PICTURES IN THE PRESS

Origin and Growth of Newspaper Illustration.

ART IN PRINTERS' INK

PROGRESS FROM CRUDE WOOD CUT TO THE HALF-TONE.

Mechanical Process Described — The Line Drawing—Etching on Zinc —Function of the Cartoon.

By Will H. Chandlee.

A pictorial spelling book is one of the earliest and dearest recollections of my childhood. It was rather an indifferent specimen typographically. The letters were large and heavy, particularly the capitals. At the head of each page was a woolly wood cut engraved in the good old Bewick style, very stiff and respectable. Under the pictures were short, terse sentences relating thereto, such as "John has a new top," "The cat is on the mat," "See the fat pig," etc. My favorite of the lot was a hen and her brood, with the query, "Can you see the hen and her chicks?" In the light of more mature years the absurdity of the question is evident, for the hen was abnormally large and the chicks occupied a very conspicuous position in the immediate foreground.

Will H. Chandlee.

I was too young to appreciate the literary beauties of the book or even spell the words, but the pictures filled my soul with joy. I would pore over them by day and cream of them at night. I lived with John and gloried in his new top, bade him good-bye when he nursed me away to supper and followed him home in fancy along the path over the hill which was just behind him in the picture. I peopled the low-roofed house at the edge of the distant woods with the members of his family. They were all inhabitants of the spelling book.

His grandmother, with a kitten playing about her feet, knitted serenely on the page opposite John; and his baby brother, with puffy cheeks, flourished a rattle near the end of her book. No amount of mere description could have added anything to the pictures. They told their own story, which is the chief end of all illustrations.

As a child is able to understand and recognize the picture of a cow long before the printed word conveys any meaning to him, so man in the childhood of civilization understood and communicated his ideas to his fellows by characters or drawings of objects as in the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptians.

Prehistoric Pictures.

In the caves of France, man of the stone age has left fragments of his history in rude drawings on the horn of the mammoth and other then existing animals. The picture writings of ancient Greece are preserved to us on many a delicate vase and amphora, and the daily life of Pompeii, the tragic, is depicted in the remains of its wall paintings and fresco decorations.

The plains Indians of our own country have for ages recorded their successes or failures in war and the chase by picturing them in colors upon buffalo hides or deerskins, and the Innuit or Eskimo of the far north keeps tally of his seal hunts and canoe voyages by carvings in ivory.

Du Halde is authority for the statement that the Chinese printed pictures from wooden blocks as early as 1120 B. C. and the Italians 1285 A. D.

The Germans were printing religious pictures in the early part of the fifteenth century, and Finiguerra, the Florentine, took impressions from copper plates in 1461. Botticelli also gave much attention to copper plate engraving, and since the days of Albrecht Durer and the Italian renaissance, illustration has gradually gained the attention and claimed the services of the greatest minds in the world of art, until today artist and illustrator are one and interchangeable. Edwin A. Abbey, whose masterly decorations of the "Quest of the Holy Grail" are in the Boston Public Library, and who was commissioned to paint the coronation of King Edward VII of England, was but a few years ago simply an illustrator in black and white.

The monthly magazine was the pioneer of popular illustrations in America. Godey's Ladies' Book will be remembered for its elaborate steel-engraved frontispieces and lithographed folders in color of the fearful and wonderful feminine fashions of the post-bellum period; also its diagrams for the construction of "tatting" and the "herring-bone" stitch.

War-Time Illustrations.

During the civil war the "weekly" was the illustrated newspaper. One has but to glance at its soulless wood cuts to appreciate the progress that has been made in both the spirit and the letter of illustrating. Then there was little encouragement to individuality of style, for the artist must needs submit his work to the engraver, who knew but one deadly interpretation—the conventional.

In the war pictures of '61-'65 regiments of soldiers in patent leather boots and fashion-plate trousers charged in unbroken lines over the roughest kind of country, encouraged by a faultlessly attired officer with drawn sword pointing forward. Compare with those the war pictures of today, the work of Detaille, Pryor, Schreyvogel and Remington; the difference is obvious to the least informed.

