

# INTERIOR OF AN AMERICAN TELE- GRAPH STATION.

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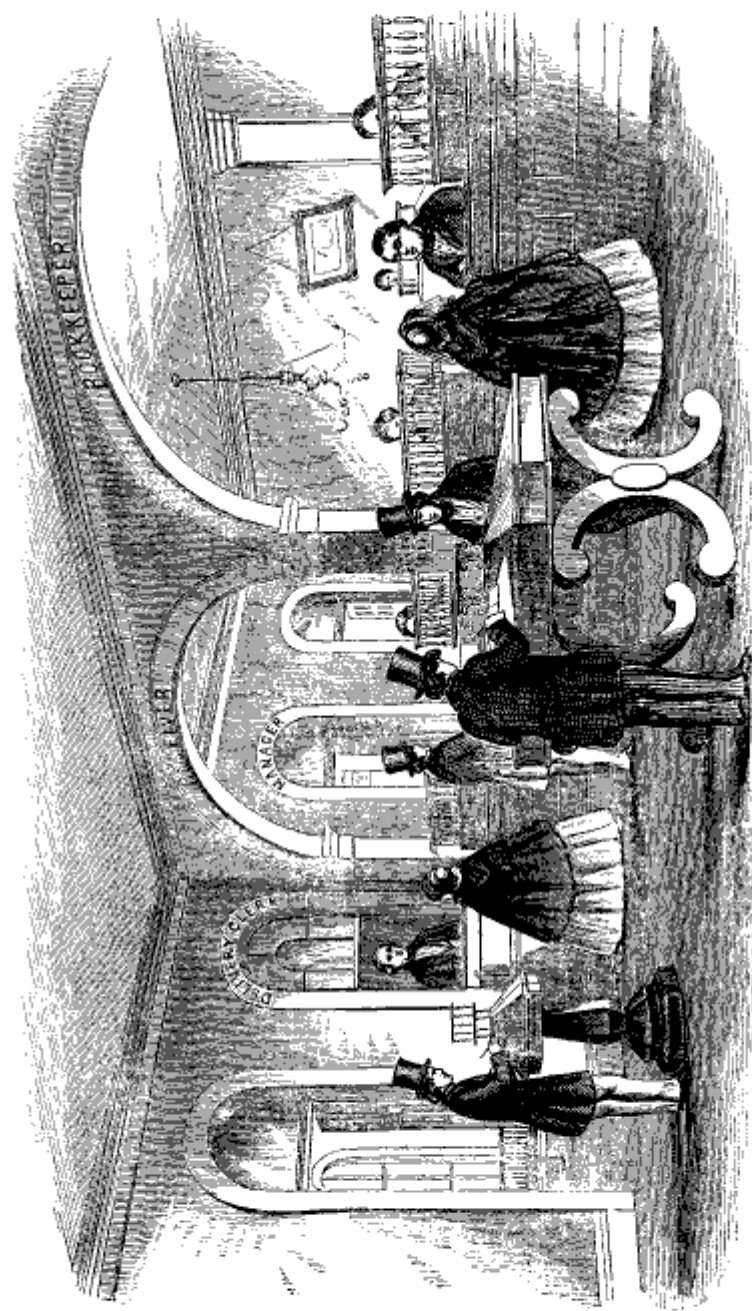
## CHAPTER XXXIII.

Receiving Department of a Telegraph Station—The Operating or Manipulating Department—Receiving Dispatches by Sound—Incidents of the Station—Execution of an Indian Respited by Telegraph.

