

Photographs taken for THE WORLD TO-DAY by the Lawrence Company, Chicago



STANDING near the north gate of the Union Station, Chicago, between the hours of eight and ten in the evening, whoso looks will see a yellow train composed of an engine and six mail coaches. It is number 57 of the Chicago, Milwaukee & Saint Paul, the Fast Mail—the central link in that stupendous mail-chain which unites the East with the far Northwest. It is waiting for the through mail on the Lake Shore and the Pennsylvania, which are scheduled to arrive at 8:30 and 8:55, respectively.

It is waiting, but waiting in this case does not imply idleness; for mail trains from New Orleans, from Saint Louis, from Cincinnati, from the South and the Southeast, are constantly arriving, and their Northwest contingent is being rushed to the Union Station and hustled aboard the Fast Mail. Local trains, converging from at least three cardinal points of the compass, contribute their quota of half-filled sacks to the swelling burden of 57. Vans from the city postoffice, laden with the late business mail, hastily discharge their loads and scurry away. It is like a vast grist from the three quarters of the globe, pouring into this yellow hopper

which is to grind it and separate it in a night, ready for delivery to the anxious multitude in the morning.

At exactly 9:15 a dozen heavily loaded vans, drawn by galloping horses, wheel up to the curb and discharge their lading into the chute that leads to the assorting platform below. The Lake Shore is on time. It has taken just forty-five minutes to transfer ten tons of mixed mail across the city from the Lake Shore station. All is now bustle and hurry, for the Pennsylvania has arrived, twenty minutes late, with the mail from Philadelphia and Washington. There is a rumbling of trucks and an indistinguishable shouting of names as the striped sacks are thrown pell mell into the open doors of 57. But amid this apparent confusion there is absolute order, for Uncle Sam's mail men work with the precision of a Linotype machine. At precisely 9:55 the last sack is aboard, the sliding doors shut with a click and this swift messenger of fortune and failure moves silently out of the station, out through the glinting lights of the city, out into the starlit night.

The distance from Chicago to Saint Paul is 420 miles; the time, ten hours; an average of forty-two miles an hour, including stops. And when the Lake Shore or the Pennsylvania is late, and

they often are, the yellow messenger waits an hour, sometimes two; for the chain must not be broken. It is then that the great drive wheels of the engine measure fifty, sixty and sometimes seventy miles an hour in their race against time.

Armed with a permit from the Post-office Department to inspect the Railway Mail Service of the Northwest (the permit serving the double purpose of a certificate of good moral character and a railway pass) I was directed by the gate-man to 57, climbed into the open door of

way mail service was explained with an intelligent directness seldom encountered in the business and professional world. I did not have to ask questions. I had but to press the button of conversation and these busy, silent men fairly bubbled over with information. Nor was there once exhibited even the shadow of impatience. Each was ready to stop his work and talk to me about what was to him evidently an old story. When I attempted to express my appreciation of this kindly courtesy, one of the "boys," by way of



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MAIL WAGONS UNLOADING AT THE UNION STATION, CHICAGO

Mails close at the postoffice about forty minutes before train time

one of the coaches, inquired for the clerk in charge, and presented my credentials. The clerk, a big, handsome fellow, clad in the regulation uniform of the service, an undershirt and dirty overalls, gave me a most cordial greeting, introduced me to the other "boys" of the crew, eleven in all, to whom he explained my mission and requested them to afford me whatever information in their power respecting the service. Never have I been treated with more distinguished consideration than I was by this crew of Uncle Sam's mail clerks. Every detail of the intricate rail-

defense, naively remarked, "outsiders so seldom come aboard the train that we are always glad to see any one."

Had I at the very outset stumbled upon the great secret of the efficiency of the Railway Mail Service, the fact that the men behind the mail sacks are intelligent gentlemen?

