

What am I? I am an operator, sir, on the line of the Great Western Telegraph Company, sir, that's what I am, and I date myself there, and I am a better operator in the employ of the company than myself, though perhaps I am not the person that should say it. And I enjoy myself, too, sir, I wear my clothes cut in the latest style, smoke the best cigars, and play a pretty good game of billiards. Is not that enjoyment, sir? I know some people think I am a little fast, but then I am bound to have my pleasure, sir. An operator's life is not the easy, careless one some people think it is. It is not a pleasant duty sitting up half the night dispatching messages, while others are sleeping, their time in amusement or quiet slumber; nor is it always agreeable to know that, while you are tired and sleepy, and are longing for a good sleep, you have important messages to send off which must be sent with strict accuracy, or somebody will suffer terribly. Therefore, when I can, I put off the feeling of care and responsibility, and I go to sleep, and I have a little harmless amusement. But I was not always an operator, sir; blame you no. Men don't jump into good positions like mine; they have to work their way up to them. I was a ladder at the very lowest round of the ladder, sir, and then pull ourselves up round by round. That was the way I commenced, sir, and that is the reason I am so proud of my position. I earned it by hard, faithful, humble labor. That is the beauty to our institutions, sir. A man may make for himself as high a position as he pleases, almost, if he only has the energy and perseverance. Just let him attend closely to his business, work hard, act honestly, and before he knows it he is rising, sir, and nothing will keep him down. But I do not intend to preach a sermon; there are others who can do that better than I can; but I was going to tell you a story of two people who came under my observation while I was yet at the bottom of the ladder.

What was I then? I was a telegraph boy, sir. I carried the messages from the office to the different parties to whom they were addressed. That's what I did, and my work was well done, or I should not have been the chief operator in this office, as I am today. Just as soon as it was light in the morning, winter or summer, I was in the office, and as soon as a message was received I would take it and scamper off. They used to say in the office that I could deliver a message and return quicker than any of the other boys, and that pleased me.

One I used to see some strange things sometimes, when I delivered the messages. Sometimes they would be good, and then they would smile and laugh, or jump and clap their hands, just in the degree that the messages pleased them. And then, again, the news would be bad, and they would cry or, or stamp around and swear, and I would stand and watch them, imagining that I was studying their characters, until they would send me off with a reply, or hint that some was to be sent, upon which hint I generally hurried away quickly enough.

There was one old banker I liked to watch when I took him the report of the New York stock market, which I did several times a day. Sometimes the reports would please him, and then he would be as smiling and pleasant as any one could be, and sometimes would speak quite kindly to me. At other times stock would be down, that he wanted down, or stock up that he wanted down, and then he would look terrible cross and angry, going about snapping and snarling like a savage cat, and once he threatened to kick me out of his office, because I remarked that the report I had brought him did not seem to suit him.

Sometimes the messages I had to deliver were announcements of deaths, and then it was sad enough to watch the countenances of the recipients, as they opened the messages and read the terrible news. I did not always linger on these occasions, for they too often brought to mind a message my mother once received, and I do not like to think of her despairing look as she told me that my father had been killed on the railroad.

But I keep running off, when I should be defining my remarks to the subject of my story. And here it is, sir, and though it is short, sad, and simple, I think it will interest you, and convince you that there is more romance in life, than you will find in all of the novels that have ever been written. We think we know the world, sir, but we don't; we don't more than half realize what's going on about us. If some one should just write plain history of a single community, with all their joys and sorrows, hopes, fears and deeds it would contain more romance than the War of the Roses.

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