

"DEAD LETTERS."

And What Becomes of Them—More Than Four Millions a Year.

A Washington letter to the Cleveland Herald describes the operations of the dead letter office as follows: It is difficult to imagine a place more inviting to a lover of the curious. Not a day passes without almost numberless instances, humorous, droll and pathetic, revealed by the letters that find their way into this great receptacle for the waifs from the mails. But before entering upon this tempting part of my theme let me present a few figures taken from the records of the office, that cannot fail to interest the reader.

During the last year the number of pieces of mail matter that reached the dead letter office was nearly four and a half millions! The exact number was 4,440,822. This is about 14,500 for every day. A daily record is kept, and for the day before my visit this showed over 19,000. Of the yearly aggregate given 4,856,915 were letters, domestic and foreign, and \$3,907 were parcels of every description. Of the letters 3,246,892 were "dead," strictly speaking—that is, they were uncalled for at the offices where received, advertised according to law, and duly forwarded here. There were 78,865 returned from hotels, transient guests having failed to leave directions where letters should be forwarded; 13,507 bearing fictitious addresses; 133,509 returned from foreign countries, and 3,749 registered letters. There were 475,045 letters not properly "dead," but classed as "unavailable," as follows: For non-payment of postage, 181,584; misdirection, 324,429; containing inclosures prohibited by law, 1,345; without any address whatever, 11,979. The number received mailed in foreign countries was 405,348. According to the terms of the international postal treaties all these are returned unopened to the countries in which they were mailed, and there treated as dead letters.

The gentleman who has been kindly placed at our disposal, "to show us through," announces his readiness, and we start upon our tour. We enter a large room in which are nearly a hundred clerks, busy as bees. On every hand there are mailbags and great heaps of epistolary corpses and papers ready to meet their fate.

"Here," says the guide, as we approach a long desk, where half a dozen ladies, with quick eyes and nimble fingers, are busily at work, "is where the dead letters are received, from more than fifty thousand different postoffices in the United States. You see they are all done up in packages, the wrapper showing the nature of their contents, and addressed to this office. About 14,000 letters are handled at this table every day. Our force is inadequate to do our constantly increasing work, and our "openers," are now two or three weeks behind. In that large case you see yonder are over 300,000 letters tied up in packages of 100 each, waiting to be opened.

"Let me open for you one of these packages that has just come in this morning. Here is a large one from Chicago. That will show you the different classes of letters we have. These ladies look them all over and sort them, and then they are sent to other desks for examination. Now look at these letters. The first we come to, you see, has no stamp. We get about 900 of these every day. Strange, isn't it, that so many people, through carelessness, mail unstamped letters. That letter is not 'dead,' and if legibly addressed we send a notice to the person to whom it is directed, informing him that a letter for him is held here for postage. The chances are a hundred to one that he will immediately send the required stamp, and we stick it on his letter and mail it to him. If we get no reply to the notice within due time, the letter is then treated as dead, opened and returned to the sender. That is the way that class is disposed of."

"Now here is another kind. This one is misdirected; it has the town and county but no State. The postmaster could not send it, and had no alternative but to forward it to the dead letter office. We get more than a thousand a day that come under this head. They embrace all sorts of errors in the address, as well as those that are illegible, for you know some people try to write when they can't, and the result is, nobody can read it. The department does not allow 50,000 postmasters to do the guessing. If a letter is not properly and legibly addressed it must be sent here, and we have some experts whose sole business it is to do the guessing. And they are good guessers, too.

"Look at this one. It is properly sealed and stamped, but the envelope is blank, there isn't the scratch of a pen upon it anywhere. Forty or fifty of these come here daily. Of course such mistakes are attributed only to carelessness or inadvertence. And it is a singular fact that a much greater percentage of these unaddressed letters, than of any other class we get, have valuable inclosures, such as money, checks and drafts, they are largely business letters, showing that they are mailed from offices and counting-rooms, the fatal omissions resulting from the hurry and confusion of business. But it seems queer that there are so many of them. We can do nothing but open and return them. Here are a number returned from hotels. We have no possible means of knowing the permanent address of these persons, and we can only treat them as dead.