During the two hours we lie at the station, I have ample time to observe the loading and note the disposition of the mail. Three cars are devoted to "storage." That is, they are used for the transportation of closed mail sacks going

to points beyond Saint Paul. They may be tagged for Seattle or Tacoma; they may contain mail for various points in South Dakota or Montana, but it is such mail as under the scheme of distribution need not be assorted until it has left Saint Paul. The storage cars are without fixtures, except stanchions to keep the corded mail sacks in place. One car is occupied exclusively by mail going to the Great Northern and Northern Pacific. This is mostly through mail, and the car is packed from floor to roof, a narrow pas-

sacks of mixed mail are emptied, and the contents separated and "thrown," resacked and labeled according to its destination. Much of this mail is addressed to local points in Wisconsin, Minnesota and the Dakotas. Some of these sacks are dropped off at junctional points, to be taken up by the next mail train and carried on. But the bulk of it is addressed to the far Northwest. This becomes "through mail" and the sacks go to the "storage" cars of the next through train out of Saint Paul.



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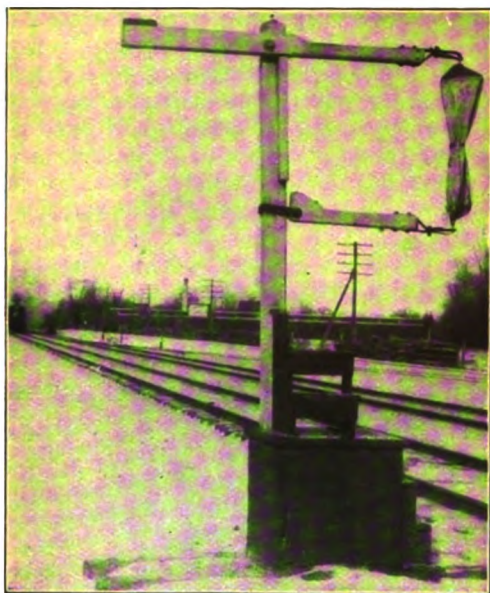
LOADING MAIL POUCHES ON THE CARS AT THE UNION STATION, CHICAGO

The bags are labeled so that each may be placed in the proper car without delay

sage through the center alone remaining free. The other storage cars contain mail for the points in the North and West not reached by the Great Northern and Northern Pacific. Most of the mail for the Canadian Northwest Territories is carried in storage on 57 and delivered to the Soo at Saint Paul.

There are two "paper cars," cars used in the distribution of papers, magazines and merchandise, second and third class matter. These cars are fitted with distributing tables, flanked by double rows of boxes and sack racks. On these tables the

By far the most interesting, as well as the most important section of 57, is the "letter coach." I wish to dignify this particular car by the name "coach." It is a little richer in fixtures than the "paper cars." There is a small sack rack and a distributing table for handling bunched mail, a few old tramp chairs for the accommodation of a possible guest, and used by the clerk in charge for office work—the "boys" seldom sit—and six distributing cases arranged as conveniently as possible against the side walls. These cases are designated Wisconsin,



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CATCHING THE MAIL AT A WAY STATION
The mail pouch on the crane ready for the train

Minnesota, North and South Dakota, Saint Paul, Minneapolis and Moose Jaw. All first-class mail addressed to points within this territory is distributed through these cases.

It is upon the handling of first-class mail that the department is exercising its genius. To consume the least possible time in the transportation and delivery of a letter is the great desideratum. It is therefore in the "letter coach" where the fine points of the system are best seen.

F. Arlington-Smith, a business man of Saint Paul, leaves Chicago on the Pioneer Limited at 6:30 P.M. Arriving at Saint Paul at 7:20 A.M., he breakfasts and gets to his office at 8:30. There he finds among his mail a letter awaiting him from Chicago, calling attention to a matter which came up two hours after he left the city. This is quick action. Quite as good as the telephone with its "will call you" and "line busy," and much better than the telegraph with its unaccountable mistakes and its unexplainable delays. How is it accomplished? Let us return to the "letter coach" for an answer.

Mail addressed to points in Wisconsin most quickly reached from the Milwaukee line is assorted and sacked ready for delivery at the proper junction. The train

does not stop, but the mail sack does. If any mail is to be taken on, it is caught on the fly. The same disposition is made of the Minnesota mail, except that addressed to the Twin Cities. Some of the sacks for the southern part of the state must leave the train at La Crosse, at Red Wing, at Hastings. Those for the northern and western parts of the state are transferred at Saint Paul.