The rapidity and absolute accuracy with which a drawing or photograph can be reproduced and made ready for the press has been the making of the illustrated daily papers. At first the pictures were very crude, seldom more than mere "outlines." They were made by what is known to the "craft" as the "mud" or chalk-plate process, which is now used only for occasional map or diagram work. The making of cuts in this manner is briefly as follows: A steel plate is thinly coated with a fine white clay or kaolin paste. When this dries it is ready for engraving. The design to be cut is traced lightly upon the surface of the clay, after which it is cut through with the proper tools to the hard surface of the steel. After the loose clay dust has been carefully blown out of the cuts made by the graver or tool, the plate is placed in an iron casting box and molten metal poured thereon; this fills the engraved lines down to the face of the steel plate. When the metal cools it is removed from the clay, trimmed and mounted and is ready for printing.

This mode of engraving is known by many names, but the principle is the same. Of the various methods of photo-engraving zinc etching is the one almost exclusively used in modern newspaper illustrating.

The Line Drawing.

After the drawing to be reproduced is made by the artist it is photographed in the ordinary way—that is, a glass negative is made.

This negative is then thickened and intensified by chemical treatment until when held to the light the photograph of the original drawing appears line for line, as though drawn with a fine point upon a black surface. A sheet of polished zinc of the required size is next coated with albumen sensitized with bichromate of ammonia. The glass negative is placed over the zinc and the whole put in a printing frame and exposed to the sun or the concentrated rays of an "arc" electric light.

After a few minutes' exposure the negative is removed and the zinc plate is placed under a tap. The albumen readily washes off except where it has been hardened by the action of the light through the lines of the drawing on the negative.

In other words, the original drawing is reproduced upon the zinc in gelatine lines.

The zinc plate is then placed in a "cradle" or tray containing a bath of nitric acid and water. The acid eats the exposed portions of the zinc, leaving intact the lines of the drawing, which are protected by the little strips of hardened gelatine; these remain in relief and are the printing surface of the finished cut. By this method of engraving a dozen or more cuts can be made ready for the press in something less than an hour.

The Half-Tone.

The process of making a half-tone engraving (one made directly from a photograph without the intervention of the draughtsman) is identical with the foregoing, except that in the latter the printing surface is secured by interposing an extremely fine screen between the sensitized negative plate and the object to be photographed. This cuts the surface of the plate in cross-lines of light and shade as these values appear in the original.

It is then subjected to the acid bath and etched in the usual manner. The half-tone in the last few years has, to a large extent, superseded the line cut, which is now used chiefly in the larger daily papers for the decorative borders or embellishments which surround the groups of photographs, and in many of the Sunday supplements are printed in colors.

Color printing is a comparatively recent addition to the artistic embellishment of the newspaper, and is largely responsible for the ebullition of the so-called comic supplement. It is yet in a crude state, but is in harmonious keeping with the variety of humor which it usually illuminates.

Cartoons.

The importance of the cartoon naturally places the cartoonist among the very necessary adjuncts of a newspaper equipment.

Felix Mahony.

The cartoon is or should be a graphic editorial in every sense. It should fulfill the original function of an illustration. It is the hieroglyph in its highest estate when it tells its story simply and directly and approaches its ancient prototype in the popular idea of obscuring when it is overburdened with labels and explanatory notes, as is unfortunately too often the case.

In cartooning, the idea is the thing, after which its interpretation in the simplest, and at the same time the most comprehensive manner, is the burden of the artist and the proof of his ability.

The use and effectiveness of the cartoon in recent years is exemplified in the well-remembered instance of Thomas Nast's drawings in Harper's Weekly, which were largely responsible for the downfall of the Tweed ring, and, later, Joseph Keppler's tattooed man in Puck, which was a factor in the political destiny of the late James G. Blaine.

Too often the weapon of the cartoonist is used unjustly, and although its ultimate effects may be far more than was intended, the mischief is started with the little snowball which accumulates and grows until its victim is overwhelmed at the foot of the hill. The cartoon policy of The Star has been to respect the rights and feelings of the individual, and to confine its shafts as far as possible to the puncturing of public boils and institutional gall spots.

The Star's First Picture.

The first picture published in The Star was a cartoon. It was many years before Mr. Felix Mahony, the paper's present cartoonist, ever thought of wielding a cartoonic pen or pencil—on a time when the present day Old Subscriber and Veritas were playing hookey and fishing for mullets in old Tiber creek.

The theme of the cartoon was an adjournment of Congress for the Christmas holidays.