### RECEIVING DEPARTMENT OF A TELEGRAPH STATION.

In the present chapter I will explain the routine of the interior of a telegraph station on the American lines. The public reception rooms are sometimes on the lower floor, so that entrance may be direct from the street. At many of the offices, it is in the second story. Figure 1 represents the public reception room in the Cincinnati Station. Behind the counter are seen the receiving clerks; in front is the public department. At convenient places are arranged tables or stands on which are placed pencils and blanks to be used in writing dispatches to be transmitted. A copy of these blanks will be found at the end of this chapter, marked A. It is not necessary to write the dispatch with ink, and in fact it is the universal practice to use the ordinary lead pencil; the paper used, is generally soft and receives the lead so that the writing can be easily read. When the dispatch is handed to the receiver at the counter, the words are counted and endorsed on its margin. No regard is given to the signature, and the receiver may know it to be fictitious, yet he promptly receives the dispatch and the money for its transmission. The blank form A has been adopted recently on several of the American lines, but it is not compulsory to use them. In short, messages are received and sent from any one offering, whether upon the company's blanks or upon any other kind of paper.

Fig. 1.



The general reception room represented in the figure, was arranged by Mr. Charles Davenport, who, for many years, has been energetically engaged in that most difficult department, discharging his trust with more than ordinary skill. There is no part of the telegraph service more tedious and perplexing than the administration of the reception department. Thousands of people send their dispatches hundreds of miles, and know not but what they go and their answers come the same instant. Far in the West, I have known persons to offer dispatches for the extreme East, some twelve or fifteen hundred miles distant, passing over the lines of some half a dozen companies, and expect the answer while they are waiting at the counter. It becomes the duty to explain to the anxious and uninformed public the cause of the delay of a dispatch. The answer is generally anxiously expected, because it may refer to some speculation, the death of a friend or relative, or of something of great import to the parties. The mysterious workings of the telegraph are but little known to the public, and the most respectful tone has to be observed, by the receiver, in his explanations. The service of the receiver is an art, and one that requires more than ordinary powers, manners and amiability of disposition to discharge.

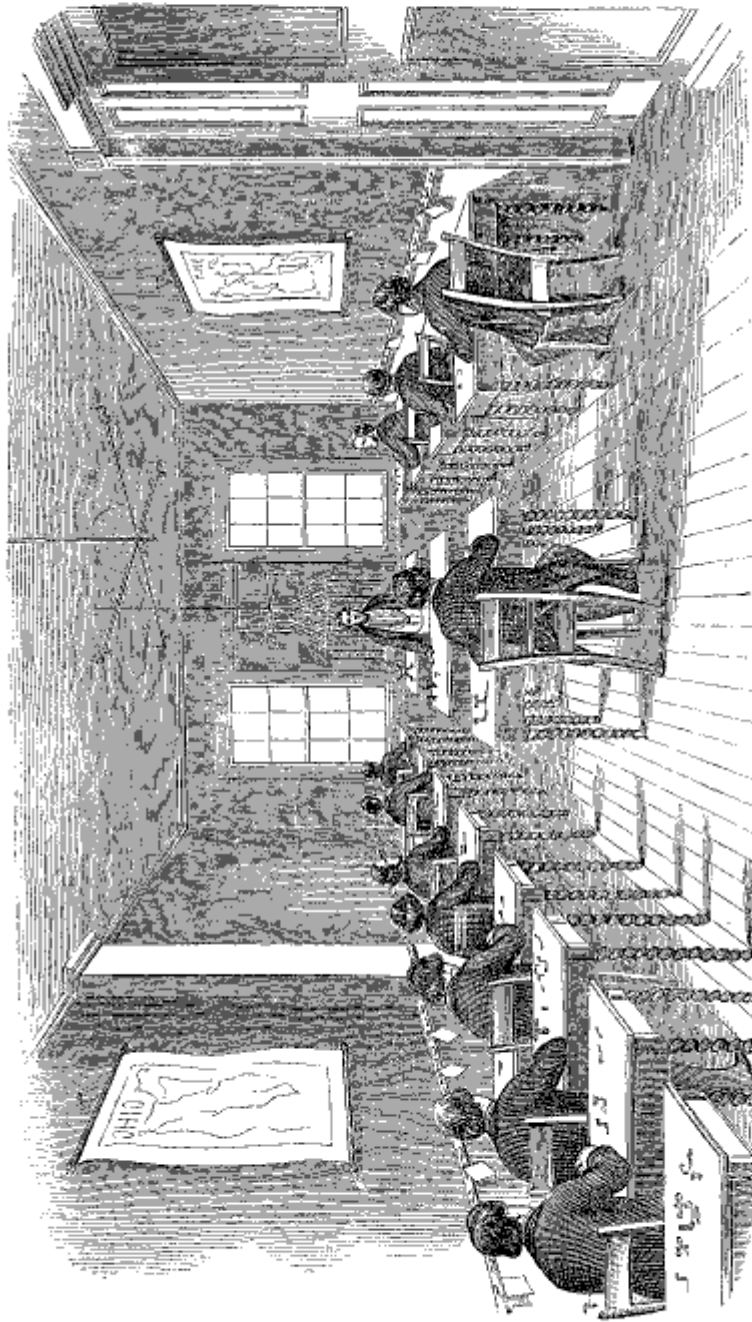
I have not deemed it necessary to embrace in this work the fiscal details of the telegraph, nor is it easy for the European reader to comprehend the celerity and economy practically observed on the American lines. In the city of New York I have estimated the number of dispatches transmitted daily at 2,430, or for the year about 739,000. But this is in the great metropolis. At Cincinnati, a city in the far West, where a little more than a half century in the past, there were but a few log huts to be seen, now the telegraph largely enters into the commercial affairs of the public, and through that station an average of about 950 dispatches pass daily, or about 385,000 per annum. To execute this great amount of business there are employed 12 operators, 2 book-keepers, 2 receiving clerks, and 14 messengers.