All mail bearing the Dakota address goes to the Dakota case, where it is distributed among some three hundred points and railway routes in that territory. This is the heaviest case on 57, the clerk often handling more than forty thousand letters in a single night.

To the Moose Jaw case goes all mail addressed to the Canadian Territories, to Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. It receives its name from the fact that all this mail must go to Moose Jaw, where the Soo line connects with the Canadian Pacific. The Moose Jaw case is a quite recent addition. When it was installed a few years ago it was called the "kid," and was attended to at odd times. Now, however, owing to the development of the Canadian Northwest, it threatens to rival the big Dakota case in volume of business.

But the latest introduction of time-saving machinery, and that which best characterizes the modern development of the Railway Mail Service, is the city distribution. On 57 it is represented by the Twin City cases. Prior to 1900 the mail for Minneapolis and Saint Paul was sacked and turned over to the postoffices to be distributed and delivered according to local regulations. Mail arriving at 7:20 would catch the ten o'clock delivery in the business portions, and the noon delivery in the residence districts. Now, it is assorted, distributed and tied into bundles on the train, ready for the carrier, who, as soon as it arrives at the commercial station, starts out upon his rounds of delivery.

These city distributions entail a hardship upon the railway clerks, whose heads are already so full of postoffices, mail routes and junction points that there is little room left for carrier routes and city streets. But they are great time-savers and will accomplish as much as a three-hour reduction on a night run.

This is how the letter written and mailed to F. Arlington-Smith, of Saint Paul, two hours after his departure from Chicago, came to be waiting for him at his office in the morning.

Every vocation has its literature—its history, its mythology and its slang. The Railway Mail Service is no exception.

"What are those in that box," I asked as I pointed to a pigeonhole marked "nixies."

"Those are nixies."

"Nixies?"

"Yes, we call misdirected mail and mail with insufficient or unintelligible address 'nixies.' They are sent to the inquiry office of the division to be returned to the sender for better address or deciphered by experts if they happen to be ambiguous.

"Here is a letter addressed to J. H. Brown, Armour, Ohio. Now, there is no such postoffice in that state. There is, however, an Armour in Iowa. No doubt the letter is intended for that address, but

we have no authority to change it. It must be returned for 'better direction.' We often get as high as a hundred 'nixies' on one run."

"People are very careless about the address on their mail. They will address their letters to a railway siding where there is nothing but a switch lever, or to a farm, like the Dalrymple Farm, North Dakota. They forget to put on the state, or they will get the state and county but omit the postoffice. The ordinary 'nixies' don't bother us much. We fire them into the inquiry office at Saint Paul."

"Here, what do you think of this?" said the man at the Dakota case, known among his peers as the "Baby Elephant." The appellation is not half bad, and was given him because of a swaying, restless movement from side to side, like that of an elephant tethered to a stake. It is a habit that many railway clerks acquire in adapting themselves to the motion of the cars while at work.

"What do you think of a fellow who



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IN THE LETTER CAR ON THE NORTHWEST MAIL

The railway mail clerks can not be persuaded to wear a uniform while at work. They insist on negligee costume

will run a thing like that through the United States mail?"

He handed me a letter on which was written in a fair hand the following superscription:

Away out west I am to go—
Clear to the State of Idaho.
At Boise City stop the train—
Put me off and go on again.
And when Sue Clark comes strolling in,
Just give her this and watch her grin.

"There is an inglorious Milton who

"When are your heaviest runs?" I inquired.

"Tuesdays, compared with other days of the week. But from the twentieth to the last of each month we carry the heaviest mail. Then we often have a half car-load of 'stiffs.' "

I kept still this time and soon learned that "stiffs" were mail sacks just large enough to contain two tiers of standard magazines. They are rigid and as heavy as blocks of wood. It is during the last



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THE INTERIOR OF THE PACKAGE CAR
Where tons of merchandise are handled every night

refuses to be mute." This from the "Baby Elephant." Then he added, "He has a cinch on us—we are compelled to read his poetry."

