

# Uncle Sam's Postal Service

Copyright, 1904, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

**W**ASHINGTON, July 14.—(Special Correspondence of The Bee.)—I had a long chat last night with Postmaster General Payne at his residence in the old Charles Sumner mansion, now a part of the Arlington hotel, within a stone's throw of the White House. My visit was by an appointment made at the Postoffice department and the conversation covered a wide range of postal business and personal matters.

I first asked the general to tell me something about himself and his family, asking whether he came of the rich Cleveland Paynes of whom the late Senator Henry B. Payne and Oliver H., the Standard Oil millionaire, were prominent members, or from the poor Paynes to whom the author of "Home, Sweet Home" belonged.

He replied: "My family may have come from the same stem as those whom you designate as the poor Paynes, and the rich Paynes, but if so the relationship dates far back. I am one of the Massachusetts Paynes. My ancestors first came to Massachusetts about 1633 on the third ship after the Mayflower. They were among the first settlers of Boston, but they afterward moved farther inland."

"I see you were born at Ashfield." "Yes, my people moved there after the war between the colonists and the Indians, known as King Phillip's war. It took place about 100 years before our Declaration of Independence was signed. When it was over a grant of land was made to the soldiers who took part in it and my family got a share."

"How did you happen to go west?" I asked.

"The Paynes seem to have been imbued with the emigrating spirit," said Mr. Payne. "Some of us early moved to the Holland purchase and others, later, to the western reserve. I lived in Massachusetts until I was 20 and then went to Wisconsin to take a position as a cashier and bookkeeper in a wholesale dry goods store."

"What kind of a bookkeeper were you, general?"

"I think I must have been fairly good," was the reply. "I have a natural talent for mathematics and keeping accounts was easy for me. I know that when we took stock I could keep my footings so that I could give the totals within ten or fifteen minutes after the last items were called out. This was considered rather remarkable. I have met but few people who could do it."

"What did you do after your bookkeeping experience," I asked.

"Almost everything," said the postmaster general. "Much of my work has been along the line of railways and railway management. In 1892 I was one of the receivers of the Northern Pacific railway, and I had much to do with the consolidation and development of the electric street railway of Milwaukee. I am proudest of my success in that line. Ten or twelve years ago we had a dozen different street car companies in Milwaukee. Some were run by horses and others by electricity. The roads had been built largely to aid in suburban development and they were poorly managed. I was made president of one of them and improved it. Later on I became interested in the others and planned to consolidate the whole. I got other men to join me and we bought the roads and so reorganized them that we have now one of the best trolley systems of the United States. I was president of that system at the time I was made postmaster general."

"You were at one time president of the American Street Railway association, were you not?"

"Yes, I was, but I am not now. I gave up active business of all kinds when I came here."

"How about our street cars, general; will the time ever come when we will have cheaper fares?"

"I hope not," was the reply. "Cheap fares are not for the good of the street car service of the people. If you have low fares you must graduate them by a distance or by zones, as in Glasgow and other European cities. You must charge 1 cent for a certain distance, 2 cents for a little more and so on. The result is that the workmen, to save fares, crowd themselves nearest their work. The cities become congested, the suburbs are not built up and the workman lives in the heart of the city instead of in the country. It is better to pay a 5-cent rate per ride and to allow the people to live out. This is an important consideration and one which conduces to the making of better American citizens."

"You have been a business man, handling large affairs, general. Is the postoffice hard to manage as a business institution?"

"Yes, it is. The chief trouble is you cannot manage it as you can a private enterprise. The employees are selected for you, and you cannot dismiss them, except by making charges and bringing them before what might be called the department court. There are many laws which hamper your individual action. The moment you try to do something you find there is a law against it, and the result is there are all sorts of clogs in the way of progress."



HENRY C. PAYNE, POSTMASTER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES.

"How about the postal service—is it a good one?"

"Yes, with the limitations I have mentioned, and I do not know but that they are good limitations on the whole. One feature which prevents the system being efficient as a private institution is the number of superannuated clerks. We have some clerks who have been serving the department for years, and who have given good service. They have grown old, and in an ordinary business they would have to go. Here the process of removal is such that they are allowed to stay."

"How about the Postoffice department, do you think it worse or better than the others of the executive departments?"

"I think the postal service is as honest now as any in the United States, public or private," replied General Payne. "The fraud investigations have purged it. We had fifty or sixty postoffice inspectors at work for eight months examining into every branch of the business. We have prosecuted every irregularity, and have already seven of them indicted and five sentenced to the penitentiary. Many others are under indictment awaiting trial. Indeed, I don't believe that any government department, in this or any other country, has ever been more thoroughly investigated than the Postoffice department. The result is that it is now in a thoroughly healthy condition."

"Give me some idea of the business of the department," I asked.

"It is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, business of the kind upon earth," replied Postmaster General Payne. "It has been estimated that the aggregate number of letters and newspapers which annually goes through the postoffices of the world is 22,500,000,000. About 8,000,000,000 pass through our mails, so that we do about one-fourth the postoffice business of the world. We have now almost 75,000 postoffices, and our postal routes are 500,000 miles in length. If you went all over all the lines you would have to travel as far as twenty times around the world, and the annual travel over them is almost 500,000,000 miles. The service is now costing in round numbers more than \$150,000,000 a year, and we shall take in almost that much this year."

"How about the postal receipts; do they show that the times are growing better or otherwise?"

"The postal business is one of the best of our financial barometers. It shows that the business of this country is growing enormously and that it has doubled within the past ten years. In 1890 the gross receipts of the whole service were only about \$8,000,000. In 1894 the receipts were \$75,000,000, and this year they will be more than \$150,000,000. That is a wonderful record."

"Do you think our postoffice business is better managed from year to year?"

