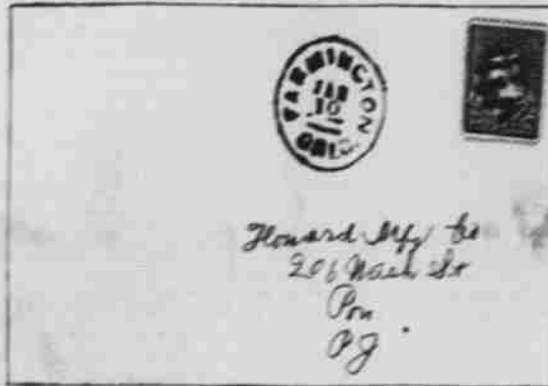


NIXIES.

Were you ever so careless as to drop a nixie into the postoffice? Yes, you probably have been, for there is scarcely an individual, from the most methodical business man to the most careless clerk, who has not at some time



NO. 1.—ADDRESS UNCERTAIN.

mailed a letter that could not be forwarded by reason of some defect or the absence of the distinctive, but all-powerful, postage stamp, that little, flimsy, sticky-back, camme-based portrait of Washington, which costs but two cents, but can carry a letter farther than an able-bodied man could do at an expense of a thousand dollars. A nixie is a letter that is unmailable, and derives its name from a very obvious source. It is a matter of astonishment what a multitude of these there are, reaching into the millions every year. These are treated in various ways, the court of last resort being the dead letter office at Washington. This is the graveyard of many a letter whose sender blames the government for not delivering, or whose failure to reach its destination is never known by the writer. How many a sad drama or tragedy in real life has been caused by a little carelessness that has transformed a message of love, forgiveness or helpfulness into an inert and useless nixie, one can but conjecture; but the contents of many of the letters opened at the dead letter office indicate that their number is legion.

The most common piece of carelessness is a failure to affix a stamp to the envelope. In such cases, when the business card or name of the writer is printed on the envelope, it is stamped "held for postage," and returned. This is of itself an overwhelming argument in favor of the printing of business cards upon envelopes. Many an important remittance or letter has failed to reach its destination in time, or at all, simply because of a failure to do this, and thousands of dollars of loss, even financial ruin, been the result. The argument holds good in the case of important letters sent by private individuals. It is so easy to write on the upper left-hand corner "From John Doe, Roseville, Oregon," and thus avoid any possibility of loss or delay, that it is a wonder such a necessary precaution is ever neglected. Possibly, after reading this, some who have never thought about this subject will have their eyes opened. In case there is no mark upon the envelope to identify the sender, a printed card is mailed to the person to whom it is addressed, informing him that a letter for him is held for postage and will be forwarded upon receipt of stamp. If within a reasonable time this notice brings no stamp, the letter is sent to the dead letter office, where it is opened, and, if found to contain anything of value, the writer, if his name and address can be learned from the letter, is notified. If there be only a deficiency in postage, such as one stamp when there should be two or more, the letter is forwarded to its destination, provided one full rate has been paid; that is, a letter with a two-cent stamp would be forwarded, but one with only a one-cent stamp on it would be held for postage. The deficiency is collected when the letter is delivered. Letters defective in the matter of postage are dropped into every office in amazing numbers, reaching well into the millions throughout the United States. It looks like simple thing, but, beyond question,

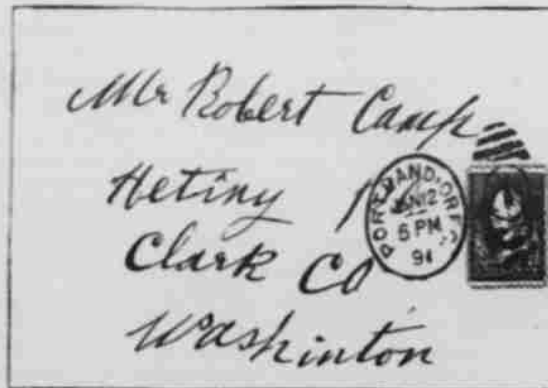
most disastrous results are constantly following this most common and universal carelessness.

The next most prolific source of nixies is carelessness in addressing envelopes. The errors of this kind are multitudinous and varied, the most common being the omission of the name of the state or the writing of a wrong one. One is the habit of addressing a great many letters to one state will mechanically write the name of that state upon a letter intended to go elsewhere. Such letters are treated in much the same way as those without stamps—sent back if the writer is known, forwarded if it is possible to guess with any certainty the address really intended, or sent to the dead letter office as a last resort. A letter addressed "Chicago, Oregon," would be forwarded to Chicago, Illinois, but, as there are other postoffices of that name, this may not prove to be correct, and, after the usual delay for advertising, it may finally reach the great nixie heap in Washington. Duplication of names in different states leads to endless trouble and annoyance. For instance, "Dayton, Or.," and "Dayton, O.," are very much alike, and a little carelessness on the part of either the writer or a postal clerk might, and often does, make endless trouble. Sometimes the name of the postoffice itself is omitted, and here is where the ingenuity of the nixie clerk—for there is an individual by that title who makes a business of putting these estrays on the right path—is taxed to the utmost. If street and number are given he has a clue that generally leads to the situation. In his possession are the directories of all the leading cities. He first finds from the street directory what city has a street with the same name as that on the envelope; and, if there are several of them, as is generally the case, he next sees which one of them has a number corresponding to that on the envelope. Possibly he may find the name of the firm or individ-



NO. 2.—WOO LEE CO., HOQUIAM, WASHINGTON. FIRST CLASS WORK GUARANTEED. BEST LAUNDRY IN THE CITY.

ual in the directory, and thus be certain, but if not he writes "Try Chicago, Memphis and Charleston," if these show equal possibilities, and sends the letter on its way, rejoicing or otherwise, as the case may be. Many cities have leading business streets with names peculiar to themselves, and these the experienced nixie clerk well knows, such as Broadway or Wall streets in New York, Chestnut street in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania avenue and other state names in Washington, Euclid avenue in Cleveland, Lake street in Chicago, Kearney street in San Francisco, Yamhill street in Portland, Pacific avenue in Tacoma, and a multitude of others. The more extensive his knowledge on this subject the easier the work of the nixie clerk becomes. An instance of this kind of address is No. 1 of the accompanying engravings, all of which are fac similes of addresses of letters passing through the Portland office. In this case there is an indication of a postoffice name, "Pon," but which may not, in fact, be intended as such. Nor does it follow that the "P. J." is intended to designate the state, since there is no state or province bearing those initials. Washington street is such a common name that it might be intended for any one of fifty cities, and about the only clue is the name "Howard Mfg. Co.," which may or may not prove to be in



NO. 3.—MR. ROBERT CAMP, ETNA P. O., CLARKE COUNTY, WASHINGTON.