

# The Mail Agent's Story

Five years ago I was subordinate mail agent on the Great Southern Railway. I use the term "Great Southern" advisedly, since I have no intention of locating my story, and if you look on your railway maps for the name of any of the towns mentioned herein, your quest will, doubtless, be a vain one.

Axtell was the agent, and I acted under his orders. We ran only on the night express.

One foggy night, as we slacked up for water at Rowley station, Axtell said to me:

"I shall have to give you the charge tonight, Gregory. I am off to Pelham. Little engagement, you know."

"He laughed, and so did I, for his sweetheart lived at Pelham, and from the unusual redundancy of Axtell's necktie I had little difficulty in concluding that he was going to visit Kate Vernon. And as I had my own dear Helen on board the train then, traveling to Fairbridge under my escort, of course I had a fellow feeling with Axtell, and was quite ready to accommodate him.

It was just falling dusk, and promised to be a dark night. There was a cold mist in the air, and an east wind growled sullenly through the pine woodlands lying back of Rowley station.

"I wish you joy of your ride, this nasty night," said I, as he moved off, and pocketing the key of the mail car, which he gave me with the remark: "I left the car unlocked with Joe to stand guard. You'd better hurry up."

He sprang to the platform, for the train was already getting under headway. As we were moving off, Harker, the telegrapher at Rowley station, came hurrying out with a slip of paper in his hand.

"Hello, Gregory," said he, breathlessly, "be good enough to give this to Johnstone. Telegram just came down from Derby Junction. Important!"

I caught the last words without seeing the speaker, for we were leaving Rowley behind in the gloom.

I thrust the paper into my pocket and hurried off to relieve Joe, a sleepy headed fellow, who acted as brakeman, stoker, lamp-lighter, porter, or whatever he might be required for. I wanted to put the mail car under lock and key the first thing, and I felt a little vexed with Axtell for his carelessness in leaving it unlocked; but for that I could have spent a cozy ten minutes by the side of Helen before it was time to change the mail at Burkesville.

It was not like Axtell to be careless, but he was so deep in love with dashing Kate Vernon that at times his head was not quite level.

I found Joe, as I expected I should, fast asleep, and snoring almost as loud as the puffing of the locomotive. I sent him about his business and entered the car to see if all was right, pulling the door to after me. I heard it lock as it closed, for it had a spring-lock—one of the devil's own inventions. Never mind, I said to myself—I had the key and was safe enough.

I opened the bags of papers and letters, sorted out the parcels for Burkesville and placed them in their appropriate bag. We merely left the mail at Burkesville—it was thrown off without stopping—generally the train made no very perceptible slackening there. And as we were a little behind time that night, of course there would be no lessening of the speed, and I must be ready to throw off the bag promptly. I took up the bag and applied the key to the door of the car. Good heavens! It was in no respect like the key which fitted that complicated lock. I looked at it more carefully and saw that it was nothing but a common trunk key. Axtell had made a fearful mistake.

I was a prisoner! and the worst of it was, there could be no escape for me until the train reached Fairbridge. No one but Axtell and myself ever came near the mail car. And here we were, rushing along at the rate of forty miles an hour, with a noise like the thunder of Niagara, and I felt, without making any attempt at realizing the fact, that all the voice in my lungs would never penetrate beyond the walls of that strongly built car.

Like lightning we whizzed past Burkesville. Through the narrow slit which answered for a window I saw the station-master in the attitude of expectancy gazing after us, but we were miles away, probably, before the disappointed man got his mouth closed from the gape of anticipation with which he regarded the train.

I was angry, and must confess that I swore a little, though as there was no one present to hear me, it did not create any great sensation. My chief cause of chagrin lay in the fact that I could not reach Helen, and that she would doubtless be very much hurt, and perhaps angry, at what she might think savored of neglect.

I examined the car doors, and battered against them with a settee, but I might as well have attempted to break the walls of the Bastille.

There were three luggage vans between me and the engine, and two second-class cars, containing no passengers, between me and the coaches.

The bell-rope leading to the engineer's box ran through the attic of the mail car and was not accessible from the compartment in which I then was.

"Well," I said, disconsolately enough, after reviewing the situation, "there is nothing to do but grin and bear it."

