WITH THE EYES SHUT

Edward Bellamy

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RAILROAD rides are naturally tiresome to persons who cannot read on the cars, and, being one of those unfortunates, I resigned myself, on taking my seat in the train, to several hours of tedium, alleviated only by such cat−naps as I might achieve. Partly on account of my infirmity, though more on account of a taste for rural quiet and retirement, my railroad journeys are few and far between. Strange as the statement may seem in days like these, it had actually been five years since I had been on an express train of a trunk line. Now, as every one knows, the improvements in the conveniences of the best equipped trains have in that period been very great, and for a considerable time I found myself amply entertained in taking note first of one ingenious device and then of another, and wondering what would come next. At the end of the first hour, however, I was pleased to find that I was growing comfortably drowsy, and proceeded to compose myself for a nap, which I hoped might last to my destination.

Presently I was touched on the shoulder, and a train boy asked me if I would not like something to read. I replied, rather petulantly, that I could not read on the cars, and only wanted to be let alone.

"Beg pardon, sir," the train boy replied, "but I 'll give you a book you can read with your eyes shut. Guess you haven't taken this line lately," he added, as I looked up offended at what seemed impertinence. "We've been furnishing the new−fashioned phonographed books and magazines on this train for six months now, and passengers have got so they won't have anything else."

Probably this piece of information ought to have astonished me more than it did, but I had read enough about the wonders of the phonograph to be prepared in a vague sort of way for almost anything which might be related of it, and for the rest, after the air−brakes, the steam heat, the electric lights and annunciators, the vestibuled cars, and other delightful novelties I had just been admiring, almost anything seemed likely in the way of railway conveniences. Accordingly, when the boy proceeded to rattle off a list of the latest novels, I stopped him with the name of one which I had heard favorable mention of, and told him I would try that.

He was good enough to commend my choice. "That 's a good one," he said. "It 's all the rage. Half the train's on it this trip. Where 'll you begin?"

"Where? Why, at the beginning. Where else?" I replied.

"All right. Did n't know but you might have partly read it. Put you on at any chapter or page, you know. Put you on at first chapter with next batch in five minutes, soon as the batch that 's on now gets through."

He unlocked a little box at the side of my seat, collected the price of three hours' reading at five cents an hour, and went on down the aisle. Presently I heard the tinkle of a bell from the box which he had unlocked. Following the example of others around me, I took from it a sort of two−pronged fork with the tines spread in the similitude of a chicken's wishbone. This contrivance, which was attached to the side of the car by a cord, I proceeded to apply to my ears, as I saw the others doing.

For the next three hours I scarcely altered my position, so completely was I enthralled by my novel experience. Few persons can fail to have made the observation that if the tones of the human voice did not have a charm for us in themselves apart from the ideas they convey, conversation to a great extent would soon be given up, so little is the real intellectual interest of the topics with which it is chiefly concerned. When, then, the sympathetic influence of the voice is lent to the enhancement of matter of high intrinsic interest, it is not strange that the attention should be enchained. A good story is highly entertaining even when we have to get at it by the roundabout means of spelling out the signs that stand for the words, and imagining them uttered, and then imagining what they would mean if uttered. What, then, shall be said of the delight of sitting at one's ease, with closed eyes, listening to the same story poured into one's ears in the strong, sweet, musical tones of a perfect mistress of the art of story−telling, and of the expression and excitation by means of the voice of every emotion?

When, at the conclusion of the story, the train boy came to lock up the box, I could not refrain from expressing my satisfaction in strong terms. In reply he volunteered the information that next month the cars for day trips on that line would be further fitted up with phonographic guide−books of the country the train passed through, so connected by clock−work with the running gear of the cars that the guide−book would call attention to every object in the landscape, and furnish the pertinent information statistical, topographical, biographical, historical, romantic, or legendary, as it might be just at the time the train had reached the most favorable point of view. It was believed that this arrangement (for which, as it would work automatically and require little attendance, being used or not, according to pleasure, by the passenger, there would be no charge) would do much to attract travel to the road. His explanation was interrupted by the announcement in loud, clear, and deliberate tones, which no one could have had any excuse for misunderstanding that the train was now approaching the city of my destination. As I looked around in amazement to discover what manner of brakeman this might be whom I had understood, the train boy said, with a grin, "That's our new phonographic annunciator."

