Continent of Europe books are mainly sold in sheets, furnished simply with paper covers; and in England the binding of books is carried on as a distinct business, having no connection with their printing. The Establishment embraced

a Bindery as well as Printing Offices, arranged upon a scale commensurate with their general business. They occupied nine five-story buildings, five upon Cliff, and four upon Pearl Street, and covering the entire space between those avenues. These buildings were devoted to the various branches of their business—to typesetting, stereotyping, and electrotyping; to press-work, drying, folding, stitching, and binding; to storing the vast quantities of books which constantly accumulated, and to the various transactions involved in their sale and delivery.

This is scarcely the place for any very minute account of the processes and results of their business; and yet the readers of the Magazine may be interested in a brief statement of the leading facts connected with it.

The house was established by the two senior partners, JAMES and JOHN HARPER, who opened a small book and job printing-office in Dover Street, in 1817. Their first employer in book printing was Mr. Evert Duyekinck, a leading publisher of that day, to whose order, on the 5th of August, they delivered two thousand copies of Seneca's *Morals*; on the 3d of December, twenty-five hundred copies of Mair's *Introduction to Latin*; and on the 7th of April, 1818, five hundred copies of Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*. These were the first books they printed. In 1823, the third brother, JOSEPH WESLEY HARPER, became a partner in the Establishment, and in 1826, the fourth, FLETCHER HARPER, entered as a member of the firm. At that time their printing-office had become the largest in the city, though it employed but fifty persons, and did all its work on ten hand presses. In 1825 the house removed to Cliff Street, where they purchased two buildings, numbers 81 and 82, and entered more largely upon the publication of books on their own account. In 1830 they began to stereotype their works, and from that time forward they have printed mostly from stereotype plates, which were stored away in fire-proof vaults for subsequent use, and which, in the course of their business, had accumulated to the value of half a million of dollars. The public demand for books has increased faster even than the facilities for supplying it. The improvements in machinery, of which they have endeavored to avail themselves to the utmost, enabled them to multiply copies of their books to an almost incredible extent; and yet they were constantly under the necessity of enlarging their limits, and adding to their facilities for the supply of the reading public. At the time of the destruction of their Establishment they kept in constant operation *thirty-three* Adams power-presses, of the largest and best description, *twelve* of which were employed, sometimes by night as well as by day,

upon the Magazine—and *four* new ones had just been put up for the new monthly series of Harper's *Story Books*, of which *twenty thousand* copies had already been printed. Each of these presses averaged about six thousand impressions, or 190,000 16mo pages, a day. Sixteen of the presses had been built expressly for working wood-cuts; giving employment to ten persons considered the best workmen in the country, and occupied exclusively in making ready and elaborating the illustrated forms of the Magazine and other pictorial publications. The progress made during the last thirty years in this department of the business may be inferred from the fact, that when the senior partner of the house was learning the trade, and working at press, it took two men to do *one tenth* part of the work which a single power-press, fed by a boy or girl, now performs; and in 1837 the Harpers had but twenty-four hand-presses, employing thirty persons, each press doing one seventh of the work performed by each of their thirty-three Adams presses, managed by seventy persons. At the time of the destruction of their Establishment, the second and third stories of three buildings on Pearl Street were used as press-rooms.

The composing-rooms bore no proportion to the rest of the establishment, since a portion of the type-setting for their publications was done by stereotypers in various parts of the city, and a large number of their presses were occupied, moreover, in reprinting fresh editions of old works from stereotype plates. Thus, while the number of new volumes issued yearly did not average more than one hundred and twenty, there were over a thousand old ones reprinted for new editions constantly required by the public. The number of compositors employed was about forty, in two departments, and under two foremen, one of whom (who has been in their employ, man and boy, for over thirty-two years) superintended the most difficult work, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, books of science, &c., and the other the reprints and plainer matter.

Their stereotyping-rooms employed about twenty men, who made from twenty-five to thirty casts a day, averaging about one hundred and twenty pages. A new department had recently been organized for applying the newly-discovered process of electrotyping, and the production of casts of all the engravings and most of their valuable books. The object of this process is to procure a stereotype plate of *copper*, instead of the composition usually employed for that purpose, as it is much more durable, and secures a much more perfect and delicate impression. It is effected by first taking a wax mould from the face of the page, and immersing it in a solution of copper subjected to

the action of an electric battery. In the course of about twelve hours a thin coating of the copper is deposited in the mould, and this being fixed upon a metallic plate, is used upon the press like an ordinary stereotype plate. This department had been organized but about six months.