"These, you observe, were mailed in Germany, England, France, etc. They will all be returned, unopened, to those countries. Here are a couple of registered letters. They undoubtedly contain value, which will be returned to the senders. But it often happens that a man sends money or a draft, in either a registered or an ordinary letter, while traveling. He dates his letter at the place where he happens to be. We can

only send it to him there, and of course it comes back to us again. Postmasters everywhere are instructed in all cases of a returned money letter to take every possible means to find the sender, but when he fails he can only send it here again. All such returned letters are held here for three months, and it is the sole business of one clerk to endeavor, by correspondence or otherwise, to find either the sender or the person addressed. Often he succeeds, but if not, the money is turned into the United States treasury. The data in each case are carefully recorded and the amounts are subject to reclamation by the owner on making proof within four years. At the expiration of that time the money by law passes absolutely to the government, and can only be recovered by act of Congress."

"What per cent. of the money is returned or delivered to those addressed?" "Ninety-seven per cent.—nearly all of it. The number of letters opened last year containing currency, checks, drafts and negotiable paper was over 34,000. The amount of actual cash taken from letters was nearly \$30,000, and the value of checks, etc., representing money, about \$1,600,000."

At this moment one of the clerks engaged in opening letters—at a table near by—calls to the gentleman who is entertaining me. He goes to him, and immediately beckons for me to follow.

"Now, what can be done in this case?" he says. "Here is a letter this instant opened, and you see what it contains?" "There is a clean, new twenty-dollar bill, neatly folded and wrapped in a piece of perfectly blank brown paper—not a mark of pen or pencil to show from whom it was sent. The letter had been advertised as unclaimed and was dead, and the examination of its contents made it more completely dead than before.

"We have nothing but the postmark, and even that is almost obliterated, but our expert will take hold of it and do the best he can with it. There's a pretty slim chance in this case. I guess Uncle Sam will get that money. This reminds me of something in my own experience. A few years ago, when I was opening letters, I found one just like this, except that the amount was \$30, and on the paper wrapped around it was written in pencil, 'A friend, Matthew vi. 3.' I looked that up and found it to be: 'But when thou doest alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.' The letter was addressed to a woman, and it was clearly a case of charity. I really felt bad that we could not succeed in finding either party, and the money is in the treasury to-day.

"There is one class I want to mention, and that is the letters sent out by or addressed to the frauds and swindling concerns that gull innocent people. Just look at this printed list we have of over 400 of these concerns in all parts of the country. This list is furnished to all postmasters, and they are directed to forward straight to this office all letters addressed to them. These letters, and we get them by the thousand, are usually written in response to attractive advertisements or circulars, in which they promise what they never intend to fulfill. A short time ago there was a firm in Philadelphia that advertised a Bible as the means of swindling the people. At first nobody thought of its being a fraud, and a great many bit at it, and they all got bitten, too! We 'caught on' pretty soon and found that the concern was raking in the money and giving absolutely nothing in return. We sent a notification right away to all postmasters, and would you believe it, we received in one day 6,000 letters addressed to them. Nineteen-twentieths of them contained money, from seventy-five cents to \$2 each. That was the greatest lot of the kind we ever had. There was not less than \$7,000 or \$8,000 in those letters, all of which were returned to the senders, with a circular informing them that the concern was a fraud. You see the government takes a good deal of pains to accommodate the people and protect them from imposters and swindlers."

Daily Life of the Chinese Emperor.

The Chinese emperor is a lad thirteen years of age. He lives in a state of semi-seclusion in the palace of Jan-Chien-Tien, where he is waited on by a staff of picked retainers, who never approach him otherwise than on their knees. His mother visits him once a month, and she kneels while uttering her first sentence. Considering the extraordinary respect in which parents are held in China, no more complete recognition of the transcendent character of the imperial dignity can be imagined. His father goes through exactly the same ceremonial.

The emperor devotes two hours and a half daily to the study of Chinese, and the same time to Manchu. Needless to say, the professors approach him on their knees; but to remark the respect to letters which Chinese traditions exact ever from the emperor, he invites, or rather commands, them to rise when the lesson begins. He passes two hours each day in riding and in archery, and in winter he takes sledging exercise.

Eight eunuchs wait upon him at table, and have orders to prevent his partaking too freely of any of his favorite dishes, as boys, even though they be emperors, will sometimes do. He sleeps in a magnificent Ningpo bed, the frame of which is of massive gold and ivory, and which belonged to his distinguished ancestors, K'ang Hsi and Ch'ien Lung.

The Inseparable.

"Margery," said Ethelbert, as they sat on the opposite ends of the Turkish divan. "Why am I like the letter Q?" and a silence fell, broken only by the melodious cough of Margery's warranted New-England throat.