To the left of the public room, in fig. 1, is the messenger or delivery department. To the left of the receiving space is the cashier's room. Such is the arrangement of the reception department of the Cincinnati office, of the great Western Union Range of telegraph lines.

#### THE OPERATING DEPARTMENT.

The operating department is in the story above the receiving room. A representation will be seen in fig. 2. In this station

Fig. 2.



the sounding apparatuses are wholly used. No recording mechanism is there employed. The register, and the moving ribbon paper are no more to be seen in that station. The engraving gives a very correct idea of the interior of the manipulating department. The operator sits at a small table, on which is the manipulating key, the magnet, and the sounder.

These three pieces of mechanism constitute the whole of the telegraphic apparatus. The operator transmits by the key and receives by the sounder. As fast as the dispatches are received from the public, they are sent to the operating room by a pulley, and then distributed to the proper files of the routes over which they are to be sent. The operator takes them from the files, and, in turn, transmits them to their respective destinations.

#### RECEIVING DISPATCHES BY SOUND.

The process of receiving by the operator is as follows, viz.: He has before him on the table the blanks represented by the form B, at the end of this chapter. He fills the blank with the date, address, and the message as it arrives. He receives it by sound, and writes it in ink upon the blank. When thus received it is sent to the delivery department by a pulley, and there it is registered, placed in an envelope, entered into the messenger's book, and then immediately delivered. This is the whole formality, and the time occupied does not necessarily exceed five minutes, if the party for whom the dispatch is intended lives within a square of the station. If the dispatch thus delivered requires an answer, the messenger returns with it, and it is immediately forwarded.

#### INCIDENTS OF THE STATION.

After the dispatches received from the public at the station have been sent, they are registered, that is, the names to and from, the date, and the amount. The originals are then filed.

The wire from the line enters the office at the window, and is connected, first with the paratonnerre, and then with the "circuit changer" on the side of the wall, and thence it is conducted to the magnet and thence to the battery wires.