Hamage had written me that he would be at the station, but something had evidently prevented him from keeping the appointment, and as it was late, I went at once to a hotel and to bed. I was tired and slept heavily; once or twice I woke up, after dreaming there were people in my room talking to me, but quickly dropped off to sleep again. Finally I awoke, and did not so soon fall asleep. Presently I found myself sitting up in bed with half a dozen extraordinary sensations contending for right of way along my backbone. What had startled me was the voice of a young woman, who could not have been standing more than ten feet from my bed. If the tones of her voice were any guide, she was not only a young woman, but a very charming one.

"My dear sir," she had said, "you may possibly be interested in knowing that it now wants just a quarter of three."

For a few moments I thought well, I will not undertake the impossible task of telling what extraordinary conjectures occurred to me by way of accounting for the presence of this young woman in my room before the true explanation of the matter occurred to me. For, of course, when my experience that afternoon on the train flashed through my mind, I guessed at once that the solution of the mystery was in all probability merely a phonographic device for announcing the hour. Nevertheless, so thrilling and lifelike in effect were the tones of the voice I had heard that I confess I had not the nerve to light the gas to investigate till I had indued my more essential garments. Of course I found no lady in the room, but only a clock. I had not particularly noticed it on going to bed, because it looked like any other clock, and so now it continued to behave until the hands pointed to three. Then, instead of leaving me to infer the time from the arbitrary symbolism of three strokes on a bell, the same voice which had before electrified me informed me, in tones which would have lent a charm to the driest of statistical details, what the hour was. I had never before been impressed with any particular interest attaching to the hour of three in the morning, but as I heard it announced in those low, rich, thrilling contralto tones, it appeared fairly to coruscate with previously latent suggestions of romance aud poetry, which, if somewhat vague, were very pleasing. Turning out the gas that I might the more easily imagine the bewitching presence which the voice suggested, I went back to bed, and lay awake there until morning, enjoying the society of my bodiless companion and the delicious shock of her quarter−hourly remarks. To make the illusion more complete and the more unsuggestive of the mechanical explanation which I knew of course was the real one, the phrase in which

the announcement of the hour was made was never twice the same.

Right was Solomon when he said that there was nothing new under the sun. Sardanapalus or Semiramis herself would not have been at all startled to hear a human voice proclaim the hour. The phonographic clock had but replaced the slave whose business, standing by the noiseless water−clock, it was to keep tale of the moments as they dropped, ages before they had been taught to tick.

In the morning, on descending, I went first to the clerk's office to inquire for letters, thinking Hamage, who knew I would go to that hotel if any, might have addressed me there. The clerk handed me a small oblong box. I suppose I stared at it in a rather helpless way, for presently he said: "I beg your pardon, but I see you are a stranger. If you will permit me, I will show you how to read your letter."

I gave him the box, from which he took a device of spindles and cylinders, and placed it deftly within another small box which stood on the desk. Attached to this was one of the two−pronged ear−trumpets I already knew the use of. As I placed it in position, the clerk touched a spring in the box, which set some sort of motor going, and at once the familiar tones of Dick Hamage's voice expressed his regret that an accident had prevented his meeting me the night before, and informed me that he would be at the hotel by the time I had breakfasted.

The letter ended, the obliging clerk removed the cylinders from the box on the desk, replaced them in that they had come in, and returned it to me.

"Is n't it rather tantalizing," said I, "to receive one of these letters when there is no little machine like this at hand to make it speak?"

"It does n't often happen," replied the clerk, "that anybody is caught without his indispensable, or at least where he cannot borrow one."

"His indispensable!" I exclaimed. "What may that be?"

In reply the clerk directed my attention to a little box, not wholly unlike a case for a binocular glass, which, now that he spoke of it, I saw was carried, slung at the side, by every person in sight.

"We call it the indispensable because it is indispensable, as, no doubt, you will soon find for yourself."

