

How Illustrated Newspapers are made.

Few persons, however well informed regarding literary and artistic matters, understand clearly the distinction between a pictorial paper and an illustrated newspaper. The first—the pictorial paper—is merely the medium of presenting to the public pictures, whose merits consist in their abstract attractiveness, without regard to the passing events of the day. A pictorial paper, therefore, gives literally nothing but pictures. An illustrated newspaper, on the contrary, not only furnishes its weekly gallery of art, but gives the current news, thus bringing the genius of the pencil and the pen promptly to illustrate the recorded event.

Our present number is a most excellent illustration of our idea. On Saturday last a conflagration of unusual interest occurred in Brooklyn; not only is the event noticed in our paper, with prepared description from the pen, but one of our most accomplished artists was early at the scene, and has made it permanent as a graphic picture. Within the last week have occurred the appalling accidents near Philadelphia and on Lake Erie. These things are the news of the day; our paper contains ten illustrative pictures, drawn from nature, and adding their charms and their horrors to the letter-press description peculiar to papers not illustrated.

Our readers will therefore perceive with what rapidity the artists' labors and the engravers' work must be brought into requisition, and also from some idea of the certainty with which each must do their work, and the necessary extra expense attending such rapid execution. To bring to the eye with perfect accuracy the great and novel events, notable localities, and portraits of persons in whom the public have an interest, is a task that affords a pleasure second only to an actual view or a personal reconnaissance. An illustrated newspaper, if it fulfils its mission, must have its employees under constant excitement. There can be no indolence or ease about such an establishment. Every day brings its allotted and herculean task, and night affords no respite.

The only way an illustrated newspaper is published at all, is by a most ingenious division of labor, a total regardlessness of expense, and a directing head to the whole concern, not only possessed of more than usual business capacity, but also perfect in the generally inconsistent quality of a perfect knowledge of art, and all the practical details necessary not only to produce pictures and engravings, but also a perfect knowledge of the mechanical appliances by which they are created.

Our readers must imagine a vast publishing house, composed of many departments, each filled almost to overflowing with editors, engravers, artists, compositors, pressmen, clerks, newsboys, and others perfectly acquainted with the reporter's calling. An edition of the paper is to be produced—the manner we will endeavor to give: in the first place, there is a corps of editors, whose duties are divided up between editorials and general subjects, and matter particularly condensations of the events of the week—theatrical and musical criticisms giving constant employment to seven or eight persons. Information is received that an accident has occurred, or that some great mass meeting or other event will take place. Immediately one or more artists are dispatched to the point of interest, and by long experience hasty sketches are made that are to be elaborated when put on the wood, which is the next stage of their advancement. The wood used is that known as 'boxwood,' so much a favorite as a shrub in our gardens, but which in Turkey expands by slow growth into a tree with a trunk of a few inches in diameter.

This valuable product is nearly as hard as flint, and can be cut with great precision. From the diminutive size natural to its growth, it is only possible to produce pieces large enough for the purposes of an illustrative paper by joining innumerable small bits together and fastening them by screws on the back of the block, as will be seen by the engraving. The art required to perform this apparently simple mechanical process cannot be understood except by those directly engaged in the business, or by those who have to use the wood to print from after it is engraved. The block of wood having been selected, and the “travelling artists” having supplied the subject, other artists again are employed in putting the design on the block, which when done is one of the most beautiful works of art without color that can be imagined.

The hour of publication is near at hand, and here we have a two-page picture to be engraved, which cannot be completed by a single hand under several days of hard labor. What is to be done? The screws which hold the small parts of the wood together are unloosened, and the block is divided into ten or twenty parts. Upon each there is but the fragment of the drawing; one has a little bit of sky, another a group of children cut in two in the middle; another, part of a house; another a trunk of a tree; another is covered with foliage. Ten or fifteen engravers now seize these fragmentary pieces, and work night and day; not a moment is lost; they silently and industriously pursue their work, and the surfaces of the several blocks are cut away save where they are marked by the image of the artist’s pencil, and we have left the surface which makes the impression on our paper known as a wood engraving.

The engravers’ tools are very few in number, and very simple in construction. They are called: 1. Flat tool; 2, 3, 4 and 5, gravers; 6 and 7, tint tools; 8, sand-bag and stand on which the block is laid; 9, scraper; 10, chisel—and cost comparatively but a small sum; yet with these simple tools the engraver, with an incomprehensible certainty to the spectator, runs through the complicated outlines of the innumerable forms which make up the pictures of our weekly edition, displaying a skill of handling to our notions as wonderful as the touch of the artist himself.

Leaving the engravers at their work, we will step into the familiar printing-office. The first thing that attracts our attention is an immense steam-engine, whose piston-rod quietly, as if marking the breathing of some huge monster, sets all the complicated wheels in motion. There is no noise; all is expressive of silence and power. The huge fly-wheel which rolls steadily round as if it were a ring of Saturn and the “governor,” as if possessed of absolute intelligence, elevates and depresses its arms, managing thus wise the steam, and controlling its influence upon the useful machinery. In old Franklin’s time the straining muscle of the human arm performed this useful labor, but now the genius of Watt and Fulton has caught the elements, and made them willing servants to do this menial service.