The foregoing description of the interior department of the telegraph, embraces the whole routine therein executed. The whole formality is based upon celerity and the most complete promptness. Practically, an expert operator can send or receive by sound, two thousand words per hour, and serve ten hours per day, making 20,000 words per day, and the twelve operators,

represented in fig. 2, can send and receive 240,000 words per day. According to this data, it will be seen that the capacity of the line for transmission of intelligence is equal to the most expert manipulation. It is in contemplation, by some lines, to apply mechanism by which the general news may be sent with more rapidity than by hand. Contrivances have been made by which twenty thousand words per hour may be successfully transmitted. The day is not far distant when this will be a daily achievement. Ten years ago, each line in the station had the most complete set of apparatuses. The register for receiving was manufactured with the greatest care, so that the clock-work would move with perfection, the paper had to be adjusted on cylinders, and the various appliances had to be arranged in a particular form. The operator put the machinery in motion, and he read from the paper the dispatch as it was slowly received. He read aloud, and the copyist, near by, wrote it down with a pencil; and when thus finished, it was handed to the copying clerk, whose duty it was to copy it on the forms as represented by *b*. It was then enveloped and handed to the messenger for delivery.

Expert telegraphers soon dispensed with the copyists, then followed the dismissal of the copying clerks, and soon thereafter, the recording instruments were laid aside. The first operator to practically receive by sound was Mr. Edward F. Barnes, of New York, and at that day it was regarded as a feat most extraordinary. But now it is the daily practice in all the leading telegraph stations in America—only the local or interior stations have in use the recording apparatuses.

If a telegrapher cannot receive, perfectly, by sound, he is not regarded as an expert, and the ambitious young man ceases not until he has fully attained that degree of perfection.

Some years ago, as president of a telegraph line, I adopted a rule forbidding the receiving of messages by sound. Since then the rule has been reversed, and the operator is required to receive by sound or he cannot get employment in first class stations. At the Cincinnati stations, for example, there is not a recording apparatus, and, of course, if an operator cannot read the language uttered by the mysterious messenger, as transmitted over the wires, he cannot have employment there. No mistakes are made, and, in fact, many experts have informed me that the ear proves to be more reliable than the mechanism.

It is quite common for the operator to take with him, when he proceeds upon the line to repair it, a small pocket magnet, and when he arrives at the place of difficulty, to communicate back to his office. Some operators care not for even this small

mechanism, preferring to manipulate by striking the wires together, and then receive with the tongue, by placing one wire above and the other wire below it. The voltaic pulsations will be felt on the tongue, and the dots and dashes are thus recognized as to time by the sense of feeling. In latter days practice has gone farther, and a second party has received intelligence from a distant office by noticing the quivering of the nerves of the tongue of another, who had the wires attached as above described. These latter modes of receiving, of course can never be used for practical telegraphing, but they are common in the repairing service, and have been for several years.

#### EXECUTION OF AN INDIAN RESPITED BY TELEGRAPH.

In 1850, a mail carrier, by the name of Colburn, was murdered on the plains some three hundred miles from the white settlements, on the Santa Fé trail. The mail bag was found near the dead body, open, and its contents scattered on the ground. Among the papers were found several drafts for money, which fact alone was sufficient to demonstrate that the murder had been committed by the Indians.

Search was made by the whites, and different articles were found in the possession of an old Indian, who was supposed to be the murderer. He was arrested, and so was his whole family. They were brought to Jefferson City, in the State of Missouri, that being the place of the nearest court of jurisdiction. At the first term thereafter the Indian was put on trial, and a son of the old man was called as a witness. He denied that his father had anything to do with the murder, or that he had been accessory either before or after the fact. He confessed to the murder, and declared that he alone had committed the horrid deed! The father was released, and so were the whole family, except the son. He was placed on trial. He again confessed to the murder, which was satisfactorily proved by some circumstantial evidence. He was convicted of the murder, and sentenced to be hung on the 14th of March, 1851. The old Indian and his family were then conducted back, by the Government, to their home in the wilds of the West, leaving the youthful, but brave son behind, never again to be seen by them.

