

A Day in the Life of an Editor
Written by Lavinia Goodell
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Every distinct individual has his peculiar trial, and every employment is attended with different forms of perplexities and vexations. Sometimes I have thought those attending editorship were peculiar in the superlative degree, but perhaps that is only because I am an editor, and therefore more immediately cognizant of the peculiar sorrows and tribulations of that particular "sphere." Be that as it may, for the benefit of such farmers, ministers, housekeepers, merchants, or lawyers, as think they have something to do, I will record the experiences of one day, just *one day*, and a fair sample of the 313 every year (for the Editor must keep his mill grinding all the year round – no play day), to show them that some other people have something to do, too.

To introduce myself – I am William Henry Hartley, a man of thirty-five years, and tolerably good looks, and Editor of the "Reform Journal, and Fireside Friend." Last Wednesday morning I made my toilette, bright and early; for though I sat up late, reading proof, the night before, and though visions of editorials murdered in the type-setting, and printer-boys calling for "copy," had haunted my sleeping hours, I had a capital Leader in my head, on the "State of the country," which I was anxious to transfer to paper, while it remained in a transferable state. I had requested the Premier of Kitchendom to be sure to have breakfast ready in good season, as I wanted to be off for the office a little earlier than usual. N.B. – I am obliged to start for my office "a little earlier than usual," 99 out of 100 mornings – Well, for once, breakfast was ready as soon as I was ready for it. I swallowed mine, hastily, in a gloriously absent-minded state (for which I hope wife won't think me huffy about anything – at any rate I'll make it up when I get that Leader written), and bolted for the ferry. Of course I bought the morning papers, on my way, and imagine my consternation on opening them, in the ferry-boat, to find them filled with highly important news! Alas, for the Editor! Other men can sit and discuss the latest phases of "the question," coolly and leisurely, rejoice over the good news, or mourn over the unfortunate – but *his* first thought is: "Can I get it in?" "How shall I condense it?" "What shall I say about it?" Now my paper ought to go to press early on Wednesday – I had read the last proof – nothing remained but to "make up" and "revise" – just at this critical juncture, this *news* must come! Would that our Union forces could be persuaded to plan their battles, and take their Forts with some reference to the convenience of Editors of Weekly Journals! Well, the press must be delayed a little, something must be left over, and this "highly important" inserted – for are not the "Democrat" and the "Recorder" dated the same day with my paper, and might not *they* contain the news? At any rate, *I* must have it.

Accordingly, my first business, on landing, was to repair to the printer's, for consultation as to the ways and means. What could I leave out? The "news" was all too important, and I was obliged, reluctantly, to give up my poor editorial on the Tax Bill, which had been left over, twice before. Then I retired (?) to my sanctum, and fell to work, with might and main, to make up the "Highly Important!" for the little type-setting urchin who was already awaiting it.

"Hulloa, Hartley, how are you? Thought I'd run in, and have a little chat, this morning – going back on the noon train. Were you up to the Institute last evening? Splendid meeting! Heard the news? Isn't it glorious?" and I raised my head to behold Ned Olmstead, an old college chum, whom I should really have been delighted to see, had my *news* been in the hands of the printer.

"One moment, Olmsted – very busy, getting the paper to press – glad to see you," said I, crossing out "Gen. Olmstead," where I should have written "Gen. M'Clellan," and dashing on my pen, at a furious rate.

"Yes, yes, I suppose you are busy," said Olmsted, settling himself in an arm-chair, and seizing the *Tribune*, out of which I was soon to clip two or three important items.

"Pardon me, Ned; I must monopolize the papers this morning. They are my tools, you see. I shall be through presently" – and I clipped and pasted, and interlined, for the next ten minutes, in silence. Ned would think me a bear, I was certain! So when I had made the last finishing flourish to my summary, and dispatched it printer-ward, I postponed my editorial, and settled myself for a cosy chat, which I hoped would efface any such unfavorable impression. National and family matters were duly canvassed, for the space of fifteen minutes, when our *tete-a-tete* was interrupted by the entrance of a brusque, florid, middle-aged lady, with a manuscript in her hand. She introduced herself to me as Mrs. Philander Stephenson, M.D.; said that she had chanced to fall in with a stray No. of the "Reform Journal," with which she was exceedingly delighted, and immediately launched into the most profuse and extravagant praises of said Journal and its editor, till I was fairly astonished at my own virtues, and really began to feel that I had never been appreciated before. The conclusion of the whole matter, however, proved to be just this: she had a communication – a poem – 31 pages, cap. If it couldn't all go into one No., she should be willing that it should be divided into parts. She would not make any charge; she had concluded to give it to me, as a token of her appreciation of my labors. Before reading a half page, I had decided in my own mind that I should be obliged to decline the honor of publishing it; but to do so gracefully was the problem. If I have a weakness, it is over fear of offending the ladies. So I feebly pleaded the length, great press of matter, etc. as excuses. She, however, argued her own case so earnestly and eloquently that my little courage fast oozed out, and I actually surrendered so far as to put it in my pocket, with a promise to turn it over to my "literary assistant." Between you and I, *my wife* is the mysterious, unknown "literary assistant," who is the terror of my promiscuous contributors. When poetry is not so utterly wretched that I have sense enough, myself, to know it won't do, I turn it over to her, for inspection.