"Because, dear," added Ethelbert, "I feel that I am useless without U."—Boston Bulletin.

THE NATION'S PROPERTY.

Public Buildings in Washington and Their Value.

The national government is the owner of an enormous amount of property in Washington, as appears by the books of the assessors of the District of Columbia. They make up their accounts by figuring the actual cost of all public buildings and other structures, and estimating the value of the United States reservations by the value of the land around them. Following are the valuations:

Table listing valuations for various public buildings in Washington, including the President's house, Treasury Building, State, War and Navy Building, and others.

The land in Reservation 1, which includes the President's house, having an area of 3,318,172 feet, is valued at \$7,198,128. The President's house is valued at \$753,530. Treasury Building, \$7,158,454. State, War and Navy Building, \$7,638,935. Treasury workshops, \$77,000. President's stable, \$28,500.

Total, \$22,844,597. The Capitol grounds are valued at \$7,907,645. And the building at, \$15,939,956. Total, \$23,807,251.

The sum of \$15,599,654 is the amount actually expended on construction of the Capitol to date. The Navy Yard is valued at \$1,403,500. Buildings, \$3,615,905.

Total, \$5,019,308. The land occupied by the Patent Office building is valued at \$906,105. Cost of building, \$3,245,778.

Total, \$4,151,883. Judiciary Square, containing several buildings, is valued at \$1,254,561. Cost of City Hall, \$75,152. Cost of Pension Building, \$137,000.

Total, \$1,666,713. Reservation 2, containing the Smithsonian, and other buildings, is valued as follows:

Table listing valuations for Agricultural Department buildings, including land, buildings, and other items.

Total, \$5,986,966. Other items are: Washington monument—Land, \$1,815,781. Superstructure, \$794,163.

Total, \$2,609,944. United States Observatory—Land, \$125,961. Buildings, \$255,364.

Total, \$381,325. Arsenal buildings—Land, \$1,291,607. Buildings, \$70,324.

Total, \$1,401,931. The Marine Barracks are valued at \$370,872. Naval Hospital, \$125,713. Government Printing Office, \$18,524. General Post Office, \$4,72,985. Medical Museum, \$8,312. Bureau Engraving and Printing, \$78,731. Department of Justice, \$288,922. Winders building, \$74,269. Botanical Garden, \$4,063,927. Powder Magazine, \$74,998. New jail, \$25,550.

These are the principal items in the government's list of the property here. The aggregate of all the government property is over \$86,000,000. The actual investment of money in buildings is something more than half that sum, say \$50,000,000. Beside this the government has paid great amounts, although never a full share till of late, of the expenses for improving streets, avenues, etc. The buildings now underway will involve an expenditure of at least \$5,000,000. It does not look very much as if Uncle Sam were thinking of pulling up stakes and moving his Federal family out West. He would have to sacrifice nearly \$100,000,000 were he to do so.—New York Telegram.

Pithy Advice.

Keep your head cool, your feet warm and subscribe for your local newspaper. Don't spend more than you can borrow, and don't borrow more than you can pay promptly.

Don't kindle the fire with kerosene unless you are prepared for a land that is fairer than this. If you are angry at a man count fifty before speaking; if he is a great deal bigger than you are count four hundred and sixty.

Don't blow in your gun to see if it is loaded, unless you want to get your name in the papers and your family is well provided for.

Be satisfied with the world as you find it, remembering that you are only a tenant here and may not find yourself as well suited when you move.

Love your neighbor. If he keeps a dog that howls at the moon do not make harsh remarks about him, but borrow the dog to go hunting and forget to bring him back again.

Don't brag about the achievements of your ancestor. A great ancestor in the grave is poor capital of itself for a man to go into business on. And, beside, our ancestors had their faults. Even Adam's record is not as clean as we would like it to be.—Middleton Transcript.

Origin of the Word "Punch."

The origin of this word is attributed by Dr. Doran, in his "History of Court Fools," to a club of Athenian wits; but how he could possibly connect the word "punch" with these worthies, or derive it from either their sayings or doings, we are totally at a loss to understand. Its more probable derivation is from the Persian punj, or from the Sanskrit pancha, which denotes the usual number of ingredients of which it is composed, viz., five. The recipes, however, for making this beverage are very numerous; and, from various flavoring matters which may be added to it punch has received a host of names, derived alike from men or materials. Mark Lemon was accustomed to say that the composition of his punch required three lemons, viz., Leman Rede, Laman Blanchard and Mark Lemon.—Notes and Queries.

