

How a Letter Travels---Scenes in Postal Service

WHEN a letter, paper or other communication is deposited for transmission through the mails, it passes through many hands before it arrives at its destination, and every hand is known and watched from the time of the receipt of the letter until its delivery. The first man to receive the letter from the box is the collector, one of a corps of men whose duty it is to collect the mail for delivery at the central office. Some of these men go with horse carts. By reason of their continuous service the horses learn the location of the post boxes as well as their masters, and will walk from one to the other with unerring instinct, only disconcerted when a new box is placed on the route. At the central office a force of men sort the collections, separating the letters from the papers and packages, placing the former in order for postmarking or cancellation of the stamps. In the larger offices this work is done by electric machines, a recent invention, which has a capacity of several thousands of letters an hour.

Then comes the first of the distributions, which are to continue until the message has been placed in the hands of the person to whom it is addressed. Standing before a case of boxes on which are marked the names of states, of postal routes and of

before their arrival placed in the car all mail on hand intended for their route. The first duty of the postal clerk is to get his car in shape for work. Sacks are arranged, the cases labeled and the sacks of mail stored in one end of the car in order-

knowledge of the regular junction points, but must know how to reach the various offices by unusual lines in case his train is unable to form a junction with its ordinary connections. A wreck or washout may disarrange the postal route junctions in an entire state, and the postal clerk is counted good who can get his mail to its destination with the least delay.

The mail with which the clerk starts out is only a part of that which he must handle. At every office on the line pouches and sacks are to be received and delivered. On the slower trains this is done while the train stops for passengers, but on the special mail trains, or flyers, mail is received and delivered without stopping the train. For this purpose an imperfect device is used by which the clerk seizes from a projecting arm upon a pole at the height of the car door the pouch intended for his train and at the same time throws out of the car the pouch intended for the office. The government is at the present time experimenting on a new device for the receipt and delivery of mail while the train is in motion, as with the present device pouches are frequently torn by the hook which catches them, and pouches thrown from the car are occasionally drawn under the wheels.

The work on the local case continues while the car runs, but other distributions are going on at the same time. From the "state case," where a clerk is separating the letters according to states, another clerk takes those intended for the states close to that through which the train is passing and again divides them according to cities, counties or postal routes, only the mail for distant states being placed in pouches or sacks without more particular separation.

The clerk who performs this work is the result of years of training. He starts into the service as a substitute, holding that position six months; then he receives an appointment for six months, becoming a clerk of the first class; when he has received his permanent appointment he is known as a clerk of the second class and his pay is advanced accordingly. The fifth class is the highest which he can hold while on the road. Every six months from the time of his appointment he is required to visit the office of the chief clerk of his jurisdiction and stand an examination, consisting of certain questions in regard to the service and the distribution of cards containing the names of the postoffices in some one of the states which are "worked" on the line on which he is employed. He must be examined on one state every six months until he has served fifteen years, when he is examined but once a year. Some remarkably good records are made in these examinations, one clerk distributing cards addressed to 1,902 offices in the state of Iowa in one hour and ten minutes, making but five errors and handling 27.1 cards a minute. The best record on Iowa was one error in the distribution of 1,880 cards. In the examinations on other states 100 per cent has been made frequently, cards being handled at the rate of 27 per minute. The average time of the postal clerk on his car is from five to six hours, he being on about thirty hours at a stretch with from two to three days off between each trip. On the days when he does not go out he is expected to study the changes in the postal guide and post himself on his duties. Without this study advancement is impossible.

When the mail leaves the postal car in the larger cities it goes to the central postoffice, where a force of clerks again distributes it. This time the distribution is with reference to the carrier routes. The carriers take the mail from these distributing cases and once more separate it. This is its last distribution before its delivery. The carrier's distribution consists of placing them in the order in which the persons addressed are reached by him. Generally the mail for persons residing on one street are tied together and the letters and papers are ready for their destination.

Registered letters and packages pass through a slightly different process. When they are delivered at the office of mailing a receipt

is given by the registry clerk to the person delivering them. This form of mail is kept separate from the balance and each person gives a receipt for the package when it is received. The pouches containing the registered mail are never permitted to pass out of the sight of an employe of the government.

ready the fishery shows a notable improvement, apparently due to this work. During the present year, the work coming to an end April 1, there were planted in New England waters 250,000,000 codfish.

