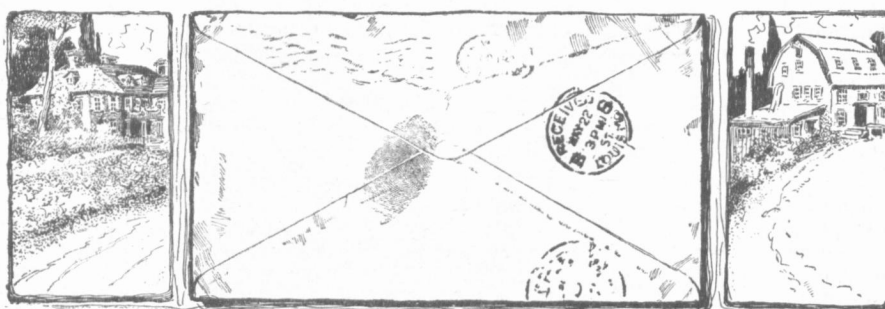


THAT POSTAL DEFICIT

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THE annual cry of a deficit in the Post-Office Department has again been raised by the Postmaster-General in his report. This time the culprits named are rural free delivery and the one-cent-a-pound postage rates for magazines.

It is pertinent to inquire—First: Is a postal deficit necessarily a great evil and one that must be remedied at any cost? Second: Is the remedy proposed not worse than the disease?

Let us first look at the purposes for which the Post-Office Department was established. Was it established primarily to raise a revenue to support the other non-supporting departments of the Government; or was it established to perform certain great public functions for all of the people, functions that were too important to be left to the hazard of private enterprise?

The Post-Office Department has been brought to such a state of efficiency that it comes nearer to every man, woman and child in the country with its beneficent functions than any other department of the Government. To accomplish this it has been necessary to charge no more for the transmission of a letter from New York to San Francisco than from New York to Jersey City. It has been necessary to establish mail routes in sparsely-settled sections of the country where the cost of delivering mails to scattered farms and ranches or distant mining camps is often a hundred times as much as the revenues derived from such services. It has been necessary, or has been



deemed necessary, not only to pay most liberal rates to the railroads for carrying the mail, but actually to subsidize some railroads by paying a large bonus for

putting on extra fast mail trains, and to subsidize all of the railroads by paying them annually a rental for postal cars such as great as the cost of building such cars.

If the policy of efficiency is to be reversed and the policy of revenue is to be the chief object in view, then why not begin by abolishing every postal route in every sparsely-settled community that does not within itself bring in sufficient revenue to pay expenses? Why not divide the country into zones of a hundred or two hundred miles each, and double letter postage every time a letter crosses one of these zones? And why not, at the same time, give some little consideration to whether or not the rate paid to the railroads for carrying the mails is fair or excessive, and to whether or not it is excessive to pay during the life of a postal car—say twenty years—sixty thousand dollars rental for a car that cost only two thousand dollars to build?

At the rate now paid the railroads for carrying the mails, as given by the Postmaster-General in his report, would it not be cheaper for the Government to put a two-hundred-pound sack of mail in the seat of a Pullman car and tack on it a regular first-class passenger ticket to pay its fare, for instance, from Washington to New York?

Would it not also be wise to inquire why the Government should pay so much more for carrying the mails than the railroads charge the express companies for carrying express packages in a car next to the mail car? Surely no one will say that the express rates are too low!

Remedies Near at Hand

THE fact is that a number of publishers now send newspapers and magazines by express for all short distances because the express companies, on account of the low rate that they get from the railroads, are able to underbid the Post-Office Department. This would not be so if the rate per pound charged the Government for mail by the railroads was not so high. Besides, the Post-Office

Department should stop the express companies from taking newspapers and magazines for the short haul, which is profitable, and if this were done it would do much to wipe out the deficit. This could be stopped by an order from the Post-Office Department, and it could also be stopped by establishing a system of parcels post, in which event the express companies would not be needed. In England there is a parcels post and there are no express companies, for they are not needed.

This annual cry raised about the deficit in the Post-Office Department is puzzling to the public. Why should the Post-Office Department be required to pay expenses any more than the Department of the Interior, or the Navy Department, or any other department of the Government? Is that department worth so much less to the people than the other departments that it should be penalized for existing? If the Post-Office Department is to be required to meet expenses, then why not have the Post-Office Department charge all the other departments for handling their mail which is now handled free of charge?

Profitable Business Originated by Magazines

IN VIEW of the facts already stated, indeed, is it not remarkable that this great department has been able to furnish to the people from ocean to ocean the service that it does, and lack only seventeen millions of dollars of making both ends meet?