POPULAR SCIENCE.

While on his way from England to Australia, Mr. M. D. Conway, who is making a tour around the world, saw a very peculiar sun. One morning, he says, that in place of the usual orb, an intense blue sun rose above the horizon, and maintained its startling color the entire day.

The Glasgow Medical Journal describes an electro-magnet having a power to rise upon its point a weight equal to six ounces. It has been used successfully in cases where workmen in iron and steel have been severely wounded by flying chips, and the writer says that such instruments must henceforth become an essential part of the apparatus of ophthalmic surgeons.

Sir Samuel W. Baker, the African explorer, states that the camel will cross the deserts with a load of 400 pounds at the rate of thirty miles a day in the burning heat of summer, and require water only every third or fourth day. In the cooler months the animal will work for seven or eight days without water; and if grazing on green foliage without labor will drink only once a fortnight.

From a report on American precious stones, by Mr. George F. Kutz, it appears that some eighty-eight different minerals occur in the United States which have been used as gems, and twelve of these are found only in the United States. Systematic mining for gems is carried on at only two places in this country, viz: at Paris, Maine, famed for its tourmalines, of which probably more than \$50,000 worth have been obtained; and at Stony Point, N. C., which has thus far yielded some \$7,500 worth of tourmaline and hiddenite. In other cases where gems are found they are either met with accidentally or occur in connection with other materials that are being mined, or in small veins which are only occasionally to be discovered.

The analysis of snake poisons, made last summer by Drs. Wier, Mitchell and Reichert, have been fully confirmed by other investigators. All the venoms examined are essentially alike; in every case they are made up of three proteid bodies. The first reduces the blood pressure, induces swelling (oedema), and finally brings about putrefactive effects. The second is a virulent substance, one-twentieth of a grain of which will kill a pigeon in two hours; it gives rise in a few minutes after injection to enormous infiltration of blood into the neighboring tissue. The poisonous properties of the third substance are doubtful. The object of the analysis is to eliminate the venomous principle, so that experiments may be made as to what drug can be used to the best advantage in neutralizing it.

THE HOME DOCTOR.

SICK HEADACHE.—Coarse brown paper soaked in vinegar and placed on the forehead is good for a sick headache. If the eyelids are gently bathed in cool water the pain in the head is generally alleviated.

CURE FOR COUGHS.—One of the best cures for cough, and one which is always at hand, is to dip strips of flannel in very hot water and then bind tightly about the throat. Remove as soon as cold and apply others. A cold in the chest can also be cured by wetting several thicknesses of flannel in hot water and laying it upon the chest.

DRINK FOR A SICK CHILD.—One of the best and most strengthening drinks, as well as a pleasant one, to give a delicate child, is made by beating up an egg in a tumbler with a little sugar until it froths, then fill it with rich milk and have the child drink it at once. The nourishment in the egg and milk combined sustain the system all day if nothing else is taken.

CURING WEAK EYES.—Bathe your eyes daily in salt water; not salt enough though to cause a smarting sensation. Nothing is more strengthening, and we know several persons, who, after using this simple tonic for a few weeks, had put aside the spectacles they had used for years, and did not resume them, continuing, of course, the oft-repeated daily use of salt water. Never force your eyesight to read or work in insufficient or too broad light. Reading with the sun upon one's book is very injurious to the eyes.

The Arab and His Horse.

The Arabians never beat their horses; they never cut their tails; they treat them gently; they speak to them and seem to hold a discourse; they use them as friends; they never attempt to increase their speed by the whip, or spur them, but in cases of great necessity. They never fix them to a stake in the fields, but suffer them to pasture at large around their habitations; and they come running the moment that they hear the sound of their master's voice. In consequence of such treatment these animals become docile and tractable in the highest degree. They resort at night to their tents, and lie down in the midst of the children, without ever hurting them in the slightest manner. The little boys and girls are often seen upon the body or neck of the mare, while the beasts continue inoffensive and harmless, permitting them to play with and caress them without injury.

A Proposal.

"Had a proposal from any of the fair sex since leap year began, Jones?" "I have, Brown; I had a proposal from the daughter of my boarding missus." "Giminy! you're in luck. How did she muster courage to make it, and what did you say?" "Well, you see, she keeps the books for her mother, so she came to me the other day and proposed." "Yes, yes, lucky dog! go on." "She proposed that I pay up my arrears or git." "Whew!" "So I got!"—Somerville Journal.