In The Star's columns at that time was wont to appear a little cut used to attract attention of the casual reader to advertisements for run-away slaves. Since 1898 Mr. Mahony's cartoons have been an almost daily feature of the front page of The Star, a feat which can only be appreciated by one who knows the joys and sorrows of the cartoonist's life. The dark days which come when there is nothing to cartoon, the difficulties which invariably surround the picturing of the most timely subjects, and when, at last, the cartoonist furnishes his picture and says to himself, "That's pretty good," to be buttonholed by a friend on the morrow, who, with anxious face and tearful eyes, prays for an explanation.

General illustration became a feature of The Star in 1886, since which time the paper has sailed a safe middle course in that regard; believing that where a picture can be made to supplement the text or add legitimate interest to a story it should be used, avoiding bloated and over-decorated Sunday, or, in The Star's case, Saturday editions; art supplements of questionable artistic value and inflamed comic sections, whose brilliancy is more chromatic than intellectual, eschewing elaborate "layouts" or full pages of grouped pictures and illuminated with intermittent spots of fragmentary text. In fine, holding to the principle that a few good pictures are superior to many poor ones, and that a newspaper is not or should not be an illustrated magazine.

Modern Newspaper Illustrating.

Modern newspaper illustrating is one of the notable products of the last twenty years, although in 1835 the New York Herald printed a map of the burnt district of the great fire of that year, together with a view of the old Merchants' Exchange. In 1838 were depicted in the same paper graphic scenes at the polls, and the famous "Boz" (Dickens) ball at the Park Theater was illustrated with twelve wood cuts. In connection with the funeral ceremonies of General Jackson in 1845 a pictorial view was given of the procession, occupying a full page. Contemporaries ridiculed the efforts of the Herald, the Albany Evening News and others endeavoring to demolish its enterprise by claiming that the picture had already done duty at Victoria's coronation, General Harrison's funeral and the Croton water celebration. The first illustrated daily in America was the New York Graphic, first published March 4, 1873. Its pictures were of current events drawn in pen and ink and photographed on stone, from which the pictures were reproduced, and the descriptive and other reading matter was printed afterward from the ordinary presses. The Graphic was discontinued in 1889, at which time the photo-engraving on metal plates, capable of being printed with the body of the paper, made possible the illustrating of the regular dailies.

THE ART ROOM.

NEAR CLEVELAND PARK (Half-tone).

Trees in Kansas City.

From Park and Cemetery.

Kansas City is now setting an up to date example for our western cities in the care of its trees. It has secured the services of a properly qualified city forester, and has passed ordinances regulating the planting, trimming and care of its trees in such terms and under such provisions that its citizens will realize their importance and the necessity of conforming to them in a wise and co-operative spirit. The press is aiding in the work to a very appreciable degree, and the result will be that in a few years those who once knew the energetic city in its practically treeless condition will marvel at the change so wise and beneficial a program has brought about. It is always well said that when the people are educated to the degree of recognizing the importance of rules and regulations of practical necessity they are at once loyal to them. But to reach this point the requisite knowledge must be conveyed in a comprehensible and attractive manner, which comparatively few public officials are capable of doing. The press communications of the Kansas City tree official, and the advice and directions emanating from his office, however, vindicate him in this respect, and afford examples of lessons to the public which remind us of works of Prof. Collins of the Brooklyn Tree Planting Society, which has extended so promising an influence in the east.

People Who Are Too Early.

Lady Onslaw in The Queen.

Tiresome as the guests are who spoil a dinner and keep all their fellow-guests waiting twenty minutes longer than necessary, thus prolonging the dreary before-dinner interval, I think one feels even more exasperated, from a hostess' point of view, with those who come too early. While the anxious giver of the feast is hurrying into her dinner dress, it is trying to hear a peal from the hall-door bell a quarter of an hour before the earliest expectation, announcing the advent of the first arrival, who must be smiled upon and conversed with, in spite of aggrieved feelings.

THE WORLD MUCH BETTER.

A Cheerful Estimate of the Year That is About to Close.

From World's Work.