In the breakfast−room a number of ladies and gentlemen were engaged as they sat at table in reading, or rather in listening to, their morning's correspondence. A greater or smaller pile of little boxes lay beside their plates, aud one after another they took from each its cylinders, placed them in their indispensables, and held the latter to their ears. The expression of the face in reading is so largely affected by the necessary fixity of the eyes that intelligence is absorbed from the printed or written page with scarcely a change of countenance, which when communicated by the voice evokes a responsive play of features. I had never been struck so forcibly by this obvious reflection as I was in observing the expression of the faces of these people as they listened to their correspondents. Disappointment, pleased surprise, chagrin, disgust, indignation, and amusement were alternately so legible on their faces that it was perfectly easy for one to be sure in most cases what the tenor at least of the letter was. It occurred to me that while in the old time the pleasure of receiving letters had been so far balanced by this drudgery of writing them as to keep correspondence within some bounds, nothing less than freight trains could suffice for the mail service in these days, when to write was but to speak, and to listen was to read.

After I had given my order, the waiter brought a curious−looking oblong case, with an ear−trumpet attached, and, placing it before me, went away. I foresaw that I should have to ask a good many questions before I got through, and, if I did not mean to be a bore, I had best ask as few as necessary. I determined to find out what this trap was without assistance. The words "Daily Morning Herald" sufficiently indicated that it was a newspaper. I suspected

that a certain big knob, if pushed, would set it going. But, for all I knew, it might start in the middle of the advertisements. I looked closer. There were a number of printed slips upon the face of the machine, arranged about a circle like the numbers on a dial. They were evidently the headings of news articles. In the middle of the circle was a little pointer, like the hand of a clock, moving on a pivot. I pushed this pointer around to a certain caption, and then, with the air of being perfectly familiar with the machine, I put the pronged trumpet to my ears and pressed the big knob. Precisely! It worked like a charm; so much like a charm, indeed, that I should certainly have allowed my breakfast to cool had I been obliged to choose between that and my newspaper. The inventor of the apparatus had, however, provided against so painful a dilemma by a simple attachment to the trumpet, which held it securely in position upon the shoulders behind the head, while the hands were left free for knife and fork. Having slyly noted the manner in which my neighbors had effected the adjustments, I imitated their example with a careless air, and presently, like them, was absorbing physical and mental aliment simultaneously.

While I was thus delightfully engaged, I was not less delightfully interrupted by Hamage, who, having arrived at the hotel, and learned that I was in the breakfast−room, came in and sat down beside me. After telling him how much I admired the new sort of newspapers, I offered one criticism, which was that there seemed to be no way by which one could skip dull paragraphs or uninteresting details.

"The invention would, indeed, be very far from a success," he said, "if there were no such provision, but there is."

He made me put on the trumpet again, and, having set the machine going, told me to press on a certain knob, at first gently, afterward as hard as I pleased. I did so, and found that the effect of the "skipper," as he called the knob, was to quicken the utterance of the phonograph in proportion to the pressure to at least tenfold the usual rate of speed, while at any moment, if a word of interest caught the ear, the ordinary rate of delivery was resumed, and by another adjustment the machine could be made to go back and repeat as much as desired.

When I told Hamage of my experience of the night before with the talking clock in my room, he laughed uproariously.

"I am very glad you mentioned this just now," he said, when he had quieted himself. "We have a couple of hours before the train goes out to my place, and I 'll take you through Orton's establishment, where they make a specialty of these talking clocks. I have a number of them in my house, and, as I don't want to have you scared to death in the night−watches, you had better get some notion of what clocks nowadays are expected to do."

Orton's, where we found ourselves half an hour later, proved to be a very extensive establishment, the firm making a specialty of horological novelties, and particularly of the new phonographic time−pieces. The manager, who was a personal friend of Hamage's, and proved very obliging, said that the latter were fast driving the old−fashioned striking clocks out of use.

"And no wonder," he exclaimed; "the old−fashioned striker was an unmitigated nuisance. Let alone the brutality of announcing the hour to a refined household by four, eight, or ten rude bangs, without introduction or apology, this method of announcement was not even tolerably intelligible. Unless you happened to be attentive at the moment the din began, you could never be sure of your count of strokes so as to be positive whether it was eight, nine, ten, or eleven. As to the half and quarter strokes, they were wholly useless unless you chanced to know what was the last hour struck. And then, too, I should like to ask you why, in the name of common sense, it should take twelve times as long to tell you it is twelve o'clock as it does to tell you it is one."