LEAP YEAR.

JOHN:—Come, Sally, dear, it's getting late, and mother's wide awake; She knows you're here, and therefore your departure you must take; I've got to lock the door and then put out the parlor light; Please go, dear Sal, and you can come again some other night.

SAL:—Oh, phaw! dear John, it's early yet, I'm sure I needn't hurry; It's scarcely half-past 10 o'clock, you mother need not worry; But if you want to go to bed then I'll no longer stay, So, love, give me another kiss, and I will go away.

JOHN:—Oh, Sal, please don't! Well, take it then, now go; oh, please, make haste! If mother should come down and see your arm around my waist I think I'd faint; come, dearest, don't delay a moment more; Put on your hat and shawl and I will see you to the door.

SAL:—I think it's just too bad that I have got to go so soon; Well, never mind, I'll see you, love, to-morrow afternoon;

JOHN:—Oh, hush! I hear your mother coming down with footsteps light; I'm off—just one; oh, my, how sweet! Well, Johnny, dear, good-night.

—Somerville Journal.

PUNGENT PARAGRAPHS.

An exchange speaks of "Limburger by the ton." We have frequently seen Limburger by the Teuton.

"Why do they call it leap year, pa? Is it because it comes along just about the time when hops are most prolific?" "Guess not, child! Most likely it's because it keeps men on the jump to keep out of the way of embarrassing situations."—Yonkers Gazette.

During a conversation recently on the subject of cold weather, a stranger said: "I don't care how cold it is, my fingers never get frost-bitten." "How is that?" inquired several. "Why, because," replied the stranger; "I once monkeyed with a buzz-saw."—Puck.

To get rid of the smell of fresh paint in a chamber or living room, slice a few onions and put them in the middle of the room. After that it will be desirable to get rid of the smell of the onions. This can easily be done by putting on another coat of paint.—Philadelphia Call.

"Why, how wonderfully life-like!" said Mr. Derrix, gently caressing a bumble-bee which reposed among the artificial flowers and insects on his wife's new bonnet. "If it was on a garden flower I'd swear that it was all—G-r-r-reat Caesar!" he suddenly shrieked, inserting a wounded finger in his mouth and dancing around like a whirling dervish, "why, the blame thing is alive!"—Drake's Magazine.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE CORN.

How much the fair but potent sex Is like a crop of corn, For in whatever place they're seen, That place they do adorn.

The corn is green when young, as is The offspring of man's rib; It's then they're taken by the ear And placed within a crib.

You find on them the finest silk, Becoming, too, no doubt; And when the season comes around In tassels they come out.

In reaping time some fellow comes, And in his arms they're locked, Surprised! Well, yes; but then they like This way of being shocked.

But when the days have come and gone, And filled life's golden page, A difference you will find, my friends— The corn will tell its age.

—Yonkers Statesman.

The Chameleon.

Philosopher as he is, the chameleon requires food, and since he is too slow to go after it, he brings it to him. As his ball-and-socket eyes roll this way and that way, one of them marks a large white butterfly walking up the bars of his cage, and he forms a purpose to eat it. He unbinds his tail, then relaxes the grasp of his broad palms one at a time (for he is extremely nervous about falling and breaking his bones), and so he advances slowly along the twig until he is within six inches of his prey, then he stops, and there is a working in his swollen throat; he is gumming his tongue. At last he leans forward and opens his preposterous mouth, and that member protrudes like a goose-quill steeped in white bird-lime. For a moment he takes aim, and then, too quick for eyes to follow it, the horrid instrument has darted forth, and returned like elastic to its place, and the gay butterfly is being crunched and swallowed as fast as anything can be swallowed when tongue, jaws, and throat are smeared with viscid slime. But this part of the process is inconceivably vulgar, and we may well leave the chameleon to himself till it is over.

Why the Pepper-Box Resembled Him.

It was only yesterday that an inveterate stammerer dined at Parker's. On attempting to help himself to pepper, he found, after a violent shaking, that there was none of the article to be obtained. Turning round and beckoning to the waiter, he said:

"wa-wa-wa-wa-wa-wa! this pep-pep-p-pepper-box is som-som-something like me."

"Why so, sir?" asked the waiter. "It lo-lo-looks well, but has mi-mi-mighty po-po-po-poor delivery!"—Boston Post.