

WHEN LIFE IS A BURDEN.

MONOTONOUS GROCERY CLERKS AND THEIR DREARY EXISTENCE.

They are a Courteous and Obliging Class of Men, but are Martyrs to Human Selfishness and Stupidity—The Way a boy Utilizes the Electric Lights.

I wonder how many of the people, and I am sorry to say they are generally women, who dawdle into a grocery store just as the gates are being closed, and take up the time of the clerks pottering about the shop, asking questions, examining goods, and perhaps leaving a few small orders, ever realize exactly the kind of life a grocery clerk leads? I don't mean a grocery clerk in St. John, where the people do their shopping during the day, and on every night but Saturday the gates are up by a quarter past six at latest on nearly every large grocery store in the city. I refer to the clerk in a place like Moncton, where everyone likes to shop just at the moment which best suits herself without reference to time, the hour, or least of all the clerk; and where every housekeeper is filled with righteous indignation if she ever happens to find the doors of her favorite grocery store closed, no matter how late the hour.

I have often thought how little time for pleasure those poor young clerks must have in their lives, but I never fully understood how much those nineteenth century martyrs to human selfishness and stupidity, had to endure until the other evening when I had a little talk with one of them. He was not a man with a grievance by any means, he was not even discontented with his lot or inclined to complain, and he had not the faintest idea that he was being "interviewed." He was simply a young fellow who had rather attracted my attention a few months ago by his sturdy build and a look of excellent health rather unusual amongst the clerks in a grocery store. Lately I had noticed the change the summer months had wrought in him, and how thin, worn and ill he looked. So one evening when I seemed to have a few moments leisure I asked him a question or two about his hours, and what he thought of early closing. And this is what he told me:

"If I could get out of the shop at eight o'clock on seven evenings in the week," he said "I should be perfectly satisfied, but we can't do it; all the other groceries are open, and so of course we must keep open too, to accommodate our customers. I would not mind staying late on Saturday evenings because we expect that, and everyone in a store of any kind has to do it, but I do feel that we might just as well close at six o'clock and have three or four evenings a week to ourselves as not, if people would only let us.

"I am down here at half past six every morning to tidy up the store and open it. I have just time enough at noon to rush down to my boarding house and get my dinner, and, except my dinner and tea I am never out of this store during the day unless it may be to run out for a moment and get something we may happen to be out of or to get some change. It is nine o'clock at the earliest on most nights before I get home, and then I am too tired even to read, I have just enough energy left to undress and go to bed so as to get rested before six next morning, when I must be up."

"Why cannot people get accustomed to buying what they want in the day-time? I asked, "then all the shops could be shut at six, on every evening but Saturday and Monday."

"They don't seem to think of it," he answered, "and the very men up in the railway shops who have been working so hard to get an eight hour day for themselves, are the ones who are helping to make our working day [about fifteen hours long, for of course they are very largely amongst our customers."

I don't think there is a more courteous and obliging class of men to be found in any business than the grocer's clerks! The man who presides over a dry goods counter maybe supercilious and haughty in his manners, while the drug clerk is almost always of a lofty and patronizing spirit; but take him when you like, whether he feels well or ill, is ready to drop with exhaustion, or merely in his chronic state of being tired out, he is always ready to do his best for you and to do it with a cheerful smile that would almost make you think his life was one long pleasure trip, and he was only serving grocers for the fun of the thing! I only wonder he does not hate humanity to such an extent as to find it impossible to be decently civil to anyone. Think of it! Fourteen and fifteen hours a day on his feet hastening to serve this one, rushing out to the back of the shop in search of something for another, and hastening back so that other customers shall not be kept waiting. All day long with mind and body at their highest tension, with no variety, no change of work no fresh air, nothing but a daily grind that is enough to send him to a lunatic asylum in a few years.