The compositors’ rooms are next in order of interest. It is here that the manuscript from the editorial rooms reach the printers, who proceed at once to put it in type. It is first set up, then read by copy and generally revised by the author, who frequently finds an opportunity to improve a period or correct an error, which he would not have noticed in the miserable scrawl which he hands in as his editorial matter. The rough-out our great city, so far as newspapers are concerned, a large share of the labor of type-setting is done at night, and yet printers, becoming accustomed to late hours, generally enjoy equal health with those who retire at more seasonable times and

who do not by necessity turn night into day. The “matter” being up, the next order is to put it in the form,” which in an illustrated paper is more difficult than in any other. Originally it is “composed” in columns exactly suited to the paper; but a casual glance at the different sizes of the wood-cuts will explain how it is that the same type has to be re-arranged, so as to meet the many differences in the size of the engravings. This work, which is very difficult, is called “over-running,” and gives additional expense to the publisher of illustrated sheets. The “form,” however, is finally “made up,” and is carried into the “press-room,” a department in a printing office, which especially attracts the notice of visitors.

The highest mechanical ingenuity is brought into requisition to create a “cylinder press,” one of which will quietly perform the labor of many hands; and do it with a neatness and dispatch impossible to be obtained in any other way. In forms put upon the press filled with engravings is used what is termed an “overlay,” the construction of which requires much experience. An impression is taken of each engraving on thick paper, and then, they are laid upon a table, and by a sharp knife all the white parts of the picture are removed; when this is done, the dissected picture is put upon the cylinder of the press in such a way as to make unusual pressure upon the engraving, or especial parts of it, while being printed. It is in this way that such brilliant effects are often produced. Were this otherwise, the pictures would come up with the same even tone, so peculiar and so beautiful to solid columns of type.

The paper once printed, innumerable rolls, containing a hundred each, are now distributed to the news agents, by them to be sent to the different literary depots throughout the entire country, while other hundreds are taken to the packing room to be put in wrappers, marked with subscribers’ names, and then to be sent to the Post-office for distribution. Meanwhile, those important attaches to every New York newspaper establishment—the newsboys—are clamoring in crowds around the door of the publication office, fighting and wrangling for the first supply. Having obtained their wishes, they mechanically start off on a run, and keep up a yell well calculated to split the ears of pedestrians. So entirely absorbed do these urchins become in their vocation, that they can often be seen hallooing their ‘wares’ along an entire block in buildings in which every house is closed and not a possible purchaser in sight. If they pass under a dead wall they still keep up the cry “Ere is Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Noosepaper, ‘ere they is.” But too much cannot be said in favor of the newsboys; they are an enterprising class of juveniles, and acquire a remarkable sharpness while engaged in their employment. Some few are economical, and support aged mothers or helpless brothers and sisters but the majority “live fast,” lighting the candle of life at both ends. An old newsboy is a rarity not yet exhibited at Barnum’s Museum.

Our space will not permit us to go into that elaborate description we should desire to inform the public of the vast expense and mental artistic labor required to get out what can properly be termed an illustrated newspaper. Our beautiful illustrations will more than compensate for our omissions. No business combines within itself so many difficult elements to control; and from the first conception of our weekly issue, where the subjects of representation are still in the brain, through every rapid ification of their progress to the complete sheet a constant supervision is not only necessary, but the master-spirit must be combine in a thousand apparently inconsistent things. He must combine the finest business talent with the most intense knowledge of every department of art; he museum be mechanical and poetical—practical to the last degree, yet full of enthusiasm and poetry. It is all these varied qualifications, so difficult to find in one person,

that has made the experiment of illustrated papers in this country heretofore a failure, but with Mr. Leslie that case is different. The finest living practical engraver himself, acquainted with every degree of power that can be produced upon wood—perfectly au fait in the knowledge of every material used in getting out his sheet, from the broom that sweeps the printing office up through every department necessary to complete his magnificent paper, he can combine economy in details, yet readily be extravagant when outlay is demented. From long experience in his business, and an intimate knowledge of every part of the Union, he has established an unrivalled corps of artist correspondents, and has folios groaning with magnificent views of all the cities and distinguished places of the thirty-one States, ready to be used at any moment; so that no great event can happen, no accident take place—nothing can occur throughout the broad land of which Mr. Leslie in some way has not anticipated the locality, and half performed the labor in advance of getting out an illustration.

The amount of capital necessary to carry on an Illustrated Newspaper is enormous; hundreds and thousands of dollars are frequently expended, for which no return is received in months. The rapidity which is necessary to get out the engravings often enhances the expenses four-fold, and the artist, engravers, and printers, already exhausted by their labors, are compelled to renewed exertion, by the only possible reward—extra pay. The result of all this mental care and business anxiety is before the public. One volume of the illustrated paper is already completed, the second one is rapidly extending its circulation, and from every quarter comes the cheering intelligence that Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper is becoming a necessity for public libraries, and a friend that cannot be dispensed with at the fireside. The future will show evidence of an increased desire on the part of the publisher to deserve success, while he is encouraged with the knowledge that his paper is no longer an experiment, but a permanent institution ranking among the most costly and most useful enterprises of the country. So much for the creation of illustrated newspapers.

Editorial, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, August 2, 1856.