"Do you get many such freak effusions," I asked.

"Yes, the high school boys and college freshmen are given to it."

"On what evidence do you locate them?"

"On the evidence of their handwriting and the limping doggerel."

ten days of each month that the eastern magazine is mailed to the West.

It must be remembered that number 57 is a type only. It has an exact counterpart in number 55, which leaves Chicago for Saint Paul at three o'clock in the morning. These two solid mail trains with their complements, numbers 56 and 58, from Saint Paul to Chicago, constitute what I have called, for the want of a better name, the Northwest Mail. It must not be thought that these trains



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ONE OF THE BIG LOCOMOTIVES THAT DRAW "57"

Compare its height with the engineer's

carry all the mail designed for or originating in the Northwest. The Milwaukee maintains three other trains each way, all carrying mail coaches; they are fast trains, too. And the other roads between these points carry more or less mail. But of the through mail to the Northwest, the Milwaukee carries the lion's share.

How did this route happen to become the great highway of the Northwest mail? Why is it that along this particular line, this tide of concentrated commerce between the East and the Northwest continues to ebb and flow? It is the old story of enterprise recognizing opportunity.

Twenty-five years ago modern railway mail service, the distribution of mail in transit, was in its experimental stages. The efforts of the Postoffice Department were being expended in the direction of fast mail trains and Congress had been fostering this infant industry to a limited extent by granting subsidies to certain eastern railroads that maintained a fast mail service. But the practice had not crystallized into a settled policy. So, when, in 1884, the department decided to put on a fast mail from Boston and New York to the Pacific Coast, there was no subsidy available to smooth the way and facilitate negotiations with the western railroads.

Under the proposed program, the time from Chicago to both Omaha and Saint Paul was to be reduced to twelve hours, the trains leaving Chicago at three o'clock in the morning after the arrival of the

fast mail from the East. This scheme would necessitate placing in commission special trains devoted exclusively to the mail service. With this proposition, the department approached one of the great railway systems of the Middle West having direct lines to both Omaha and Saint Paul. But the management, after "careful consideration," could see nothing in it for the stockholders, and so the proposition was turned down with "regrets."

In this dilemma the superintendent of railway mails turned to the Milwaukee with the suggestion that if the required service were put on between Chicago and Saint Paul, the department would divert as much mail as possible under the regulations to that line. The same suggestion was made to the Burlington, respecting the Omaha division. It was a losing proposition. A fast mail train having the right of way over all other traffic was an expensive concession to make, especially so when the department had no inducements to offer except its good will. But there was the future, with the inevitable development of the Northwest to consider. What was now a sure loser might become in time a sure winner. The Milwaukee and Burlington both decided to discount the future and put on the service. The proposition was accepted, and at three o'clock on March 13, 1884, number 55 left Chicago on her first flying trip to Saint Paul. Such was the inception of the Northwest Mail.

The exceptional facilities afforded by

this train, in both time and connections, drew to it the bulk of the business between the East and the Northwest. The policy of the Postoffice Department is always to send the mail through the channels making the best time, and when a routing is once established it is not changed unless something better is offered. Whatever good will was extended to the Milwaukee twenty years ago in routing the Northwest mail has long since become history. It is now purely a matter of public service, and the department has no favorites.

In 1899 the Postoffice Department decided to reduce the schedule between New York and Seattle twenty-four hours. Eight hours was to be taken off the time from New York to Saint Paul and sixteen hours made up on the run from Saint Paul to the coast. This scheme would bring the Eastern mail into Chicago between seven and nine in the evening and necessitate a new fast mail train, making the run to Saint Paul in ten hours—in time to connect with the limited morning trains for the coast. Again the Milwaukee came forward and 57 was placed in commission to fill the gap. The schedule time now from New York and Washington to Seattle is ninety-five hours, as against 122 hours before the introduction of 57.