"Yes. In 1897 the receipts were about \$82,000,000 and the deficit was over \$11,000,000. In 1903 the deficit had shrunk to \$3,000,000

and in 1903 it was only \$4,500,000. A large part of the last deficit was caused by the great additional expense of the new rural delivery service, which will cost us this year about \$22,000,000. Were it not for that service the department would now be self-sustaining."

"Is the rural free delivery service a success?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed," was the reply. "Few people know how great a success it is. We have now more than 23,000 rural delivery routes, giving a daily mail delivery to 2,300,000 families, or to more than 11,000,000 persons. Estimating our population at 77,000,000, we are now serving one-seventh of all the people in the United States through the rural delivery."

"Will that service ever pay its own expenses?"

"It may pay, but it will be far in the future. It does pay already in the increase of business throughout the country and also in the growth of the postal business in those localities and to those localities. We find that in settled rural districts where there is no such delivery the postoffice receipts are growing at the rate of about 2 per cent per annum. Where the rural delivery has been introduced they are annually growing at the rate of 10 per cent. Besides that the circular and other small mail sent along such routes is very great. Some of the chief business institutions of the country get lists of the people along the routes and circularize them."

"Will the day come when every man in the United States will get his letters at his own home?"

"I don't know. Some parts of our country are very sparsely inhabited. I should not like to predict. We now have the star routes. Men deliver mail to all the homes along their route and thereby give mail to more than 107,000 families. They also collect mail from those families and take it to the postoffice. That costs the government nothing, as the star-route men are paid more for this additional service."

"What new things are you doing for the people?"

"We are improving the service in every way possible, and our chief work this year has been done for New York. The mail is greatly congested there and a great deal of time is consumed in getting it from the postoffice to the railway stations. We have arranged to build a postoffice over the tracks at the new Pennsylvania station and also at the New York Central station. These two places will be connected by pneumatic tubes with the other offices. They will be so that the mails will be sorted in them and dropped through chutes or by elevators right down to the doors of the cars. These two great depots will take out 90 per cent of the mail of New York, and the new arrangements, when completed, will save considerable time in the forwarding of the mails."

"Then we are improving the ocean service and our foreign postal arrangements," the postmaster general continued. "We

now have mail clerks and postoffices on the large steamers just as in the railway cars. The clerks begin to sort the mail for different parts and towns of the United States as soon as they leave Europe, and when the ships arrive it is shipped off by rail without rehandling. This saves about a day on every foreign letter. We are also increasing the number of ships which carry the mails. We now have four regular mails across the Atlantic each way every week and we hope to soon send and receive mails daily. We want to cut down the foreign postage to the maritime nations to 2 cents a letter, and we believe that the revenues will be greater under this reduction than at the 5-cent rate as now."

"How about postal savings banks?"

"We may have them some day for the smaller towns and villages where there are no such banking facilities. I think they would be good for such places. I have tried to have them introduced into Porto Rico, but so far congress has not adopted my suggestion. We have no banks in Porto Rico except at San Juan and Ponce. The people understand nothing about savings institutions, and it seems to me that postal savings banks would do much to inculcate thrift and thereby better the condition of the island. Porto Rico has almost 1,000,000 people, and although the majority are very poor, many are well-to-do."

"Will the Postoffice department ever control our telegraphs and telephones?"

"I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet," said the postmaster general, "and so I cannot answer that question. I believe, however, that such things under a government like ours are far better off in the hands of private parties. The government machine is already enormous, and this would multiply it. As it is, the telegraphs and telephones are very well managed. There are competing companies, and the rates are comparatively cheap. I should hesitate to take over these great institutions if I had the power."

"How about a postal express, so that poultry, butter and other small farm products as well as merchandise could be taken through the mail?"

"I don't think that would do in our country. We have such magnificent distances and we should have to have a uniform rate without regard to distance. The result would be that the private companies would do all the profitable short haul business and the government would have the long hauls at low rates. It would enormously increase the expenses without a proportionate increase of revenue. It would not pay."

"How about sending small sums by mail?" I asked.

"We need some new arrangements for that," replied the postmaster general. "The postoffice money order is well enough for larger sums, but we ought to have something for the sending of small change. I am in favor of postal notes of the denominations of \$1 and \$2 with a payable-to-order provision on the back. If no name was written in the blank these notes would do for a common currency, and if the order was filled in they would be only payable by the postoffice, which would cash them on presentation. Fractional parts of a dollar could be sent in notes or stamps made for the purpose. We should have some better way of sending small sums."

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

## Our Barbers in London

In an East End police court the other day a curious case of assault was heard. A youngster, it appears, was sent by his father to have his hair cut. The barber, according to the father, ran a pair of clippers all over the boy's head except in front, where he left an enormous fringe to mark his displeasure the father gave the barber a sound thrashing. It is, however, not only in the East End that barbers show a great ignorance of their trade. In New York or Paris it is the easiest thing possible for a man to have his hair cut properly. In London it is hardly too much to say that there are only half a dozen places where a barber shows his business. The average barber has only one method of cutting hair, which he invariably carries out, irrespective altogether of the wishes of his customers.

I believe that if an American hairdresser were to open a dozen shops in different parts of London he would rapidly make his fortune, provided, of course, he employed the right sort of men to cut his customers' hair.—London Tattler.

## Taxing Cats in London

The returns in London for the quarter ending June 30 show a decrease of revenue of £2,500,000. A large meeting under the presidency of a dignitary of the church of England, therefore, pointed out to the chancellor of the exchequer that it would be advisable to tax cats half a crown a head. He estimated that this expedient would turn £500,000 annually into the treasury, "decrease the number of cats and elevate their social standing by removing the stigma of cheapness."—Boston Globe.