

Projects for Improving Our Postal Service

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 WASHINGTON, Oct. 4.—I am the poorest man in the world for a newspaper story. My life has not been pyrotechnic. I was not born in the gutter, and I have had no sensational struggles with poverty to get an education and teach public service. I am only a plain, ordinary man, developed along the common lines of American life in a plain, ordinary way. Besides I have had no newsy history. I do not know a good story when I see it. I have had the newspaper fellows tell me that I was the best newsmaker in the government service, but that the news I furnished was sent forth without any knowledge on my part that it was of any interest whatsoever.

But He Will Talk.
 These were the words of the postmaster general, Albert Sidney Burleson, as he sat before his desk in the Postoffice department. He had a pile of papers before him, and the room adjoining was filled with callers waiting for audiences, and each with his own ax to grind. The time was 9:30 in the morning, and from then on throughout the day, the business, I was told, would increase. It was not a good time for an interview. And the opening words of the postmaster general were by no means propitious. Nevertheless, I put my questions and the answers came quick and without hesitation. One of the first subjects was the parcel post, and the trouble that had arisen with congress as to increasing the size of the packages and lowering the rates.

The postmaster general said: "I intend to do all that the law will permit to better and cheapen the parcel post service. The postoffice is a department of efficiency, and it is the servant of the people. I am not here to make the laws, but it is my duty to enforce and carry them out, as far as this department is concerned. That duty I am trying to discharge as regards the parcel post. You have seen how the first move I made was resisted. I then said to the senators and representatives just what I have said to you. You have placed this responsibility upon me, and I am going to carry it out. I shall move forward just as fast as the law will permit, and I believe that we shall soon be sending parcels of 100 pounds weight through the mails. When we have established the present system, I have another move planned to follow it. We shall go on, step by step. I know just what I am going to do; the next step will be made at the soonest possible moment and the development will go right along during the next four years."

Express Companies' Problem.
 "But how about the express companies? Are you going to drive them out of business?"

"The express companies will have plenty to do in the carrying of packages of large size and weight. They will have to give way to the government as to small packages. There is no individual concern that can compete with the government. There is not the slightest doubt about that. We are going to do the small package business of the United States." I have asked as to the prospective increase to the parcel post service. The postmaster general replied: "That business is steadily increasing and that is so of every department related to our mails. We are now handling from 24,000,000 to 25,000,000 packages of mail a year, and we have the largest transportation service in the world. Our system of parcel post is the largest that any express company and it is just at its beginning."

Business for Six Months.
 "Give some of the details," said I. "Well, in the first six months we handled more than 300,000,000 parcel post packages. With the increase in the weight limit and the reduction of the rates the increase will be accelerated, and I estimate that by the time the year is closed we shall have handled 750,000,000 packages. We are doing much to help the business along. One thing is the change as to stamps, so that any kind of postage stamps can be used to send a parcel. Another thing is the use of pre-cancelled stamps. It costs something to put the stamps on 750,000,000 packages and to cancel them by hand is an extremely difficult process. We can cancel the stamps on letter-mail by machinery, but we cannot do that on packages, which are of all shapes and sizes. We have figured that it would cost us about \$200,000 to cancel the stamps on the parcel post packages. We believe this cost can be cut down to \$10,000 by the use of machinery and by allowing the use of pre-cancelled stamps. As it is now, pre-cancelled stamps are permitted where mailers send out 2,000 or more packages at one mailing. We want to fix it so that almost any person can further his business and at the same time reduce the cost to the government in that way."

Used by Big Firms.
 "You speak of people sending 2,000 packages at one mailing. Have we many firms that do that?"
 "Yes. The great mail-order houses send



One of the first delivery motor cars.

out many times that and there are small institutions that have a heavy parcel post daily mail. The largest number of packages sent out so far in any one day by a single firm was 40,128, and the largest amount of postage used by any one company in a day for the parcel post service was \$4,164.