But, a few days before the time fixed by the law for the execution of the young Indian, whose name was See-see-sah-ma, it was discovered that he was not the murderer of the mail carrier, and that he had confessed to the crime, in order to save his father from dying, other than by the hands of the Great

Spirit. He wanted him to die brave in battle, or calmly in the midst of his own family. The fact of this self-sacrifice for an aged parent, was satisfactorily substantiated to the citizens of Jefferson City, too late to save his life by the ordinary means of communication with the United States Government. The documents were prepared as speedily as possible, praying the President to respite the execution, having in view a consideration of the recently-discovered evidence. On the 13th of March, the day before the fatal hour, the papers had not been forwarded, and there was no hope for the poor doomed Indian, except through the telegraph. All the facts in the case were transmitted to me at St. Louis, with the request for me to aid in getting a respite. In the evening of that day, about eight o'clock, I sent to the President the following dispatch, viz. :

*To His Excellency,*

MILLARD FILLMORE, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

I am requested to petition your excellency for a respite of the execution of the Indian, See-see-sah-ma, to take place tomorrow at Jefferson City, for the term of thirty days. Documents substantiating his innocence are being prepared, and will be forwarded to Washington.

TAL. P. SHAFFNER.

The above dispatch reached the President that night, but too late to be answered before the closing of the telegraph lines. On the morning of the 14th, the day of execution, at half-past nine o'clock, the President sent to the office his answer, viz. :

WASHINGTON, *March 14, 1851.*

*To Tal. P. Shaffner, St. Louis:*

The Marshal of the District of Missouri, is hereby directed to postpone the execution of the Indian, See-see-sah-ma, until Friday, the 18th of April.

MILLARD FILLMORE.

One copy of this message was sent via Philadelphia, Pittsburg, Cincinnati, Louisville, to St. Louis, a distance of some 1100 miles, reaching its destination at ten minutes before ten o'clock, A. M. Another copy was sent via New York, Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago to St. Louis, a distance of about two thousand miles, reaching the latter city at five minutes after ten o'clock, A. M. Another copy was sent via Baltimore, Wheeling, Louisville, Nashville, Cairo to St. Louis, a distance of some sixteen hundred miles, reaching St. Louis at eight minutes after ten o'clock, A. M. Each of these copies was transmitted over the wires of four different companies, and on the latter route was ferried over the Ohio river in an ordinary skiff.

The execution of the Indian was to take place at noon. Thousands of people had assembled around the gallows to see the poor red man of the forest launched into eternity in atonement for the awful crimes, supposed to have been committed by him, namely, the murdering of a fellow-being and robbing the great mail of the United States. There was no time for delay, and I hastened to search for the Marshal, who resided in the city of St. Louis. I found him in his office, some half mile distant from the telegraph station. He wrote the following dispatch to his deputy at Jefferson City :

*To Mr. W. D. Kerr, Deputy Marshal :*

You are hereby directed to postpone the execution of the Indian prisoner, See-see-sah-ma, till Friday, the 18th of April.

JOHN W. TWITCHELL,

*United States Marshal, District of Missouri.*

The above order, accompanied with the President's, was sent to Jefferson City twenty minutes after ten A. M. The Indian, who was already on his way to the place of execution, was returned to his cell in the prison, his coffin stored away, and the multitude dispersed.

The President received the evidence, and the Indian, See-see-sah-ma, was spared the ignominy of a public execution upon the gallows.

**A.**  
**WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY.**

**No. 2.) TERMS AND CONDITIONS ON WHICH MESSAGES ARE RECEIVED BY THIS COMPANY FOR TRANSMISSION.**

The public are notified, that, in order to guard against mistakes in the transmission of messages, every message of importance ought to be repeated by being sent back from the station at which it is to be received to the station from which it is originally sent. Half the usual price for transmission will be charged for repeating the message. This Company will not be responsible for mistakes or delays in the transmission or delivery of a repeated message, from whatever cause they may arise; nor will it be responsible for damages arising from mistakes and delays in the transmission or delivery of a repeated message, beyond an amount exceeding two hundred times the amount paid for sending the message; nor will it be responsible for delays arising from interruptions in the working of its Telegraphs, nor for any mistake or omission of any other Company, or for any error which a lines the message is to be sent to reach its place of destination. All messages will hereafter be received by this Company for transmission, subject to the above conditions.

SEND THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE SUBJECT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS:

To

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