A Visit to Holyoke.

I.

ONE of the busiest though by no means one of the most picturesque of the larger towns along the banks of the Connecticut is this thriving little city, the centre of the paper industry in the United States. Crowded together along the river, or upon the numerous canals which render its water-power more available, are the mills of the thirty-five or more firms and companies engaged in the manufacture of paper of almost every sort and quality. It was early one August morning that the writer started out from Amherst, distant some twelve miles, to learn the mysteries of the process by means of which one's cast-off garments become agents in the transmission of ideas.

The antique stage with its four horses rolled, or, to drop the conventional term and speak correctly, groaned and rattled away from the trim little post-office; the two young girls upon the back seat arranged their bags and bundles, remarking sotto voce as they did so, that it was going to be a beautiful morning to "watch" the scenery, and we were off.

The road soon led us outside the town, where we caught the full beauty of the Pelham Hills, among which Amherst nests, and a little later we were riding through broad fields planted with tobacco, which is grown in considerable quantity about there. We drove into Hadley shortly after, where the stage delivered an attenuated mail-bag; and one could but be struck by the dreary quiet of the place, beside which Sleepy Hollow would become a bustling metropolis. It was here that the gray-haired regicide appeared so suddenly from his retreat in old colonial days, and saved the settlement from its Indian invaders.

The town is about half-way to Northampton, the seat of Smith College, and dear to the hearts of Amherst boys, who are rarely so poor as to be without one or two feminine "cousins" there in term time.

Here I took the train, and after a few minutes' ride along the river found myself at the end of my journey, and starting out under the guidance of a friend, who was provided with the necessary passes. Having presented our credentials at one of the largest mills, we a little later entered the rag-room in company with a kindly foreman. It was several seconds before our eyes became accustomed to the cloud of dust and lint which filled the room; but our nostrils were instantly aware of a most unsavory odor which seemed to exhale from everything. Long tables with transverse partitions went around the room, and at short distances broken scythes were firmly fastened perpendicularly to the table, and with their edges toward the wall. Before each scythe stood a woman, surrounded by numerous baskets, who dexterously removed all hooks and eyes, buttons and similar articles, not to speak of bricks, corsets, and old boots, from the rags as they were brought to her from the bales. She then sorts the rags according to the system adopted in the mill she may be in, and after cutting them in small pieces places them in their proper baskets. They are then taken up stairs, and put into one end of large cylindrical dusters, which are placed horizontally. The brush inside, by an application of the principle of Archimedes' screw, moves the rags continually forward, finally discharging them at the farther end, comparatively free from dust, although anything but clean. From here we followed them to the rotary boilers, the foreman remarking as we passed a pile of corsets that they had sold the day before sixteen tons of those hollow mockeries, the accumulation of less than three months.

We found the boilers to be long cylindrical affairs, placed horizontally, so that they could revolve upon their longer axis. They were charged through a man-hole with about a ton of rags apiece, and a quantity of lime and water, which varied somewhat with the condition of the rags. In some mills soda ash is also added, and is, of course, converted by the lime into caustic soda. The man-hole is then sealed up, and a low pressure of steam admitted, while the boiler slowly revolves for about twelve hours. The rags, which to all appearances are now far dirtier than