"That sum was paid by one of the large mail order-houses," continued the postmaster general. "The mail order houses were prepared for the parcel post at the time it was inaugurated, and they have adopted it in their business in a marvelous manner. The other day I took down a statement for the agent of one of these firms as to its business during the first seven months of 1913. In that time it sent out almost 4,000,000 parcel post packages. These houses are doing so much, that we have tried to facilitate their parcel post mail in every possible way. We have put a corps of clerks in certain establishments of that kind, and the packages go almost direct to the consumer, being largely distributed before they are sent to the trains. Our men show them how to handle the packages, and how the wrapping should be done. In this way they have proved of great value to the mail order establishments and have also saved the government thousands of dollars by not clogging the mails. The increase in the weight limit from eleven to twenty pounds will add to the mail order business."

Help for the Farmer.
 "What can the parcel post do for the farmer?"

"It can make every farmer a mail order merchant. It has already done that in other countries. He can send his goods, in small packages to the consumer. Twenty pounds is just about three pecks of cotton seed; it is one-third of a bushel of wheat and almost half a bushel of corn. It might enable vegetable and other products to be sent into cities direct, and it will be of great advantage to the farmer in the exchanging of seeds and in buying tools and supplies.

"We had a case the other day of a man who broke the point of his plow while at work on the farm. He had a telephone and he called up the merchant in town to send him a new point. The merchant replied that he had not one on hand, but that he had telephoned to the home office, 100 miles away, and ordered it to be sent on by mail. That plow point came to the farmer the next morning through the parcel post, and before night he was plowing again, without having left the farm. All that was done at a cost of 21 cents, whereas it would have taken him at least half a day to have driven to town for the package had it been sent there."

People Learning Its Value.
 "They are rapidly learning to do so. Daniel C. Roper, the first assistant postmaster of a small town in Montana from a trip throughout the west. He says the people are everywhere beginning to send their goods in that way. The postmaster of a small town in Montana said he was handling fifty packages a day, and among the things sent were boxes of cigars from the local tobaccoist, while among those received were packages of knit underwear from a small town in Utah, which had a factory of that kind. In one town he found a man who was advertising his laundry business through the parcel post, putting it in this way: 'Our delivery wagon, run by Uncle Sam, will stop at your home every morning and will make a delivery to you every afternoon.' That kind of thing is going on all over the country."

"But does it not cost the government a great deal to deliver the packages?"
 "We have had a careful record kept of fifty of the most important postoffices of the country for a period of six days. This was last April. The reports from those offices show a wide range of methods employed, and just what it costs by each method. It was found that the cost of delivering by motor vehicles varied from 1 1/2 cents to nearly 15 cents per package, whereas delivery by horse-drawn vehicles showed a variation of from 1 cent to 5 cents per package. We are now investigating how to deliver goods the most cheaply."

Great Popular Department.
 The conversation here turned to the political business of the Postoffice department and of its closeness to the people. Postmaster General Burleson said: "The Postoffice department outranks any other of the executive branches in its direct value to and connection with the people. It is the department that is closest to every individual, and it is, more than anything else, a representative of the national government. In many communities, it is the only representative of the national government. The State department is a very important part of the administration, but there are millions of our citizens who never come into contact with it, or have any knowledge of what it is doing. The Agricultural department and the Treasury department touch hundreds of thousands of our citizens, but the Postoffice department comes into almost daily contact with every individual in the United States who is old enough to read and write. It is a concern that touches the individual, and that every day. If there



Postmaster General Albert S. Burleson.

is any department that should not be controlled by politics, it is this department. And still," continued the postmaster general, with a smile, "the head of the Postoffice department is the man who is supposed to keep the executive and legislative departments in touch with each other. He is the intermediary and go-between of the two."

Here All Must Come.
 "But why is that, Mr. Postmaster General?" I asked.
 "One reason for it is that the Postoffice department is the one place to which every congressman must come from time to time. The senator or representative may seldom have occasion to go to the State department. He may never have occasion to go to the Agricultural department, but he is sure to come to the Postoffice department. It is for this reason that the postmaster general has dropped into the business of keeping harmony between the executive and legislative branches. There is no reason why this should be so, and he does not always succeed in his job, but it seems to have devolved upon him, nevertheless."