The manager laughed as heartily as Hamage had done on learning of my scare of the night before.

"It was lucky for you," he said, "that the clock in your room happened to be a simple time announcer, otherwise you might easily have been startled half out of your wits." I became myself quite of the same opinion by the time he had shown us something of his assortment of clocks. The mere announcing of the hours and quarters of hours

was the simplest of the functions of these wonderful and yet simple instruments. There were few of them which were not arranged to "improve the time," as the old fashioned prayer−meeting phrase was. People's ideas differing widely as to what constitutes improvement of time, the clocks varied accordingly in the nature of the edification they provided. There were religious and sectarian clocks, moral clocks, philosophical clocks, free−thinking and infidel clocks, literary and poetical clocks, educational clocks, frivolous and bacchanalian clocks. In the religious clock department were to be found Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal, and Baptist time−pieces, which, in connection with the announcement of the hour and quarter, repeated some tenet of the sect with a proof text. There were also Talmage clocks, and Spurgeon clocks, and Storrs clocks, and Brooks clocks, which respectively marked the flight of time by phrases taken from the sermons of these eminent divines, and repeated in precisely the voice and accents of the original delivery. In startling proximity to the religious department I was shown the skeptical clocks. So near were they, indeed, that when, as I stood there, the various time−pieces announced the hour of ten, the war of opinions that followed was calculated to unsettle the firmest convictions. The observations of an Ingersoll which stood near me were particularly startling. The effect of an actual wrangle was the greater from the fact that all these individual clocks were surmounted by effigies of the authors of the sentiments they repeated.

I was glad to escape from this turmoil to the calmer atmosphere of the philosophical and literary clock department. For persons with a taste for antique moralizing, the sayings of Plato, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius had here, so to speak, been set to time. Modern wisdom was represented by a row of clocks surmounted by the heads of famous maxim−makers, from Rochefoucauld to Josh Billings. As for the literary clocks, their number and variety were endless. All the great authors were represented. Of the Dickens clocks alone there were half a dozen, with selections from his greatest stories. When I suggested that, captivating as such clocks must be, one might in time grow weary of hearing the same sentiments reiterated, the manager pointed out that the phonographic cylinders were removable, and could be replaced by other sayings by the same author or on the same theme at any time. If one tired of an author altogether, he could have the head unscrewed from the top of the clock and that of some other celebrity substituted, with a brand−new repertory.

"I can imagine," I said, "that these talking clocks must be a great resource for invalids especially, and for those who cannot sleep at night. But, on the other hand, how is it when people want or need to sleep? Is not one of them quite too interesting a companion at such a time?"

"Those who are used to it," replied the manager, "are no more disturbed by the talking clock than we used to be by the striking clock. However, to avoid all possible inconvenience to invalids, this little lever is provided, which at a touch will throw the phonograph out of gear or back again. It is customary when we put a talking or singing clock into a bedroom to put in an electric connection, so that by pressing a button at the head of the bed a person, without raising the head from the pillow, can start or stop the phonographic gear, as well as ascertain the time, on the repeater principle as applied to watches."

Hamage now said that we had only time to catch the train, but our conductor insisted that we should stop to see a novelty of phonographic invention, which, although not exactly in their line, had been sent them for exhibition by the inventor. It was a device for meeting the criticism frequently made upon the churches of a lack of attention and cordiality in welcoming strangers. It was to be placed in the lobby of the church, and had an arm extending like a pump−handle. Any stranger on taking this and moving it up and down would be welcomed in the pastor's own voice, and continue to be welcomed as long as he kept up the motion. While this welcome would be limited to general remarks of regard and esteem, ample provision was made for strangers who desired to be more particularly inquired into. A number of small buttons on the front of the contrivance bore respectively the words, "Male," "Female," "Married," "Unmarried," "Widow," "Children," "No Children," etc., etc. By pressing the one of these buttons corresponding to his or her condition, the stranger would be addressed in terms probably quite as accurately adapted to his or her condition and needs as would be any inquiries a preoccupied clergyman would be likely to make under similar circumstances. I could readily see the necessity of some such substitute for the pastor, when I was informed that every prominent clergyman was now in the habit of supplying at least a dozen or

two pulpits simultaneously, appearing by turns in one of them personally, and by phonograph in the others.