This year the fish commission is going to bag many thousand of young salmon, artificially hatched for the rivers of the Pacific coast. Very small tags will be used,

Tagged Fishes

It seems rather an odd idea to fasten metal tags to marine fishes and then let them loose in the ocean with the idea of identifying them as individuals in case they happen to be caught at a future time, but this is what the United States fish commission is doing just now with cod, 1,500 of which have been duly tagged and released this year. No two tags are alike, the markings on them being stamped in a series of letters and numbers, record of which is kept in a book in such a manner that if a tagged codfish turns up a moment's reference to the memoranda will furnish the history of that particular specimen, with date of liberation, weight and so forth. For example, a cod wearing a tag with the raised inscription "S 100" has a complete identification card, so that it cannot be mixed up with any other fish entered in the commission's ledger.

Only "brood fish"—that is, spawning females—are tagged. They are bought from fishermen, stripped of their eggs at Wood's Holl, Mass., and liberated in the waters of Viper and Mound, after having the tags attached to them. The tag is a small piece of copper, securely fastened by a wire passed through a fin near its junction with the body. It does not matter which fin is chosen, though a back or tail fin is best. The tag is very light and its attachment in the manner described does no harm whatever to the animal. During the last few months the fish commission has distributed



SORTING IN THE CAR.

the fishes being "fingerlings," about three inches long. It is expected that in this way it will be ascertained the age at which the salmon come from the sea to spawn; also their rate of growth and the percentage of the fry that attain maturity. The work will be carried on in the basins of the Columbia and Sacramento.

Some years ago a similar experiment was made at the fish commission station on the Clackamas river, which is a tributary to the Columbia, but, instead of tagging the young fishes, the soft dorsal fins were shaved off them with a razor before they were released. When they came back to spawn, three years, later, they averaged twenty pounds in weight.

From this experiment one or two very interesting conclusions were drawn. If all



CHECKING THROUGH MAIL.

those sacks to be delivered at the nearer offices being placed close at hand.

On the car the second distribution begins. A full railway postoffice consists of a clerk in charge, two clerks of the grade next lower, two of a yet lower grade, with as many helpers as are required. The helper begins the work by opening the pouches and sacks under the orders of the distributing clerk. First letters are handled over another set of cases. Bundles of letters consigned to the railway postoffice may con-



TRANSFERRING "REGISTERS."

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CANCELING STAMPS.

the larger cities, the mail clerk separates the letters—the foreign mail usually being sent to New York and mail to postoffices not on lines of railroads to the nearest office on the railroad. Rapidity and accuracy are the chief attributes required of the mail clerk. He must be able to read at sight and to decipher all sorts of characters which pass with the population as handwriting. After the case separation the letters are tied in bundles, each bundle being marked with the name of the office where it is to leave the railway postoffice to which it is consigned.

Thirty minutes before an important mail train leaves its station in a large city there is a busy scene enacted at the postoffice. Clerks and helpers carry pouches of letters to the street cars, which are stopped for that purpose; a small army of clerks and drivers hurriedly load waiting wagons with sacks of newspapers and packages. The rush is exciting to one who does not often see it, but throughout the superintendent of the mails has established such a perfect system that few sacks or pouches are taken to the wrong train. There is another example of strenuous



PICKING UP A POUCH.

train missives intended for several states; so the letters first go to the "state case," where the boxes are labeled with the name of every state in the union—except the state through which the postal route runs. The state case contains also the names of the important cities, mail for these being separated from the states in which they are



DISTRIBUTING IN A CAR.

a circular all along the coast of New England, requesting that whenever a cod with a tag comes into the hands of a fisherman or other person he shall remove the piece of metal and send it to the commission station at Wood's Holl, together with a

brief statement as to the date on which the fish was caught, where it was captured, its weight before dressed, its length and the condition of its roe.

The object of the tagging is to ascertain the rate at which a cod grows, the frequency of its spawning and the extent of its travels in the ocean. Knowledge of this kind has an obvious bearing upon fish cultural problems and there is every reason to believe that the future of the cod fishery on the New England coast must depend mainly upon artificial hatching. The hatching of cod eggs and the planting of the fry in those waters has been carried on for several years and al-



STORING POUCHED MAIL.



DISTRIBUTING AT POSTOFFICE.

life at the railway depot. Here a transfer clerk has been busy all morning receiving sacks and pouches which are not to be sent to the postoffice, but are to be placed upon connecting trains. At the terminals the railway mail clerks begin work from two to four hours before their trains are to leave the station. The transfer clerk has

situated. The "local case" is the most important part of the railway mail clerk's work. Here letters are to be separated according to their postoffice direction, some to be delivered to the offices named and some to be transferred to other railway postal lines. In the latter case the clerk in charge must not only have an accurate



DELIVERING A POUCH.