One hundred and sixty mail clerks are employed on the various trains between Chicago and Saint Paul. These are divided into crews and assigned to certain runs. The crew of 57, for instance, is composed of twelve men, one of whom is clerk in charge. They come on duty at 5 P.M., at which time the mail for 57 begins to arrive at the Chicago Union Station. Arriving in Saint Paul at 7:56, they have a lay-over until 3 P.M., when they leave on 58, which reaches Chicago at 2:15 A.M. Now they have the choice to take a lay-off for three days or to repeat the run and take a lay-off for six days. The latter has become the general practice—the general rule is “on” four days, “off” six days.

This seems like a good deal of “off” time to the average grinder, but it must be understood that while “on” there is but little time for sleep between runs, and the nervous strain is constant. Besides, even the “off” time belongs to the government. The clerk can not leave his

domicile without permission from the chief clerk and is subject to call at any moment. Moreover, he is compelled to spend most of his “off” time in study in order to keep up with the procession. Routes are continually changing; new postoffices are springing up, and others are being wiped from the face of the map. Railroads are forever changing time, and disarranging connections at junction points. To let up for a few weeks is to become a back number.

The clerk must be able not only to pass an examination to enter the service, but he must continue to be able to pass examinations while in the service. For upon his standing, determined by these examinations, coupled with his daily record, depends his chance of promotion. These examinations for the tenth district, which includes the run from Chicago to Saint Paul, cover more than twenty thousand postoffices, railway mail routes and junction points. The crews of 57 must know, not only the Northwest and the location of every postoffice in it, but must know the cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, with the route of every carrier. Moreover, they must know Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky and Missouri, not to mention the City of Chicago and the connecting points with the time of trains throughout the entire Southeast: for there are return trains on which mail for Chicago and the Southeast must be distributed. So thoroughly systematized has this service become that the letter cases which serve for the Northwest on 57 when reversed and turned upside down become the Southeast mail cases on 58.

All these postoffices and mail routes and junction points, with the times of trains, the clerk must have in his head. There is no time for looking it up, and mistakes are fatal. There is a checking system by which the mistakes are fastened upon the men who make them. With every bundle of mail and with every sack goes a slip bearing the name of the distributor, the date and the number of the train. If there are any mistakes they are detected in the final distribution of the mail noted on the back of this slip, returned to the divisional office and entered on the record of the clerk making the mistakes. This record of the actual work done, taken with the results of his exam-

inations, make up the standing of the clerk in the service.

The records show that the service is recruited from a class of young men with liberal education. A large per cent have been school teachers. I met one who had spent two years at West Point, an appointee from one of the Wisconsin congressional districts; another had been admitted to the bar, while three others held college degrees. The morale of the railway mail service has undergone a wonderful change during the last twenty years. The superintendent informed me that drunkenness is almost unknown; that among the one thousand men employed in the tenth division there is rarely a case of intoxication reported, and the offense is never repeated. For years there have been no removals on that score. Such was not the case thirty years ago, when the appointments were made for political reasons with no regard to the fitness of the applicant for the duties of the position. "When I entered the service in 1869," said a veteran officer, "I remember I was ordered to report for duty at the office of the superintendent of railway mails in Chicago. When I arrived, I was told that the superintendent and the assistant were in a neighboring saloon playing billiards. I found them and reported. The game had evidently been played with 'high balls,' and, to put it mildly, the superintendent was in no condition to make fancy shots."

Measured by the amount of ability required, the railway mail clerks are most inadequately paid. The salaries range from \$900 to \$1,400 per year—the clerk in charge on 57 receiving the munificent sum of \$1,500. To reach this point of promotion a man must have a brilliant record covering a dozen years of faithful service. But, notwithstanding the meager salary, there are a dozen applications for every vacancy. The stability of the employment and the certainty of the pay are the attractions. As one of the "boys" expressed it, "there is a good living in it and not much worry. I would like to quit and go into something else, but my wife objects—she is Scotch."

The department has never been able to "uniform" the railway clerks. It first tried to put them in natty suits, but who would wear more clothes than absolutely

necessary in a car with the mercury standing at 99? The uniform suit idea was abandoned and "caps" were ordered. These were worn for a few weeks, then thrown into a corner and forgotten. The department gave it up and ordered gun-metal badges, which the clerks are supposed to wear somewhere on their person. The prevailing uniform now is a pair of old shoes, easy to the feet, a pair of overalls and underclothing to suit the season.