The inventor of the contrivance for welcoming strangers was, it appeared, applying the same idea to machines for discharging many other of the more perfunctory obligations of social intercourse. One being made for the convenience of the President of the United States at public receptions was provided with forty−two buttons for the different States, and others for the principal cities of the Union, so that a caller, by proper manipulation, might, while shaking a handle, be addressed in regard to his home interests with an exactness of information as remarkable as that of the traveling statesmen who rise from the gazetteer to astonish the inhabitants of Wayback Crossing with the precise figures of their town valuation and birth rate, while the engine is taking in water.

We had by this time spent so much time that on finally starting for the railroad station we had to walk quite briskly. As we were hurrying along the street, my attention was arrested by a musical sound, distinct though not loud, proceeding apparently from the indispensable which Hamage, like everybody else I had seen, wore at his side. Stopping abruptly, he stepped aside from the throng, and, lifting the indispensable quickly to his ear, touched something, and exclaiming, "Oh, yes, to be sure!" dropped the instrument to his side.

Then he said to me: "I am reminded that I promised my wife to bring home some story−books for the children when I was in town to−day. The store is only a few steps down the street." As we went along, he explained to me that nobody any longer pretended to charge his mind with the recollection of duties or engagements of any sort. Everybody depended upon his indispensable to remind him in time of all undertakings and responsibilities. This service it was able to render by virtue of a simple enough adjustment of a phonographic cylinder charged with the necessary word or phrase to the clockwork in the indispensable, so that at any time fixed upon in setting the arrangement an alarm would sound, and, the indispensable being raised to the ear, the phonograph would deliver its message, which at any subsequent time might be called up and repeated. To all persons charged with weighty responsibilities depending upon accuracy of memory for their correct discharge, this feature of the indispensable rendered it, according to Hamage, and indeed quite obviously, an indispensable truly. To the railroad engineer it served the purpose not only of a time−piece, for the works of the indispensable include a watch, but to its ever vigilant alarm he could intrust his running orders, and, while his mind was wholly concentrated upon present duties, rest secure that he would be reminded at just the proper time of trains which he must avoid and switches he must make. To the indispensable of the business man the reminder attachment was not less necessary. Provided with that, his notes need never go to protest through carelessness, nor, however absorbed, was he in danger of forgetting an appointment.

Thanks to these portable memories it was, moreover, now possible for a wife to intrust to her husband the most complete messages to the dress−maker. All she had to do was to whisper the communication into her husband's indispensable while he was at breakfast, and set the alarm at an hour when he would be in the city.

"And in like manner, I suppose," suggested I, "if she wishes him to return at a certain hour from the club or the lodge, she can depend on his indispensable to remind him of his domestic duties at the proper moment, and in terms and tones which will make the total repudiation of connubial allegiance the only alternative of obedience. It is a very clever invention, and I don't wonder that it is popular with the ladies; but does it not occur to you that the inventor, if a man, was slightly inconsiderate? The rule of the American wife has hitherto been a despotism which could be tempered by a bad memory. Apparently, it is to be no longer tempered at all."

Hamage laughed, but his mirth was evidently a little forced, and I inferred that the reflection I had suggested had called up certain reminiscences not wholly exhilarating. Being fortunate, however, in the possession of a mercurial temperament, he presently rallied, and continued his praises of the artificial memory provided by the indispensable. In spite of the criticism which I had made upon it, I confess I was not a little moved by his description of its advantages to absent−minded men, of whom I am chief. Think of the gain alike in serenity and force of intellect enjoyed by the man who sits down to work absolutely free from that accursed cloud on the mind of things he has got to remember to do, and can only avoid totally forgetting by wasting tenfold the time required

finally to do them in making sure by frequent rehearsals that he has not forgotten them! The only way that one of these trivialities ever sticks to the mind is by wearing a sore spot in it which heals slowly. If a man does not forget it, it is for the same reason that he remembers a grain of sand in his eye. I am conscious that my own mind is full of cicatrices of remembered things, and long ere this it would have been peppered with them like a colander, had I not a good while ago, in self−defense, absolutely refused to be held accountable for forgetting anything not connected with my regular business.

