

one of the compositors dodging and pecking at the type in his case, "Like an old hen picking up millet." This sort of silence and this sort of comment, both exasperated the printers, who took their revenge as they could. They fed it full, once, when a country subscriber's horse, tied before the office, crossed his hind legs and sat down in his harness like a tired man, and they proposed to go out and offer him a chair, to take him a glass of water, and ask him to come inside. But fate did not often give them such innings; they mostly had to create their chances of reprisal, but they did not mind that.

There was always a good deal of talk going on, but although we were very ardent politicians, the talk was not political. When it was not mere banter, it was mostly literary; we disputed about authors among ourselves, and with the village wits who dropped in. There were several of these who were readers, and they liked to stand with their backs to our stove and challenge opinion concerning Holmes and Poe, Irving, Macaulay, Pope and Byron, Dickens and Shakespeare.

It was Shakespeare who was oftenest on our tongues; indeed, the printing office of former days had so much affinity with the theatre, that compositors and comedians were easily convertible; and I have seen our printers engaged in hand-to-hand combats with column rules, two up and two down, quite like the real bouts on the stage. Religion entered a good deal into our discussions, which my father, the most tolerant of men, would not suffer to become irreverent, even on the lips of law-students bathing themselves in the fiery spirit of Tom Paine. He was willing to meet anyone in debate of moral, religious or political questions, and the wildest-haired Comeouter, the most ruthless sceptic, the most credulous spiritualist, found him ready to take them seriously, even when it was hard not to take them in joke.

It was part of his duty, as publisher of the paper, to bear patiently with another kind of frequenter; the type of farmer who thought he wished to discontinue his paper, and really wished to be talked into continuing it. I think he rather enjoyed letting the subscriber talk himself out, and carrying him from point to point in his argument, always consenting that he knew best what he wanted to do, but skilfully persuading him at last that a home paper was more suited to his needs than any city substitute. Once I could have given the heads of his reasoning, but they are gone from me now. The editor was especially interested in the farming of the region, and I think it was partly owing to the attention he called to the question that its character was so largely changed. It is still a dairy country, but now it exports grain, and formerly the farmers had to buy their flour.

He did not neglect any real local interest in his purpose of keeping his readers alive to matters of

more general importance, but he was fortunate in addressing himself to people who cared for the larger, if remoter, themes he loved. In fact, as long as slavery remained a question in our politics, they had a seriousness and dignity which the present generation can hardly imagine; and men of all callings felt themselves uplifted by the appeal this question made to their reason and conscience. My father constantly taught in his paper that if slavery could be kept out of the territories it would perish, and, as I have said, this was the belief of the vast majority of his readers. They were more or less fervid in it, according to their personal temperaments; some of them were fierce in their convictions, and some humorous, but they were all in earnest. The editor sympathized more with those who took the true faith gaily. All were agreed that the Fugitive Slave Law was to be violated at any risk; it would not have been possible to take an escaping slave out of that country without bloodshed, but the people would have enjoyed outwitting his captors more than destroying them. Even in the great John Brown times, when it was known that there was a deposit of his impracticable pikes somewhere in our woods, and he and his followers came and went among us on some mysterious business of insurrectionary aim, the affair had its droll aspects, which none appreciated more keenly than the Quaker-born editor. With his cheerful scepticism, he could never have believed that any harm or danger would come of it all; and I think he would have been hardly surprised to wake up any morning and find that slavery had died suddenly during the night, of its own iniquity.

He was like all country editors then, and I dare say now, in being a printer as well as an editor, and he took a full share in the mechanical labors. These were formerly much more burdensome, for twice or three times the composition was then done in the country offices. At the present day the country printer buys of a city agency his paper already printed on one side, and he gets it for the cost of the blank paper, the agency finding its account in the advertisements it puts in. Besides this patent inside, as it is called, the printer buys stereotyped selections of other agencies, which offer him almost as wide a range of matter as the exchange newspapers he used to choose from. The few columns left for local gossip and general news, and for whatever editorial comment he cares to make on passing events, can be easily filled up by two compositors. But in my time we had three journeymen at work and two or three girl compositors, and commonly a boy-apprentice besides. The paper was richer in a personal quality, and the printing office was unquestionably more of a school. After we began to take girl-apprentices it became co-educative, as far as they cared to profit by it; but I think it did not serve to widen their thoughts or quicken their wits