Postal Savings Banks.
 "What are you doing as to the postal savings bank?"
 "We have \$40,000,000 or \$50,000,000 now on deposit. The system was established only a little more than two and one-half years ago, and it is now in operation in more than 12,000 postoffices and at about 100 branches and stations. On June 30 last, the deposits numbered 500,000, and their deposits then were approximately \$3,000,000. All this comes from a class of people who were making no effort to economize and save before the postal savings banks were established. It comes from many who were too timid to put their money into the regular banks, or who were so afraid of the banks that they would not trust them with their savings. They kept them hid under the hearthstones or perhaps in a tin can or a stove, and the result was the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars every year. We have plans to increase the facilities of the postal savings banks, and in a short time we shall have \$100,000,000 of such deposits, and that without taking from the savings banks of the country as much as 1 per cent of their former resources. The postal savings banks are patronized largely by foreigners. They have confidence in their home governments, and therefore have confidence in ours. A considerable part of the many millions dollars which has been annually going to Europe in money orders will now remain here in the postal savings banks."

"THE ROCK OF CHICKAMAUGA"
 Recollections of General Thomas and the Great Battle He Won.
 One of the greatest battles of history was brought vividly to mind by the fiftieth anniversary of the two days' struggle, September 19 and 20. There were over 120,000 men on the fighting line, of whom more than a fourth were killed or wounded. They were veterans, tenacious in the highest degree, and both sides were in line with their colors when the fighting ceased. The confederates finally gained the field, but the union withdrawal was but a few miles, to Chattanooga, the proper objective of the union campaign. It was held in the face of starvation, for several weeks passed before large reinforcements relieved the confederate grip on the railway line of supplies from the north. It was so much of a drawn battle, falling so far short of satisfactory results to the two war departments, that both leading generals at the battle were speedily relieved and were thereafter conspicuous in army operations. By a coincidence General George H. Thomas, whose memorable defense saved the union army, though he commanded but one of the three corps, was lieutenant in Bragg's

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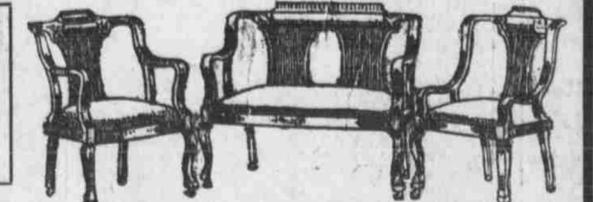
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battery in the Mexican war. "A little more grape, Captain Bragg," is General Taylor's most famous remark at Buena Vista. Lieutenant Thomas was destined to baffle Captain Bragg at the tremendous battle of Chickamauga sixteen years later. By another coincidence both Thomas and Bragg were born in the south, Thomas in Virginia, Bragg in North Carolina, and less than a year apart.

No adequate life of General Thomas has been written, though he was one of the most uniformly successful soldiers that ever lived. He never lost any engagement that he directed, and more than once he saved an army in desperate conflict, though not a commander-in-chief. From motives of delicacy he declined to take this position until the battle of Nashville, and that is referred to in the military textbooks of today as a model in handling an army in action. General Thomas died comparatively young, at the age of 55, one of the most profoundly beloved generals of the civil war and one whose career in civil life was likely to be brilliant in spite of his rule never to push himself for advancement. His nickname among the privates was "Pap," and his influence on an army inspired it to take every situation coolly and hold on to the limit of possibility. He was never driven in confusion from any position.

At Chickamauga the remnants of the army that stayed with him fell back in good order to a new line near Chattanooga. The commanding general and other two corps commanders had left the field under the impression that the army was crushingly defeated. Thomas held on. The next day the union forces were in line ready to receive another attack. It was the day of Chickamauga had ended. What followed was a delusive siege of Chattanooga, and Bragg was shortly relieved. But so was Rosecrans. Thomas was at the head of the army at Chattanooga during the famine period, and then turned over the command to Grant when his forces began to arrive from the scene of surrender at Vicksburg.

Several of the generals prominent at Chickamauga wrote their military memoirs and give to this great battle many facts of description and analysis. Sheridan's treatment of the battle is hardly up to his mark. On the confederate side Longstreet's book is especially valuable in its Chickamauga chapter. General Grant, another confederate, made a valuable and especially close study of the battle. It was Longstreet's divisions, suddenly transported from Virginia, that

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