While firmly believing my course in this matter to have been justifiable and necessary, I have not been insensible to the domestic odium which it has brought upon me, and could but welcome a device which promised to enable me to regain the esteem of my family while retaining the use of my mind for professional purposes.

As the most convenient conceivable receptacle of hasty memoranda of ideas and suggestions, the indispensable also most strongly commended itself to me as a man who lives by writing. How convenient when a flash of inspiration comes to one in the night−time, instead of taking cold and waking the family in order to save it for posterity, just to whisper it into the ear of an indispensable at one's bedside, and be able to know it in the morning for the rubbish such untimely conceptions usually are! How often, likewise, would such a machine save in all their first vividness suggestive fancies, anticipated details, and other notions worth preserving, which occur to one in the full flow of composition, but are irrelevant to what is at the moment in hand! I determined that I must have an indispensable.

The bookstore, when we arrived there, proved to be the most extraordinary sort of bookstore I had ever entered, there not being a book in it. Instead of books, the shelves and counters were occupied with rows of small boxes.

"Almost all books now, you see, are phonographed," said Hamage.

"The change seems to be a popular one," I said, "to judge by the crowd of book−buyers." For the counters were, indeed, thronged with customers as I had never seen those of a bookstore before.

"The people at those counters are not purchasers, but borrowers," Hamage replied; and then he explained that whereas the old−fashioned printed book, being handled by the reader, was damaged by use, and therefore had either to be purchased outright or borrowed at high rates of hire, the phonograph of a book being not handled, but merely revolved in a machine, was but little injured by use, and therefore phonographed books could be lent out for an infinitesimal price. Everybody had at home a phonograph box of standard size and adjustments, to which all phonographic cylinders were gauged. I suggested that the phonograph, at any rate, could scarcely have replaced picture−books. But here, it seemed, I was mistaken, for it appeared that illustrations were adapted to phonographed books by the simple plan of arranging them in a continuous panorama, which by a connecting gear was made to unroll behind the glass front of the phonograph case as the course of the narrative demanded.

"But, bless my soul!" I exclaimed, "everybody surely is not content to borrow their books? They must want to have books of their own, to keep in their libraries."

"Of course," said Hamage. "What I said about borrowing books applies only to current literature of the ephemeral sort. Everybody wants books of permanent value in his library. Over yonder is the department of the establishment set apart for book−buyers."

The counter which he indicated being less crowded than those of the borrowing department, I expressed a desire to examine some of the phonographed books. As we were waiting for attendance, I observed that some of the customers seemed very particular about their purchases, and insisted upon testing several phonographs bearing the same title before making a selection. As the phonographs seemed exact counterparts in appearance, I did not understand this till Hamage explained that differences as to style and quality of elocution left quite as great a range of choice in phonographed books as varieties in type, paper, and binding did in printed ones. This I

presently found to be the case when the clerk, under Hamage's direction, began waiting on me. In succession I tried half a dozen editions of Tennyson by as many different elocutionists, and by the time I had heard "Where Claribel low lieth"

rendered by a soprano, a contralto, a bass, and a baritone, each with the full effect of its quality and the personal equation besides, I was quite ready to admit that selecting phonographed books for one's library was as much more difficult as it was incomparably more fascinating than suiting one's self with printed editions. Indeed, Hamage admitted that nowadays nobody with any taste for literature if the word may for convenience be retained thought of contenting himself with less than half a dozen renderings of the great poets and dramatists.

"By the way," he said to the clerk, "won't you just let my friend try the Booth−Barrett Company's 'Othello'? It is, you understand," he added to me, "the exact phonographic reproduction of the play as actually rendered by the company."

