

Reminiscences of a Printer's Devil

The Song of the Printer.

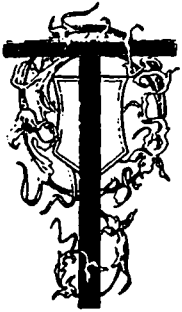
Pick and click
Goes the type in the stick,
As the printer stands at his case:
His eyes glance quick, and his fingers pick
The type at a rapid pace;
And one by one, as the letters go,
Words are piled up steady and slow—
Steady and slow,
But still they grow,
And words of fire they soon will glow:
Wonderful words that, without a sound,
Traverse the earth to its utmost bound:
Words that shall make
The tyrant quake,
And the fetters of the oppressed shall break;
Words that can crumble an army's might,
Or treble its strength in a righteous fight:
Yet the types they look but leaden and dumb
As he puts them in place with finger and thumb.
But the printer smiles,

And his work beguiles
By chanting a song as the letters he piles,
With pick and click,
Like the world's chronometer, tick! tick! tick!

O, where is the man with such simple tools
Can govern the world as I?
With a printing press, an iron stick,
And a little leaden die;
With paper of white, and ink of black,
I support the Right, and the Wrong attack.

Say, where is he, or who may he be,
That can rival the printer's power?
To no monarchs that live the wall doth he give:
Their sway lasts only an hour:
While the printer still grows, and God only knows
When his might shall cease to tower.

—ANON.



O those who refuse to believe in a personal devil I stand forth, as an individual who has been one, in refutation of a scepticism founded on ignorance. But I have reformed; no matter what my friends may say to the contrary, I respectfully submit this as a fact, without a blush. Printer's devils have been known to reform, and why not I? I could point to dozens who have risen to respectability and rank from association with the "hell-box" and deeds of darkness, such as the washing of rollers.

True, a few have gone from bad to worse and become politicians, but they were among the incorrigibles; whereas I am still picking up an honest living out of a case of type, while my name is known wherever the English language is spoken, and I need only mention it to be at once recognized: it is John Smith. Though why I should be compared by the bard to "the world's chronometer" I cannot comprehend, since I am denied "tick" on every hand. I do strike occasionally, and I do feel "all run down" and in need of being wound up on Monday morning; but it does not therefore follow that my internal mechanism resembles a Waterbury watch. On the contrary.

"The devil is not as black as he is painted;" as colored inks come more into favour, he is gradually assuming a variegated complexion, which, though less sombre, is somewhat more startling in its effect upon the spectator. In time, perhaps gold bronze may, for a season, supersede the use of inks, and then the imp will be transformed into the similitude of an angel of light.

In the days of my unsullied youth, in a city of England, I was wont to watch a printing press in operation, and aspire to be the magician who fed blank paper in at one end and conjured it through a mysterious maze of perturbed mechanism, whence it appeared as knowledge pre-digested for public consumption. This led to my being apprenticed to the craft—a singularly striking illustration of how the way to the hell-box is paved with good intentions; for I protest that I chose this career without any sinister purpose, being actuated wholly and solely by the laudable ambition to become a public dispenser of knowledge by the ream or token. To show that mercenary motives had no part or lot in my side of the contract, I need only say that my wages for the first year were eighteen pence per week, with a rise of one shilling per week each subsequent year.