The bindery was very extensive, employing over two hundred and fifty persons, one hundred and fifty of whom were females, occupied in folding and stitching the sheets. Exclusive of the Magazine, of which not far from 130,000 copies were folded, stitched, and bound each month, they had daily on hand and in process of binding over twelve thousand volumes of books. The bindery occupied four buildings on Cliff Street and the central parts of four on Pearl. One branch of it was devoted to the manufacture of the marbled and stained paper required—a process very simple in itself, and depending for its success mainly upon an accurate knowledge of the chemical action of various gums employed with various water colors, and on the taste and dexterity of the workmen. Among the articles destroyed were the brass stamps for lettering and the side plates for stamping, prepared for more than a thousand different books. Perhaps some idea of the extent of the operations in the bindery may be inferred from the fact that more than a hundred tons of pasteboard, a thousand pieces of yard-wide muslin, and forty thousand sheep-skins were used every year: the latter principally in binding school-books and dictionaries.

It would be impossible to form any thing like an accurate estimate of the number of volumes issued by Harper and Brothers since the foundation of their Establishment. Their extensive arrangements for the manufacture and publication of books have enabled them to sell them at prices which have given them access to the largest possible market, and no inconsiderable proportion of the book trade of the United States has thus been supplied by their house. Among the books destroyed was a new and complete catalogue of their current publications—from a few sheets of which, aided by previous catalogues, the following summary statement has been made up:

	Works.	Vols.	Orig.	Rep.
History and Biography . . .	329	585	158	171
Travel and Adventure . . .	130	187	73	57
Theology and Religion . . .	120	167	68	52
Educational	156	165	124	32
Art, Science, Medicine . . .	96	110	46	50
Dictionaries and Gazetteers . .	28	34	23	5
General Literature	690	780	230	460
Total	1549	2028	722	827

Although some of the above works are necessarily repeated in classification, the aggregate statement gives not far from the actual number of works on hand. They embrace vol-

umes of all sizes, and were issued in editions varying from five hundred to fifty thousand copies each.

But enough of these details. They have been given rather as a memorandum of what has been lost, than as a boasting record of what had been achieved. The Establishment now in ruins had been built up by the steady labors of thirty years: its extensive machinery and its large accumulations of books were reduced to ashes in half a day. The smallest part of the fruit of its activity, however, was that which was stored within its walls. Millions of volumes of the best books of all ages have gone forth from its doors into every corner of our extended country, and have become part of the intellectual life and activity of our people. They have followed the pioneer into the remotest regions which his hardy enterprise has invaded, and have cheered his darkest and his loneliest hours. They are to be found upon the student's desk, on the farmer's and the mechanic's table, in the private, the social, and the school library, from one end of the Union to the other. They have imparted useful knowledge to millions of our countrymen, and have done something to render them more intelligent, more energetic, and more virtuous than those of lands less favored with free access to books, and with the means of intellectual and of moral culture. While such fruits of their labor remain—indestructible in their nature, and immeasurable in the good they carry with them—the proprietors feel that it would be unmanly to complain of the comparatively slight calamity by which their exertions have for a time been checked.

The Publishers would do injustice to their own feelings if they were to close this unwonted notice of their personal affairs, without acknowledging the cordial expressions of kindness and sympathy which have reached them, through public and private channels, from every section of the country. They prize them, not merely or mainly for the aid they proffer in the re-establishment of their business—though for this purpose, if they were needed, they would be invaluable—but as gratifying indications of the extent to which their labors have won favor from the community, by contributing to the public instruction and entertainment. To the Press especially they beg leave to return their acknowledgments for its hearty and unanimous declarations of sympathy in their misfortune. Feeling that, so far as the public is concerned, its effects will be but temporary, and that its weight upon themselves is substantially lightened by the evidences of kindly feeling which it has thus called forth, they will address themselves, with confident courage and increased assiduity, to the augmented labors which it has devolved upon them.