Upon his suggestion, the attendant had taken down a phonograph case and placed it on the counter. The front was an imitation of a theatre with the curtain down. As I placed the transmitter to my ears, the clerk touched a spring and the curtain rolled up, displaying a perfect picture of the stage in the opening scene. Simultaneously the action of the play began, as if the pictured men upon the stage were talking. Here was no question of losing half that was said and guessing the rest. Not a word, not a syllable, not a whispered aside of the actors, was lost; and as the play proceeded the pictures changed, showing every important change of attitude on the part of the actors. Of course the figures, being pictures, did not move, but their presentation in so many successive attitudes presented the effect of movement, and made it quite possible to imagine that the voices in my ears were really theirs. I am exceedingly fond of the drama, but the amount of effort and physical inconvenience necessary to witness a play has rendered my indulgence in this pleasure infrequent. Others might not have agreed with me, but I confess that none of the ingenious applications of the phonograph which I had seen seemed to be so well worth while as this.

Hamage had left me to make his purchases, and found me on his return still sitting spellbound.

"Come, come," he said, laughing, "I have Shakespeare complete at home, and you shall sit up all night, if you choose, hearing plays. But come along now, I want to take you upstairs before we go."

He had several bundles. One, he told me, was a new novel for his wife, with some fairy stories for the children, all, of course, phonographs. Besides, he had bought an indispensable for his little boy.

"There is no class," he said, "whose burdens the phonograph has done so much to lighten as parents. Mothers no longer have to make themselves hoarse telling the children stories on rainy days to keep them out of mischief. It is only necessary to plant the most roguish lad before a phonograph of some nursery classic, to be sure of his whereabouts and his behavior till the machine runs down, when another set of cylinders can be introduced, and the entertainment carried on. As for the babies, Patti sings mine to sleep at bedtime, and, if they wake up in the night, she is never too drowsy to do it over again. When the children grow too big to be longer tied to their mother's apron−strings, they still remain, thanks to the children's indispensable, though out of her sight, within sound of her voice. Whatever charges or instructions she desires them not to forget, whatever hours or duties she would have them be sure to remember, she depends on the indispensable to remind them of."

At this I cried out. "It is all very well for the mothers," I said, "but the lot of the orphan must seem enviable to a boy compelled to wear about such an instrument of his own subjugation. If boys were what they were in my day, the rate at which their indispensables would get unaccountably lost or broken would be alarming."

Hamage laughed, and admitted that the one he was carrying home was the fourth be had bought for his boy within a month. He agreed with me that it was hard to see how a boy was to get his growth under quite so much government; but his wife, and indeed the ladies generally, insisted that the application of the phonograph to

family government was the greatest invention of the age.

Then I asked a question which had repeatedly occurred to me that day, What had become of the printers?

"Naturally," replied Hamage, "they have had a rather hard time of it. Some classes of books, however, are still printed, and probably will continue to be for some time, although reading, as well as writing, is getting to be an increasingly rare accomplishment."

"Do you mean that your schools do not teach reading and writing?" I exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, they are still taught; but as the pupils need them little after leaving school, or even in school, for that matter, all their text−books being phonographic, they usually keep the acquirements about as long as a college graduate does his Greek. There is a strong movement already on foot to drop reading and writing entirely from the school course, but probably a compromise will be made for the present by substituting a shorthand or phonetic system, based upon the direct interpretation of the sound−waves themselves. This is, of course, the only logical method for the visual interpretation of sound. Students and men of research, however, will always need to understand how to read print, as much of the old literature will probably never repay phonographing."

"But," I said, "I notice that you still use printed phrases, as superscriptions, titles, and so forth."

"So we do," replied Hamage, "but phonographic substitutes could be easily devised in these cases, and no doubt will soon have to be supplied in deference to the growing number of those who cannot read."

"Did I understand you," I asked, "that the text−books in your schools even are phonographs?"

"Certainly," replied Hamage; "our children are taught by phonographs, recite to phonographs, and are examined by phonographs."

"Bless my soul!" I ejaculated.

"By all means," replied Hamage; "but there is really nothing to be astonished at. People learn and remember by impressions of sound instead of sight, that is all. The printer is, by the way, not the only artisan whose occupation phonography has destroyed. Since the disuse of print, opticians have mostly gone to the poor−house. The sense of sight was indeed terribly overburdened previous to the introduction of the phonograph, and, now that the sense of hearing is beginning to assume its proper share of work, it would be strange if an improvement in the condition of the people's eyes were not noticeable. Physiologists, moreover, promise us not only an improved vision, but a generally improved physique, especially in respect to bodily carriage, now that reading, writing, and study no longer involves, as formerly, the sedentary attitude with twisted spine and stooping shoulders. The phonograph has at last made it possible to expand the mind without cramping the body."