The compensation received by the railroads for carrying the mail is based upon the supposed average tonnage transported. During periods of thirty days, every four years, all the mail is weighed and the average is taken as a standard on which to compute the daily transportation charges for the next four years. As the actual tonnage increases while the average remains stationary for four years at a time, there is not much in it for the railroads, compared with other lines of business. Then, too, the expense of special mail trains is enormous. They have to maintain a high rate of speed and be given the absolute right of way. Every train on the Milwaukee line must give 57 forty-five minutes leeway at every meeting point. This means an immense loss of time to the entire traffic of the line. And when these mail trains are late, it deranges the whole schedule, for nothing can move until the Northwest Mail is provided for.

The evolution of the northwest railway mail, as shown by the record of weights during the last twenty years, is an accurate index of the development of the great Northwest. The average weight of mail for northwestern points going out of Chicago, as shown by the record of weights in 1885, was less than seventeen tons. In 1889 it had risen to thirty tons daily; while to-day it is estimated at 125 tons every twenty-four hours—an increase of two hundred and eighty per cent during the last fifteen years, or eighteen per cent a year. The weight of mail out of Saint Paul for the Northwest was, in 1889, fifteen tons. This has increased to sixty-six tons, a gain of three hundred and forty per cent in fifteen years.

The carrying capacity of the "Northwest Mail" has about reached its limit. The mail time from New York to Saint Paul is now thirty-five hours. What next?

RATE REGULATION AS A FEDERAL FUNCTION

BY

CHARLES A. PROUTY

MEMBER OF THE INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION



IN a recently published interview, a railroad president, whose name is not given but who is described as the head of one of the great systems, referred to the Interstate Commerce Commission as "a commission that in seventeen years has cost the government approximately \$3,804,915.76, that has tried 355 cases, exclusive of the safety appliance cases, at an average cost of \$10,778.80 a case, and has decided 194 cases in favor of the complainants at a rate of \$19,612.97 a case."

Such statements as the above are of frequent occurrence. They are intended to beget the impression that the people are paying for the present commission very much more than it is worth, and that it would be vastly better for the public to let the few transportation wrongs which exist go unrighted than to expend nearly \$20,000 per case for a decision in its favor.

If the investigations of the distinguished gentleman above quoted, whoever he may be, were as minute as his figures indicate, he must have learned that but a fraction of the amount expended in the maintenance of the Interstate Commerce Commission since its creation has been devoted to the trial of cases. Railroads are required to make certain statistical returns and to file tariffs showing their rates for transportation, and a large force of clerks is occupied in those departments. Only a small part of the sum total is devoted to the payment of the commissioners themselves, and of their work by far the greater part has in the past been the ad-

justment of informal complaints without hearing. But let us examine for a minute the suggestion that \$20,000 a case is a poor investment for the public.

In 1896 the railroads transporting live stock to Chicago imposed by concerted action a terminal charge of \$2 per car on every carload delivered at the Union Stock Yards. The amount of this charge is apparently insignificant; indeed it was insisted by the railways upon the hearing which grew out of it that it was really so infinitesimal as not to deserve serious consideration.

During the year 1896, there were delivered at the Union Stock Yards about two hundred and seventy-five thousand carloads of live stock, and this has been the fair average since. The charge, therefore, has aggregated something like \$550,000 annually or, in the interval since its imposition, a sum considerably in excess of the entire cost of maintaining the Interstate Commerce Commission in all its branches from the day of its inception.

The commission held for certain reasons the railways were justified in imposing one-half this amount, but that to the extent of \$1 per carload it was entirely unjustifiable. The Supreme Court concurred in this finding of fact, but held that for certain other reasons the recommendation of the commission could not be enforced. The total annual cost of maintaining the Interstate Commerce Commission in all its departments, except the safety appliance, is \$275,000. If, therefore, there had been on June 1, 1896, any effective means by which the railroads could have been compelled to reduce that charge to the figure fixed by the commission and approved by the court, the public would have saved in this one insignifi-