Suddenly I bethought myself of the telegram from the conductor. Strange that I had so long forgotten it! I unfolded it with a cold shudder of apprehension. There were only a few words, and the import of these were dread enough. With a swimming brain and half blinded sight I read the two sentences:

"Slow the train at Derby Junction. Alder Run Bridge is down."

A cold shudder shook me from head to foot. I leaned against the side of the car for support; while, like lightning, thought was busy in calculating what would be the result.

We were running at a great rate of speed. It would be difficult to bring the train to a halt suddenly, and here was I—the only person on board who knew of the danger which threatened—shut up in this vile car helpless and powerless to give the alarm.

I climbed to the window and looked out. It was dark as Erebus, but I managed to make out the lights of Stratford whizzing past, and I knew we were forty-five miles from Derby Junction.

Alder Run was half a mile or so beyond Derby—a deep, rocky-bottomed gulch, through which ran a noisy stream, and this stream at present was quite a formidable river. I had spoken to Axtell about the extraordinary height of the water when we passed the night before. The bridge was a narrow pile, single track, and full twenty-five feet from the water. I ran all this over in my mind, and knew that if we plunged into that stony gulch, running at our present rate of speed, there would be very few of us left to tell the tale.

I drew a long breath.

"What could I do? Nothing within my power was left undone. I shouted from the little window until my voice failed from very exhaustion; I thundered against the doors until my hands were bruised and bleeding, and the settee—the one instrument I had to work with—lay in fragments at my feet. And all this time we were dashing forward to our fate. To my excited imagination it seemed as if our speed was swiftly increasing—we no longer touched the earth—we flew!

And Helen! my poor darling! A great throb of agony swelled in my throat and almost suffocated me at thought of her. All-unconscious of impending doom—sitting quietly—her blue eyes heavy with tears at my neglect—going on to her fate!

Suddenly a thought struck me, and I was desperate enough to do anything. I felt I should go mad if I could not act.

I might warn the engineer—warn the train—warn the lives of those on board—though in all probability I should lose my own.

I thought of Helen and of the dismal shades of Alder Run, and did not hesitate a moment.

I would fire the car! The flames would be seen—they would stop the train, and I would pray to God that I might retain my life until I could tell them the jeopardy we had been in—the danger which lay just ahead!

Without a scruple I tore open the mail bag containing the newspapers and piled them up in a corner of the car. I laid everything combustible at my command on the pile and applied the match. It blazed up bravely, and so excited was I that I danced in front of the fire I had kindled like a madman. The car became insufferably hot; I was obliged to put my head out of the window to breathe, and my clothes—thank Heaven, they were woolen—were beginning to crisp and shrivel in the intense heat. Already my face was blistered, and it seemed as if every drop of moisture in my body was dried up.

And still that fire gained so slowly! Would it never burst through the roof of the car? We were nearly at Derby; already, by the hollow roar, I knew that we had run through Darrell's Cut—only a mile from Derby!

Minutes seemed hours, and my impatience became so unbearable that I seized a kerosene lamp and flung it into the midst of the flames!

The car rocked as if in the breath of a whirlwind. I was hurled violently against the door, and a long spire of lurid flame shot through the roof and seemed to wrap the whole fabric in its fiery embrace.

And simultaneously I heard the sharp whistle of the locomotive to "down brakes," and I knew that my signal had been seen.

The speed slackened; a few moments more and the train was at a standstill and the roar of Alder Run could be distinctly heard.

We were within fifteen rods of destruction!

I had just strength enough left to put the telegram in the hand of the first man who approached me, and then fainted dead away.

I was very badly burned, and the physicians say that only Helen's faithful nursing saved my life.

As it was, I got scarred and disfigured, but Helen bravely sticks to it that I am handsomer than ever in her eyes; and, truth to tell, I care more for her judgement than for that of every other woman in the world!

The owners were pleased to consider my conduct heroic and raised my salary, so that Helen and I were married as soon as I was able to be about; but I have in my black locks more than one thread of white which appeared there that night the bridge at Alder Run was down.—HERO STRONG.



[These articles and illustrations must not be reprinted without special permission.]

## BIDDY IN THE BUSHES.

About the first thing asked by the town boy when he visits the farm is, "Gran'ma, let me hunt the eggs?" "Sure," she answers, "but don't fall down the hay hole."