"It is a striking comment on the revolution wrought by the general introduction of the phonograph," I observed, "that whereas the misfortune of blindness used formerly to be the infirmity which most completely cut a man off from the world of books, which remained open to the deaf, the case is now precisely reversed."

"Yes," said Hamage, "it is certainly a curious reversal, but not so complete as you fancy. By the new improvements in the intensifier, it is expected to enable all, except the stone−deaf, to enjoy the phonograph, even when connected, as on railroad trains, with a common telephonic wire. The stone−deaf will of course be dependent upon printed books prepared for their benefit, as raised−letter books used to be for the blind."

As we entered the elevator to ascend to the upper floors of the establishment, Hamage explained that he wanted me to see, before I left, the process of phonographing books, which was the modern substitute for printing them.

Of course, he said, the phonographs of dramatic works were taken at the theatres during the representations of plays, and those of public orations and sermons are either similarly obtained, or, if a revised version is desired, the orator re−delivers his address in the improved form to a phonograph; but the great mass of publications were phonographed by professional elocutionists employed by the large publishing houses, of which this was one. He was acquainted with one of these elocutionists, and was taking me to his room.

We were so fortunate as to find him disengaged. Something, he said, had broken about the machinery, and he was idle while it was being repaired. His work−room was an odd kind of place. It was shaped something like the interior of a rather short egg. His place was on a sort of pulpit in the middle of the small end, while at the opposite end, directly before him, and for some distance along the sides toward the middle, were arranged tiers of phonographs. These were his audience, but by no means all of it. By telephonic communication he was able to address simultaneously other congregations of phonographs in other chambers at any distance. He said that in one instance, where the demand for a popular book was very great, he had charged five thousand phonographs at once with it.

I suggested that the saving of printers, pressmen, bookbinders, and costly machinery, together with the comparative indestructibility of phonographed as compared with printed books, must make them very cheap.

"They would be," said Hamage, "if popular elocutionists, such as Playwell here, did not charge so like fun for their services. The public has taken it into its head that he is the only first−class elocutionist, and won't buy anybody else's work. Consequently the authors stipulate that he shall interpret their productions, and the publishers, between the public and the authors, are at his mercy."

Playwell laughed. "I must make my hay while the sun shines," he said. "Some other elocutionist will be the fashion next year, and then I shall only get hack−work to do. Besides, there is really a great deal more work in my business than people will believe. For example, after I get an author's copy"

"Written?" I interjected.

"Sometimes it is written phonetically, but most authors dictate to a phonograph. Well, when I get it, I take it home and study it, perhaps a couple of days, perhaps a couple of weeks, sometimes, if it is really an important work, a month or two, in order to get into sympathy with the ideas, and decide on the proper style of rendering. All this is hard work, and has to be paid for."

At this point our conversation was broken off by Hamage, who declared that, if we were to catch the last train out of town before noon, we had no time to lose.

Of the trip out to Hamage's place I recall nothing. I was, in fact, aroused from a sound nap by the stopping of the train and the bustle of the departing passengers. Hamage had disappeared. As I groped about, gathering up my belongings, and vaguely wondering what had become of my companion, he rushed into the car, and, grasping my hand, gave me an enthusiastic welcome. I opened my mouth to demand what sort of a joke this belated greeting might be intended for, but, on second thought, I concluded not to raise the point. The fact is, when I came to observe that the time was not noon, but late in the evening, and that the train was the one I had left home on, and that I had not even changed my seat in the car since then, it occurred to me that Hamage might not understand allusions to the forenoon we had spent together. Later that same evening, however, the consternation of my host and hostess at my frequent and violent explosions of apparently causeless hilarity left me no choice but to make a clean breast of my preposterous experience. The moral they drew from it was the charming one that, if I would but oftener come to see them, a railroad trip would not so upset my wits.