

Victorian Childhood - Post Office Boy Messengers

A Day in the Life of a Telegraph Boy An article for boys, written by one of them

The daily life of a London telegraph messenger would only be one official, monotonous duty if it were not for the different sights that one is brought into contact with, in the course of a day. The daily routine is: on arrival, signing on duty, then delivery till dinner: after dinner, delivery till ten, then one again delivery till your duty terminates. A kitchen is supplied for the boys, over which an overseer presides.

You sign on duty, and almost the first message you have is for a very rough neighbourhood indeed, and you experience some difficulty in getting attention, and on reaching the house, find the streetdoor open, no knocker or bells, whilst crowds of squalid children crowd around the entrance. At length a broken-down specimen of a woman approaches and eyes you suspiciously.

"Hello," says she, "what der yer want? A telegraft! Who for, anybody dead?" "No," you reply, "It's for Bung." "There's nobody 'or that name lives 'ere as I knows of; but wait 'arf a tick." She goes to the foot of a dirty and tumble-down staircase and calls out in non-meolodious tones: "Mrs. Muggins, are yer there?"

There comes no answer to her call, but presently you hear a rather heavy footfall making its way downstairs, and Mrs. Muggins at last makes her appearance. "There's no name of bung here, is they?" says my first. "Yus, there was, at least up to last night, when he got pinched; don't yer remember he dosed at the top!" replies Mrs. Muggins. Then, turning to me, she says, "It ain't here; he's gone to prison."

So the message goes back to the office undelivered. Later on, another is given you for a rather prosperous merchant, who after opening it smiles, says "Thanks," and after giving you twopence, wishes you "Good morning." You can always do with these. Thus we go, from poor to rich. Our delivery also embraces most of the big theatres. Towards the afternoon you have one for a certain theatre, where you are allowed to cross the stage to reach the offices.

Oftentimes I have stopped at rehearsals, being in the midst of cowboys, Indians, etc. I have seen one of the most thrilling scenes of a popular play whilst waiting for a reply at the footlights. You may now have one of one of those lofty business houses where, although there is a lift, the hall-porter refuses to take you up. On inquiring of the hall-porter on what floor it is, he calmly replies, with a sarcastic sneer, "Five," and as we well know he won't run us up, the only way out of the difficulty is to walk.

I well remember an incident relative to this. A lift-man met one of the boys on the third floor, and the boy asked him to take him down. "Jump in," said he, and the boy jumped. Closing the door, he took the boy to the sixth floor, told him to get out, as he wanted to grease the rope, shut the door, went down, and left the boy at the top of the building to walk down. Needless to say, that boy was me. Apart from the daily life, the boys have a generous spirit. Many of the hawkers have benefited by us, and there is one who was started in business (if you may call it such, selling matches, etc.) by the boys over two years ago, who still pursues his humble calling, round about the office.