During the prolonged stay of my new friend, Olmsted had taken flight, and when at last I was left alone, I turned resolutely to my desk, and seized my pen. I had not written the caption of my editorial when the door again opened, and the printer's boy entered with "Highly important" in proof, and the "revise" of the outside. Do you know what "revise" is? Well, it is a proof of the proof, to be looked over, for the purpose of ascertaining whether your corrections have been duly observed. I need not assure you that mine had not: that typo still insisted on calling Senator Crittenden "*Slavery* Crittenden," and "womanly," "manly," spelling Foote with three o's, and putting a note in the wrong place; while commas, quotation marks, dashes and exclamation points, had bestowed themselves in the most improper places, and the list of "Prices Current" was in an appalling condition. With much groaning, and many sighs over the degeneracy of the time, and the short-comings of printers, I made the needful corrections, and dispatched printer's boy just in time to receive a pile of letters from the post-man. My first impulse was to thrust the letters one side, and commence my editorial; but my bump of order said *no*, and with the hopeful exclamation "I can soon dispatch them," I proceeded to investigate their contents.

No. 1 said "stop my paper." Reason why – so much light reading on the last page, some of which is suspected of being fiction. I ought not to be encouraged.

No. 2, encloses a poem on "Spring," in a half-formed school-girl hand, and signed "Euphemia." Runs smoothly, but doesn't amount to anything.

No. 3 contains \$5. Good! Ah -- \$2 for the paper, \$2 for the *Recorder*, which I will "please hand in," (the *Recorder* office is three quarters of a mile from mine), and \$1 on a debt to a Mr. Blank in 15th Street, which I will "be so good as to pass over to him." That man must think me made up of cream from the milk of human kindness, and with nothing to do but act out my nature!

No. 4 advises me as to how I shall conduct my paper to make it more generally interesting; says it is entirely too much occupied with solid matter; and thinks me quite given to abstruse subjects.

No. 5. Another poem. Judging from the spelling and grammar, not of the highest type.

No. 6. Ah! A communication from a special contributor. A capital one, too. An oasis in a desert.

No. 7. Blowing me up, for not having published his communication, sent some five weeks before. *En passant*, said communication was twenty-seven pages long and left the reader just as wise, at the end, as he was at the beginning.

No. 8. From a Member of Congress, wishing information on _____. O, yes, I had the documents; must write him a letter immediately.

No. 9. Poem, signed "George," full of spirit, good sentiment, but measure execrable, and rhyme nowhere.

No. 10. From an agent in the West -- must answer that.

No. 11. A new lady contributor. Fine piece! Really admirable! Must write her a note, as polite as I know how, thanking her, and requesting more of the same sort. Heigh ho! Three letters to answer!

No. 12. A long yarn about something, in an unusually blind hand. I began to labor over the contents, but the demands of my "inner man" prompted me to consult my watch. "Bless me! Past 1 o'clock." So correspondence had to wait till I could run around to Boardman's saloon, for dinner.