I know of no less than three grocers during the past two years, all doing the very best of businesses who were obliged to give up, sell out at a sacrifice and devote all their energies to the recovery of their health, having found the life so hard that they could not stand it. But the grocer's clerk does not usually have anything to

sell out; his salary is far from princely, and situations are hard to get, so he goes on, and lets his health take care of itself. The men in the government shops who find a working day of ten hours, too long for them, are making a praiseworthy effort to have it shortened to eight hours, but their work is always done at five o'clock in the day and on Saturday at three in the afternoon while the man in the grocery store works four hours longer nearly every day, and at least six longer on Saturday. It is not the fault of the man who owns the grocery business, he has his living to get, and must keep up with his rivals, and besides that, he keeps nearly the same hours himself, and works almost as hard. It is the fault of a selfish and thoughtless public.

I have no doubt that if the market was kept open till nine and ten o'clock at night people would put off buying anything until just before it closed but the rule of the market is as immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. At five or half past, I really forget which now, the doors close, and anything you have neglected buying you simply go without until the next day; on Saturday it remains open till ten o'clock. These are the regulation hours and no one dreams of wanting them changed, beyond an extension of the time to six o'clock in winter, and there is no reason why a similar rule should not be established in the grocery business. If it was general no one would lose anything by it, and the public would soon become accustomed to it and govern themselves accordingly, thereby righting a very decided wrong, and making the lives of a very estimable class of men endurable, instead of such a dreary grind that I wonder they do not commit suicide in order to make some sort of a change in it.

The most enterprising boy who has been discovered up to the present time of writing, resides at Moncton, somewhere in the West end! And the history of his discovery is brief, but exciting. A citizen was returning home at half past ten o'clock one night this week, happened to glance up at the electric light on the corner of Highland and Fleet streets and was struck by the unusual appearance of the cross bar above the light. At first there seemed to be an enormous bird slumbering calmly on the bar, but a closer inspection revealed two substantial legs clad in woollen stockings and finished up with a pair of thick soled boots, dangling from his lofty perch. The position of the feet were not resting on anything, and the quiet of the body to which they belonged, precluded the supposition that their possessor was a man engaged in repairing the wires, or changing the carbon, and the awful thought flashed through the citizen's mind, that he might be gazing on the evidence of a tragedy, the body of some victim of foolhardiness who had been burned to death while meddling with the wires. Hastily moving to a spot where he could get a clearer view through the trees, the citizen gazed open-mouthed upon a medium sized boy peacefully roosting on the bar and engaged in reading by the light of the electric lamp! Undisturbed by the unusual altitude of his lamp which towered over the loftiest piano lamp ever designed, untroubled by the uncertainty and discomfort of his seat, and absolutely unconscious of being observed in any way, he placidly read on with all the absorption of a student.

One passerby, after another had his attention attracted to the unusual sight, and many were the speculations indulged in. "Family think he is in hours ago," said one, "and he has scrambled out of a back window to read Jesse James on the sly." "Perhaps the poor Johnny is only studying his lessons" suggested a tender hearted youth. "Maybe he is dead" whispered a pessimist in an awe-struck whisper. "Wouldn't kick his heels that way, it he was," answered someone of a more practical turn.

"Who can he be?" was the general question. But the lad's hand was carelessly disposed over his eyes, to shield them from the strong light so no one seemed quite sure who he was. And in the midst of the turmoil of speculation and conjecture the boy in his eerie read peacefully on, and when the crowd dispersed they left him still in possession of the field, and of his patent, non-adjustable, reading chair and lamp.

I have often heard of enthusiastic students burning the midnight oil, but I must confess that it has been left to a Moncton boy to invent a new method of turning the municipal system of street lighting to his own account and whether he was engaged in mastering a difficult lesson for the next day's recitation, or merely following the fortunes of "Hair Trigger Bill, the terror of Bloody Gulch" he deserved some recognition for his originality and enterprise.

TERRIBLE RHEUMATIC PAINS.

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REFORM BY THE BICYCLE.

