

## PRESERVATION OF COUNTLESS NEWSPAPERS.

IT is generally known that at the British Museum is preserved a copy of every newspaper published in the United Kingdom and that the collection of early newspapers is unique, having never suffered by fire or accident. But probably few people have ever thought of, much less realized, the immense amount of labor involved in keeping up the collection, in binding, classifying and preserving the papers ready for use in the newspaper reference room.

Anyone who has had occasion to consult the newspaper files knows how simple it is. He walks into a comfortable room, and fills up a form with the name and date of the journal he wishes to consult. It may be one of the earliest papers published, a century or half a century old, or it may be one of recent issue, but in any case it is placed before him in a few minutes, and he is free to pore over its contents as long as he likes. When he has done with it, back it goes to the catacombs below, where are miles upon miles of passages in which the newspapers are kept.

An average of 546 papers a day are received at the museum; these are sorted, folded and registered, and a watch has to be kept to see that every paper comes that ought to come. Should any fail to arrive, the publisher has to be written to, and, if necessary, threatened with pains and penalties; and so carefully is all this done that during a period of many years there are scarcely half a dozen missing papers.

If we can make ourselves agreeable to the gentleman in charge of this department we may find ourselves walking along passages lined with bulky volumes, edgewise, from floor to ceiling, or, rather, what would be the ceiling if there were one, for these storage places are on a curious principle.

The passages—they are not rooms—are one above the other, three deep, and instead

of intervening floorings there are iron gratings so that the light of day comes through the roof and finds its way down to the basement. It is curious to look up from the ground floor at the upper stories, walled with books, and listen to the patter of the feet of the assistants, who are constantly moving about fetching or returning books.

The only light used is the light of day and the only heat is from underground hot water pipes which are outside the building. On a foggy day the place is in darkness, and it is impossible to get any books. But if for any purpose it is necessary to penetrate the labyrinth of passages, the only light allowed is a lamp carefully fastened with a Chubb's lock, which is lighted and locked by the superintendent.

To these safeguards is attributed the fact that the library has escaped catastrophe from fire. Only once has there been the least danger. That was over thirty years ago, when a fire occurred in the bookbinders' shop, and some half-a-dozen books were destroyed and others injured.

All the bookbinding is done on the premises, and, with so many newspapers to be bound, there is quite a glut of binding. The newspapers accumulate so fast that it is impossible to keep pace with the work, and one sees huge bundles of papers stored away in odd corners. The system pursued is that papers as they arrive are placed in pigeon holes until a "bindable" quantity is accumulated; then they are tied up in bundles, and having been bound, are transferred to the permanent shelves, of which there are more miles than one would care to measure. It is one of the statistical facts about the museum which has been accepted as undoubted, that there are over thirty-three miles of shelves stored with books.—*Printing Times and Lithographer*.

It is stated that the world consumes 4,000,000 steel pens daily.