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NIXIES

Is a postoffice clerk a Chinaman? How many people who use the mails think of the men whose duty it is to decipher their penmanship?

It is the conviction of a good many clerks that thousands of people direct a letter with no other idea than that some divine agency will see that it goes to its desired destination no matter what is written.

There is plenty of substantiation in the evidence.

Every Saturday a consignment of "nixies" is sent to the dead letter office in Washington. A "nixy" is a letter that is no good; it doesn't get there. The reason may be from one of a good many causes. The main trouble is in faulty address. The ablest readers in the office may be unable to gain any light from this. Very frequently a pretty running hand is encountered, which, though handsome to look at, is a fright fresh from a nightmare. In such a case beauty weighs but little in the opinion of the mailing clerk. Again he will find a hideous dream in a scrawl that even a Chinaman could not read.

In fact when a mail clerk wakes in the middle of the night bathed in a cold clammy sweat, his mouth parched and all his instincts prompting him to shriek and pull the covers up over

his head it may safely be ventured that he has been dreaming of the handwriting of some of the alleged educated people of the world and the community.

There are several grades of nixies. One kind is a letter which gives the name and street address plainly enough, but fails to present the name of the town or the name of the state. Every day half a dozen letters or more come to Lincoln which should go to the Lincoln of some other of the score of states in the union which possess cities of this name. These misdirected letters are returned to the sender provided he makes his whereabouts known in the return corner of the envelope. Sometimes he does this and sometimes he does not. When he has failed, away go the letters to the dead letter office. There they are opened and if anything of value is found, it is returned to the sender if his address is indicated on the inside. Otherwise he pays the penalty of his negligence by never knowing what became of his letter for it is consigned to the fire after a record is made of its journey to the office.

O, the carelessness of people! Mingled with the motley trash of drummers' hotel letters and nondescript envelopes gone astray, are found ever and anon the handsomely sealed epistles of lovers true. That is what they are called by the clerks anyway, and they are quite familiar with the style of envelope used by those who adore each other. And surely it must be lovers only, so wrapt in their passion that they drop their messages in the mail boxes, both unstamped and undressed and even with no sign in the return corner. Who knows how many lovers' quarrels may not result from this neglect which may entail heartaches and distrusts and accusations! There is enough of sympathy in the hearts of the mail clerks to induce a groan when they come to this kind of neglected letter. When one distributor hears another moan in this manner and mutter, "Too bad," it is a sur-guess that he has discovered the disastrous thoughtlessness of somebody's sweetheart.

No letters are ever opened in the

postoffice to aid in discovering the sender. If the addresses are unintelligible they are placed in the section devoted to nixies and saved until the nearest Saturday when they are forwarded to Washington. The distributing clerks, of which there are five in the Lincoln postoffice, do their best to read everything that comes in the mail. If the penmanship is uncommonly wretched they all put their heads together. If they still fail the directory clerk takes hold and delves still more, taking all the time necessary in reason. Poorly as letters are addressed, however, it is only one in thousands that baffle these readers. So familiar are they with all kinds and characters of penmanship that it really is an extraordinary poor piece of writing that more than taxes their resources.

The fact is that it takes a pretty smart man to be either a mail distributor or mailing clerk in a large postoffice, like that of Lincoln, for instance. The five distributors and six mailing clerks in the Lincoln postoffice are familiar, in a degree, with the whereabouts of everybody in town and cities all over the union. It is the distributors who sort the mail that comes into the office and dole it out to the carriers. In order to do this they must be able to tell at a glance to what part of the city a letter goes and the mail man who is the person to carry it. The person who is started in at the postoffice is generally given the position of stamper, at the wages of \$500 a year. If he rises to the position of distributing clerk he gets a raise from \$600 to \$900. The highest salary paid in the office is \$1,200, received by the chief clerk of the money order department and by the chief distributing clerk.

As the department requires the closest, most faithful as well as the keenest intelligence, the clerks are righteously of the opinion that there should be the better inducement of more handsome salaries. For this reason if for nothing else they feel they ought to come in for better recognition on the part of the government. They devote their energies and brains to a style of labor that fits them for nothing else in the world, and in fact unfits them

for everything else. They are tied to one spot with no chance of progress outside of the office. It is in knowing the town and the people that they hold their positions and the best man in the Lincoln office would be worth nothing in Omaha or any other town of Lincoln's class or higher. It is hard and confining but it would be much less like servitude if people would exercise more care in addressing their missives, and if the government would considerably tack on a few more figures to the salary roll.



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