What is Being Done in the Cause of Good Roads. Everybody knows what the bicycle is doing for the good-roads problem. Of course the farmers have all along been the persons most interested in improving the country roads, and seems a little strange that they left the work to the wheelmen so long. But a similar thing happened in photography. The professional photographers, working for their livelihoods, haven't developed their own business half so rapidly in some directions as the amateurs, working for fun. Here's where the good citizenship comes in. The bicyclists and the good-roads prophets are hand in glove, according to the Washington Star.

In many of the states of the League of American Wheelmen consuls even frowned upon the construction of separate bicycle paths, partly hesitating to divert so much money from the common roads, partly fearing lest the construction of special paths may result in abridging the privileges of the wheel on the thoroughfares. This fear is probably ill-founded. Local authorities have always exercised the right to regulate and classify vehicles for the good of all classes, without impugning their rights where the classification ceases. Special speedways are in many cities constructed for trotting horses, but the man in the man in the sulky uses the common roads in going and returning from his speedway; and so does the equestrian, for whom special paths have been laid out in most large parks.

However this may be, motives of the attitude of the more conservative consuls in this matter are most emphatically those of good citizenship. Until recently New Jersey and Massachusetts were the two states which had done most for their highways. The most radical recent legislation, however, is the new Connecticut law (statutes of 1895), which pledges the state to pay one-third the cost of one mile of road in each town each year if the country and the towns will each pay one-third. The cost of one mile of road is estimated at \$3,000.

A poor town is by this means enabled to get a mile of good road at a direct cost to itself of but \$1,000, and the most of the general state and country cost fall on the richer towns and cities. A better device could hardly be imagined for encouraging road improvement in the poorer regions. Eighty-five towns availed themselves of the law last year, and seventy-five more have already swung into line for 1896. These are about two-thirds of all towns in the little nutmeg state. Before this year is over a New York cyclist may ride on good roads nearly all the way to Boston by way of New Haven, Hartford and Springfield. In New Jersey road-building has been carried on upon scientific principles, not so much throughout the state as in Connecticut, but rather concentrated in the more populous countries.

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ENGLAND'S GREAT SEAL.

When a New One is Ordered the Old One is Disposed of by Chance.

The Lord Chancellor has double the salary of the Speaker, viz., \$50,000 a year, but his tenure of office is more precarious, depending as it does, on the continuance in office of the party to which he belongs, and his only perquisite is the chance of obtaining possession of the great seal. When there is a fresh great seal the disused one is supposed to be broken, but in reality is not. The new Sovereign, in presence of the Privy Council, simply gives it a gen blow with the hammer, and, being thus "demanded," as the phrase is it becomes the perquisite of the Lord Chancellor of the time.

On the accession of William IV. to the throne, in 1830, there was an interesting contention between Lord Lyndhurst and Lord Brougham for the possession of the Great Seal of George IV. Lyndhurst was Lord Chancellor at the death of George, but a change of Government having followed, Brougham occupied the office when the Great Seal of William was completed. The former argued that the old Great Seal really belonged to the preceding

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reign, and that, as it was vested in him at the death of the Sovereign, it was his by every right and title; while the latter contended, in support of his claim to the emblem, that it continued to be the Great Seal until the Great Seal of the succeeding Sovereign was actually ready.

William IV., to whom the dispute was referred for arbitration, settled it to the mutual satisfaction of both statesmen. He allotted to each of them one of the sides of the Great Seal, and, as the designs were different, tossed up a coin to decide which should have the King on the throne and which the King on a horseback. But his Majesty's graciousness did not end there. He had the two sides set in superb silver salvers, and Brougham and Lyndhurst received, thus mounted, their respective portions of the Great Seal. This action of William IV may now be regarded as a well-established precedent. In 1860 a new Great Seal—that at present in use—was ordered, as the new one made at the accession of the Queen to the throne had got damaged. Lord Chelmsford was Lord Chancellor at the time, but before the new seal was adopted he succeeded, on a change of government, by Lord Campbell. They decided that, with the consent of the Queen, they would be bound by the judgment of William IV in the case of Lyndhurst v. Brougham, as to the disposal of the old seal. Campbell laid the matter before the Queen, who readily consented to follow the precedent of her uncle.

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