Visiting the signal box

No train leaves or enters the station until signalled to do so from here, and the safety and life of every man, woman, and child leaving Victoria depends upon the vigilance of the single sentinel at his post. He is relieved three times in the twenty-four hours, and the turn of duty we are about to keep commenced at half-past seven this morning, and will terminate at half-past one this afternoon. The whole signal duty of the Hole falls upon three men, who take their eight hours' work alternately, and who with one telegraph clerk are its sole occupants. Passing up the centre platform of the London and Brighton Railway, we step, not without some tremors of misgiving, on to the lines at its extreme end, and after leaving a busy signal-box to the right, and dodging a couple of passenger trains, a stray engine or two, and a long batch of returning "empties" from the Crystal Palace, reach a small wooden staircase and ante-room, from which we look into the Hole. (p. 325)

sentinel: One who or something which keeps guard

ante-room: A room before, or forming an entrance to, another

Inside the signal-box

It is very like an unfurnished private box at the theatre, into which some of the mechanist's properties have been put by mistake. Cautiously warned by our conductor not to distract the attention of the man on duty, we advance on tiptoe, and stand on the threshold between ante-room and box. A nervous jump back again, a vivid experience of the sensation known as "pins and needles," a half involuntary guarding of the face as if to ward off an impending blow, are the first results of the experiment. For the mechanist's properties are of the most impulsively practicable kind, and bells ring, whistles shriek, hands move, and huge iron bars creak and groan apparently of their own accord, and certainly by agencies which are invisible. On the right-hand wall of the box, and on a level with the eye, are fastened four cases, which communicate telegraphically with the platforms of the station, with Battersea Park, and with Stewart's-lane junction; and the movable faces of these are full of mysterious eloquence. The furthest one strikes what seems to be a gong twice, and then, without waiting for a reply, bangs the gong four times; the needle hands of the others tick away with spasmodic vigour, and the telegraphic clerk busily passes from one to the other, as if satisfying the wants of each. Beyond them is a small wooden desk and an open book, in which from time to time their utterances are recorded, much as if they were oracles whose sayings would be afterwards interpreted by the high priests. (pp. 325-326)

mechanist: one who constructs or uses machinery

ante-room: A room before, or forming an entrance to, another

eloquence: expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness

spasmodic: marked by jerkiness or suddenness of muscular movement

Looking out of the signal-box

Beyond the desk, and at the far end of the Hole, is a narrow window, through which the workmen employed on an extension of railway, the rude chasms formed by the excavators, the premature ruins of the houses half pulled down, and the shapely indications of the coming lines, may all be seen. To the left of this window, and facing the entrance door, is an apparatus which I can only describe as terrifying. Composed of strong and massive cranks so connected as to form a consistent whole, and resembling a tangled agricultural harrow, or one of the weird instruments of torture which racked the limbs of schismatics in the bad old times, it has secret springs, and bells, and joints, which creak, and act, and tingle with a direct suddenness highly discomposing to a stranger. You look mildly at one of its joints, and have a question concerning its use on the tip of your tongue, when, presto! it gives a cumbrous flap, and becomes a staring red signboard, with "Crystal Palace up waiting," or "Brighton down waiting," staring you in the face. The bells ring violently, [and] the speaking faces of the shut-up cases tingle in unison. (p. 326)

rude: Unformed; unfinished; not given shape, order, or regularity

harrow: A heavy frame of timber (or iron) set with iron teeth, which is dragged over ploughed land to pulverize and stir the soil, root up weeds, or cover in the seed

schismatics: those who promote or encourage a breaking of unity in the Church

cumbrous: Troublesome from bulk or heaviness; clumsy

Visiting the signal-box (3 texts in 1)

No train leaves or enters the station until signalled to do so from here, and the safety and life of every man, woman, and child leaving Victoria depends upon the vigilance of the single sentinel at his post. He is relieved three times in the twenty-four hours, and the turn of duty we are about to keep commenced at half-past seven this morning, and will terminate at half-past one this afternoon. The whole signal duty of the Hole falls upon three men, who take their eight hours' work alternately, and who with one telegraph clerk are its sole occupants. Passing up the centre platform of the London and Brighton Railway, we step, not without some tremors of misgiving, on to the lines at its extreme end, and after leaving a busy signal-box to the right, and dodging a couple of passenger trains, a stray engine or two, and a long batch of returning "empties" from the Crystal Palace, reach a small wooden staircase and ante-room, from which we look into the Hole. It is very like an unfurnished private box at the theatre, into which some of the mechanist's properties have been put by mistake. Cautiously warned by our conductor not to distract the attention of the man on duty, we advance on tiptoe, and stand on the threshold between ante-room and box. A nervous jump back again, a vivid experience of the sensation known as "pins and needles," a half involuntary guarding of the face as if to ward off an impending blow, are the first results of the experiment. For the mechanist's properties are of the most impulsively practicable kind, and bells ring, whistles shriek, hands move, and huge iron bars creak and groan apparently of their own accord, and certainly by agencies which are invisible. On the right-hand wall of the box, and on a level with the eye, are fastened four cases, which communicate telegraphically with the platforms of the station, with Battersea Park, and with Stewart's-lane junction; and the movable faces of these are full of mysterious eloquence. The furthest one strikes what seems to be a gong twice, and then, without waiting for a reply, bangs the gong four times; the needle hands of the others tick away with spasmodic vigour, and the telegraphic clerk busily passes from one to the other, as if satisfying the wants of each. Beyond them is a small wooden desk and an open book, in which from time to time their utterances are recorded, much as if they were oracles whose sayings would be afterwards interpreted by the high priests.