As the end of the year draws nigh we may congratulate ourselves that it will leave the world in much better plight than it found it. When it began there was war in South Africa and there were troublesome hostilities in the Philippines. Now peace is broken, if broken at all, only by the unrest in Venezuela and Colombia and in Hayti, that follows their revolutions, and in Africa, where the "Mad Mullah" has attacked the British. And not only is the world at peace, but the great nations are more securely linked together, perhaps, than they ever were before. New forces for peace are at work, especially two of the strongest possible world influences; an organized and closely knit commerce, which none can afford to disturb for fear of a lasting loss of trade, and, in particular, the overwhelming commercial power of the United States, which would gain a still surer lead by the suspension of industrial activity in any important country. The little periodical adjustments of power and of privilege that the nations used to make by special treaties were crude and weak guarantees of peace in comparison with the compelling power of modern commerce and all that it implies. The most recent wars were really only frontier wars.

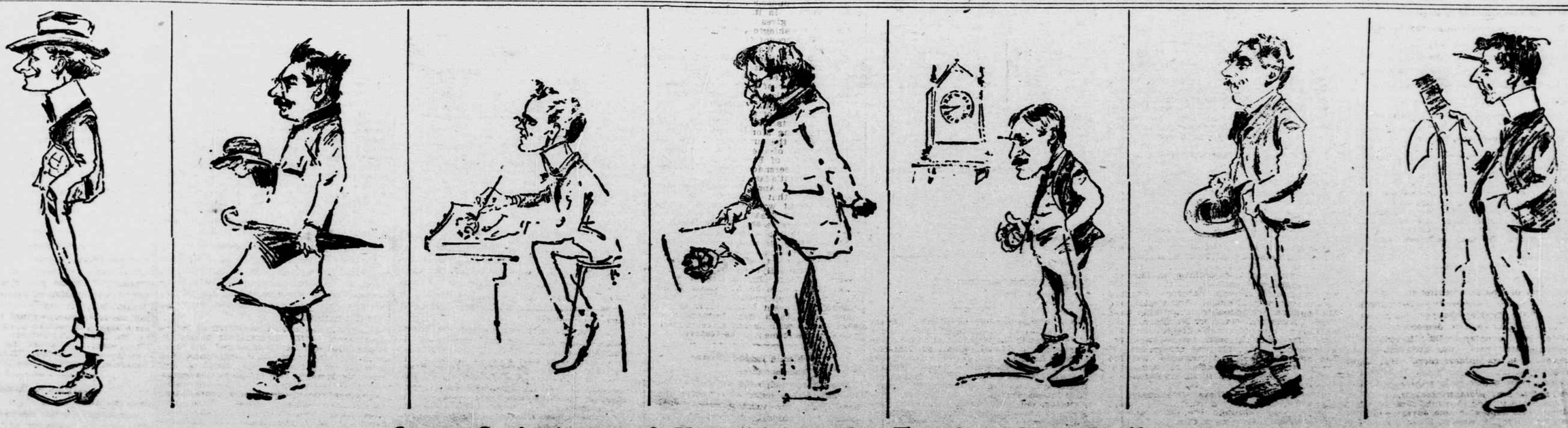
Men without historical knowledge easily believe that their own era is a new era in the world. But men with historical knowledge now see international conditions that are radically different and radically better for peace than any of the battered centuries behind us knew. The unfettering of the dominant race of men by free institutions to free opportunity on the most fruitful continent, and the industrial rise of the republic, fortifying its political power, have put all nations in a new relation to one another and in a new relation to civilization. This revolutionary fact has become plainer this year than it ever was before. Its far-reaching significance we do not yet see, but it looks like a great force that will work for the steadying of governments and for the sane direction of endeavor for centuries to come. For it is the natural result of a great law of human development and not an advantage won by the strength of armies or by the skill of diplomatists or by any other power that may change with a change of rulers and of generations. The industrial man becomes stronger, the political man weaker; and economic force is beginning to rule the world as military force once ruled it.

Zoological Gardens Criticised.

Henry Stephens in the Saturday Review.

The periodical feeding of the python on a live goat at the Zoological Gardens is a process marked at times by very disgusting incidents; and the question is being asked why these reptiles should not be fed on newly killed and still warm carcasses instead of living animals. The rigid secrecy with which the managers of the Zoo have attempted to conceal from public knowledge the repulsive tragedy of the python and its goat is an indication that all is not as it should be in the "Bastille of the Beasts."

Visions of Christmas.



Some Caricatures of Members of the Evening Star Staff.