Again, why are the magazines and the rural free delivery singled out as the two chief culprits for causing this awful deficit? Is not the magazine today as great an educator as a daily newspaper, and has not rural free delivery proved to be the most popular and beneficent branch of the whole postal service?

In 1896, when I, as a member of the Post-Office Committee of the Senate of the United States, offered the amendment to the post-office appropriation bill providing

for the establishment of the present rural free delivery system, I was met with scores of objections and alarming pictures as to the colossal cost that the system would entail, with no commensurate resulting benefits.

The chairman of the committee stated on the floor of the Senate that if this system were established it would soon cost the Government over a hundred million dollars a year more than any increased revenue that might result therefrom. In reply I pointed to the fact that we

were then delivering mail free at an enormous cost to the people of the cities of the United States who lived within a stone's throw of their post-offices, and that the free delivery of the mail in the cities had not increased and could not increase the revenues of the Government one cent, while the establishment of rural free delivery would increase enormously the number of magazines and daily newspapers that would be taken by the farmers, and that this would result in a very large increase of first-class mail.

That prediction has been fully verified by the report of the Fourth Assistant Postmaster-General, just published, in which he states that during the past five years there has been an increase of ninety-six per cent in the amount of mail handled on rural free delivery routes. I make the following extract from that report:

This remarkable increase is conclusive evidence that the institution of rural delivery has enlarged the amount of the mails handled, and, therefore, increased the revenues. This is true, although forty-five per cent of the bulk of the mail on rural routes is second-class matter.

Thus it will be seen that the Fourth Assistant Postmaster-General states that the rural free delivery has resulted in increasing the revenues, and that only forty-five per cent of the mail carried over rural routes is of second-class matter. This means that a very large per cent of the mail

is first-class, which pays a very large revenue. It is to be regretted that the Postmaster-General did not withhold his report until he had received the report of the Fourth Assistant Postmaster-General, which squarely takes issue with him.

But even if the facts were different, I submit that not a single service which the Post-Office Department is today giving the people should be curtailed, no matter if it caused a deficit twice as great. There is no better way in which the people's taxes can be used than to maintain and extend even further the functions of the Post-Office Department in the interests of every class of our people in every section of our country.

Why should not the Post-Office Department use electricity for transmitting information, as well as steam railroads and mule carts? I submit that under the Constitution establishing the postal service it is the duty of Congress to equip the Post-Office Department with electricity and every modern improvement and agency to facilitate the transmission of intelligence. This can be done, and would reduce the cost today of sending messages by wire by more than one-half, and yet raise revenue more than enough to wipe out the deficit, even without any curtailment of the excessive rates that the railroads now receive for carrying the mails.

Why not equip the Post-Office Department with a parcels-post system, which would also result in enabling the people to send packages through the mails at less than half the cost now paid the express companies, and at the same time raise revenue thereby more than enough to wipe out the present deficit?

In short, the first and chief duty of the Government should be to increase the facilities and functions of the Post-Office Department, and incidentally to do it as economically as possible without detriment to the service. A very little thought along this line would make the deficit vanish and would largely increase the blessings of the Post-Office Department.



Stuffed Society

NATURALLY, it is in the shadow of Bunker Hill, in the neighborhood whence came the shot that was heard around the world, that a man arises to declare he will no longer permit his friends to treat him as though he were a Thanksgiving turkey. They must take him unstuffed, he says, or not at all.

Conversation, say the elders, has become a lost art. How could it be otherwise when, by a habit derived from gluttons and drunkards, people seldom have a chance to talk until they are stupefied with food, drink and fatigue? Twelve or more persons sit at a large table. One can talk at most to only two others. They are not the ones he wishes to talk to, or who wish to talk to him. For two hours by the clock he must sit rigidly between them and meanwhile absorb: One gill alcohol with deleterious trimmings, four ounces oysters, one pint soup, five ounces fish, one peck assorted vegetables, half a pound of meat, half a pint frozen cream, an ounce crackers and cheese, one to two pints potent wine, topped with a cup of strong coffee and a fiery cordial to pickle the whole.

About an hour after the time when a man who works should have been in bed opportunity arrives for easy, general conversation. It proceeds as follows: "Yes, the weather is abominable. . . . I didn't care for the opera. . . . I think President Taft—eenie, meenie, minie, moe. . . . Excuse me, but I have to count to keep awake."

It is true that gorging as a social function was highly esteemed by the Romans; but we all know what became of them.