On my return, I was waylaid, and buttonholed by a large, puffy man, with a long red beard, who had not ceased to bore me for the space of six weeks, with regard to an intolerably stupid book which he had written, and which it was "so important" that I should notice. In vain I protested that I had not time to look it through, was very busy. I must stand and listen, for the twentieth time, to a rehearsal of its beauties and excellencies. When I returned to my unanswered letters it was 2 o'clock. Well, no time to waste in groaning over lost time! I sat down and dashed off answers to the agent and lady, and was in the midst of one to the Senator, -- when I was interrupted by a man with a very long paper about some charitable concern, which he wanted me to read. I considered that my "time" was "gold," or at least silver, and gave him a quarter to take himself off. As he walked off, the printer's boy walked in, with the "revise of the inside." Everything must defer to the printers, so I pushed the unfinished letter aside, and betook myself to correcting "revise" -- an employment not remarkably conducive to the cultivation of amiability. Just as I had discovered a provoking blunder in my leading editorial, which made me say exactly the reverse of what I meant, in walked Brown, with his friend Corbin, of whom he had often spoken to me, looking as if he expected to see me very much astonished and delighted. I tried to appear

so, but, I fear, not with the fullest sources; asked them to be seated, informed them that I was "very busy" just at that instant, my paper was a little later than "usual," and –

"Ah! Just in time to get in the 'very latest,'" exclaimed Brown, eagerly.

"Yes" said I, absently, crossing out a correction made in the wrong place. "I run it in this morning."

"Morning! Pshaw, the news on the bulletin this afternoon, eclipses all that."

"News on the bulletin!" I exclaimed, in great consternation.

"Yes, to be sure," said Brown, laughing. "Our boys down there are more than a match for you. They gain victories faster than you can print them."

Without another word I seized my hat and rushed for the Tribune office, but fortunately met a boy on the corner with "extras" and so was back in a twinkling.

"Can you squeeze it in?"

"Guess so. Excuse me. –"

Well, I actually compressed the "victory" into five and a half lines, concluded to displace a minor editorial, and requested Brown and Corbin to wait while I ran around to the printers. At last the paper was perfected, so far as my department was concerned, and I consigned it to the press with the same feeling of relief which wife experiences when she had put the children to bed! Consequently I returned to Brown and Corbin in a highly agreeable frame of mind, and chatted as freely as if I hadn't a care in the world, till Corbin took out his watch, and declared it was 4 o'clock, and he had an engagement that very moment.

Upon their departure my thoughts reverted to my unfinished letter, to which I devoted myself till it was accomplished. Then I discovered another pile of unopened letters, which the postman had brought, since dinner, and which I had not had time to attend to before. The first of these contained a communication from an occasional contributor, whose articles were admirable when printed, but execrable in manuscript. His communication, to a novice, would suggest the idea that a chicken had wet its feet in ink, and then scampered across a piece of blank paper. I, however, had become, through painful experience, tolerably familiar with it. I had learned that such and such characters stood for such and such letters, and that such a looking object meant such a word and what I couldn't otherwise have deciphered I guessed out from the connection. Moreover, this same contributor was exceedingly sensitive to such *mistakes* as you may imagine occasionally crept into his printed articles and I had more than once received letters from him in reference thereunto, written in a state of considerable mental excitement. Consequence was, I was obliged nearly if not entirely to re-write his articles, before giving them to the printer. I had frequently suggested to him the propriety of employing an amanuensis, but I regret to say he has never seen fit to do so; probably because there was not another individual in the United States, but myself, capable of deciphering his hieroglyphics. Sometimes in despair, I have determined to "cut" him, but his articles are really so fine, when they come out that I haven't the heart to do it. Well, at this particular time, I couldn't afford to go into it; so laid it aside and went on with my investigations. Just as I had concluded the last letter, the printer's boy – that "harbinger of ill" – entered

with a copy of the new paper, damp from the press and a – “Mr. Greyson wants to know have you got the ‘Miscellany’ copy for the next paper ready?”

Alas! That Wednesday afternoon job had been entirely forgotten. Well, here was “Minnie R____’s” story received this morning. I must look it over immediately, punctuate it – she is in the habit of substituting short dashes for commas, semicolons, periods and interrogation points – change the “etc’s” to “ands,” the “wh’s” to “whiches” and “whats,” and, in short make “all needful rules and regulations.”

The contributions duly revised, the selections chosen, and pasted together in regular order, and all delivered over to the functionary in waiting, and that cloud was dispelled. By this time, however, the “night” was “beginning to lower.” Accordingly I made up my budget of communications to look over, and “exchanges” to read, pocketed the scrap of paper on which the caption of my Leader was begun, closed up my office, and bent my steps homeward.

On looking over my new paper, I had the satisfaction of finding that “Senator Crittenden,” was still “*Slavery* Crittenden,” that the heroine of the story on the last page was described as “manly” instead of “womanly,” together with three or four mistakes in the “News” which I was quite sure I had corrected in proof.

My “Leader” is not yet finished, and if I am to have it for next paper I must burn the “midnight oil” to-night.

Don’t you wish you were an editor?

L.G.