Beyond the desk, and at the far end of the Hole, is a narrow window, through which the workmen employed on an extension of railway, the rude chasms formed by the excavators, the premature ruins of the houses half pulled down, and the shapely indications of the coming lines, may all be seen. To the left of this window, and facing the entrance door, is an apparatus which I can only describe as terrifying. Composed of strong and massive cranks so connected as to form a consistent whole, and resembling a tangled agricultural harrow, or one of the weird instruments of torture which racked the limbs of schismatics in the bad old times, it has secret springs, and bells, and joints, which creak, and act, and tingle with a direct suddenness highly discomposing to a stranger. You look mildly at one of its joints, and have a question concerning its use on the tip of your tongue, when, presto! it gives a cumbrous flap, and becomes a staring red signboard, with "Crystal Palace up waiting," or "Brighton down waiting," staring you in the face. The bells ring violently, [and] the speaking faces of the shut-up cases tingle in unison.

sentinel: One who or something which keeps guard

ante-room: A room before, or forming an entrance to, another

mechanist: one who constructs or uses machinery

eloquence: expressing thought with fluency, force, and appropriateness

spasmodic: marked by jerkiness or suddenness of muscular movement

rude: Unformed; unfinished; not given shape, order, or regularity

harrow: A heavy frame of timber (or iron) set with iron teeth, which is dragged over ploughed land to pulverize and stir the soil, root up weeds, or cover in the seed

schismatics: those who promote or encourage a breaking of unity in the Church

cumbrous: Troublesome from bulk or heaviness; clumsy

Visiting the signal box

No train leaves or enters the station until signalled to do so from here, and the safety and life of every man, woman, and child leaving Victoria [station] depends upon the vigilance of the single sentinel at his post. He is relieved three times in the twenty-four hours, and the turn of duty we are about to keep commenced at half-past seven this morning, and will terminate at half-past one this afternoon. The whole signal duty of the Hole falls upon three men, who take their eight hours' work alternately [...]. Passing up the centre platform of the London and Brighton Railway, we step, not without some tremors of misgiving, on to the lines at its extreme end, and after leaving a busy signal-box to the right, and dodging a couple of passenger trains [...] reach a small wooden staircase and ante-room, from which we look into the Hole. (p. 325)

vigilance: watchfulness against danger

sentinel: One who or something which keeps guard

ante-room: A room before, or forming an entrance to, another

Inside the signal-box

[...] Cautiously warned by our conductor not to distract the attention of the man on duty, we advance on tiptoe, and stand on the threshold between ante-room and box. A nervous jump back again [...] are the first results of the experiment. [...] Bells ring, whistles shriek, hands move, and huge iron bars creak and groan apparently of their own accord[...]. On the right-hand wall of the box, and on a level with the eye, are fastened four cases, which communicate telegraphically with the platforms of the station, with Battersea Park, and with Stewart's-lane junction; and the movable faces of these are full of mysterious eloquence. The furthest one strikes what seems to be a gong twice, and then, without waiting for a reply, bangs the gong four times; the needle hands of the others tick away with spasmodic vigour, and the telegraphic clerk busily passes from one to the other[...]. (pp. 325-326)

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Looking out of the signal-box

Beyond the desk, and at the far end of the Hole, is a narrow window, through which the workmen employed on an extension of railway, [...] ruins of the houses half pulled down, and the shapely indications of the coming lines, may all be seen. To the left of this window, and facing the entrance door, is an apparatus which I can only describe as terrifying. Composed of strong and massive cranks so connected as to form a consistent whole, and resembling a tangled agricultural harrow, or one of the weird instruments of torture [...], it has secret springs, and bells, and joints, which creak, and act, and tingle with a direct suddenness highly discomposing to a stranger. You look mildly at one of its joints, and have a question concerning its use on the tip of your tongue, when, presto! it gives a cumbrous flap, and becomes a staring red signboard, with "Crystal Palace up waiting," or "Brighton down waiting," staring you in the face. The bells ring violently [...]. (p. 326)

apparatus: equipments, material, mechanism, machinery

harrow: A heavy frame of timber (or iron) set with iron teeth, which is dragged over ploughed land to pulverize and stir the soil, root up weeds, or cover in the seed

schismatics: those who promote or encourage a breaking of unity in the Church

cumbrous: Troublesome from bulk or heaviness; clumsy