And then away to the haymow  
And up on the big straw stack,  
Down in the stable entry  
And up on old Fan's rack,  
Those kids go screeching and climbing  
To find the eggs so white  
That Biddy, the hustling farm hen,  
Has hidden out of sight.

But some hens are too slick even for the American boy and aren't found until they show their chicks unless the reaper uncovers their nest in the field.

Pretty Biddy in the picture stole her nest on the border of the wheat, where we found her sitting on thirteen white eggs in a cool cozy nest among the tall weeds and grasses. There we sat down beside Biddy in the bushes to take lessons from nature at short range, for Biddy in the stolen nest always seems to do the best. Hear our hen tale:

The nest was clean of filth and lice, for Biddy dusted near by; thus



## BIDDY'S BEAUTIES.

eggs were kept sanitary. The quiet, cool retreat was a rest cure where the hen's hatching temperature easily averaged 103 to 104 degrees, where she even gained strength as she awaited the coming of the stork. She fed every day, gathering grit and grain from the field and remained off the nest from fifteen minutes to one hour, according to the weather.

The hygrometer, contrary to opinion, showed that ground, air and hen added very little moisture to the eggs, the hen adding the most. Humidity under the hen averaged from 60 to 65, whereas certain nonmoisture incubator register but 20 to 35, a condition



unfavorable to germ life. The cause of all bound chicks and dread white diarrhea.

Biddy's eggs lost but 10 per cent weight by evaporation, some incubators by excessive ventilation and dryness robbing eggs of 20 to 30 per cent, which is deadly.

Biddy's thirteen eggs hatched. She raised them all, which shows what we can do if we follow nature's plan.

## DON'TS.

Don't hesitate if eggs and meat you want. The Dottes, the Rocks, the Reds, can do the stunt.

Don't study long if you want size and flesh that's white. The Houdan, Orpington, Minorca, are all right.

Don't look elsewhere if after big white eggs. Take Black Minorcas with blue slaty legs.

Don't be a spendthrift. The prodigal in ancient days went to the hogs, but spenders now go quickly to the dogs.

Don't hunt around long if after eggs from quacks. The Runners lay them round by stacks.

Don't ponder much on turkey breeds. The big Bronze beaut meets all our needs.

## A SLICK FOXY TRICK.

Ten roosters sat high in a tree  
As safe and cozy as could be.  
They kissed good night and went to sleep  
While peace reigned in the forest deep.

A big fox waited down below  
To nab these roosters in a row.  
"Alas," he cried, "the game's so no,  
Because they love each other so!"

Then that sly fox let out a snore  
That made the very forest roar.  
A rooster, wakened in his fright,  
Yelled at another to his right:

"Cut out that snore, you awful bore!  
If you shoot off your snoot horn more  
I'll give you such an awful lick  
You'll turn into a feather tick!"

An argument at once arose,  
And those ten roosters came to blows.  
They battled in that tall tree-top,  
And all fell down to earth kerflop.

And foxy gobbled all the ten  
And bore them to his hidden den,  
Where in his cave amid the stones  
Were stacks on stacks of chicken bones.

Thus that old demon, slick Old Nick,  
Works humans with this foxy trick.  
He promotes, referees each bout,  
Then gives to each a slick knockout.

N. B.—To beat the devil keep your temper level.  
C. M. BARNITZ.

## BEST TIME TO BUY STOCK.

It's often a puzzler for a beginner to know when to buy stock—when it's high or low and at its best.

Old birds are cheapest at the end of the breeding season. They are of little profit for eggs from then on till after molt. Molt puts them out of condition for sale, and their room is needed for youngsters.

Don't buy breeders in molt. They are without full plumage, don't show their real shape and spirit, and you can't tell whether you are getting a square deal on color, for a bird perfect in color before in molt will sometimes go bad.

As winter approaches fowls are high or because scarcer, and eggs sell high. In spring they are highest because of breeding season.

Buying in molt, you may lose some, as feather forming is a strain. Buying in winter, colds contracted in shipping may bring ruin.

Young stock, hatched from March to May, is fully matured in the fall, cheap and plentiful, especially males.

In buying at shows remember many particolored fowls are bred for exhibition by double mating and thus cannot breed their like.

It is the best policy to visit your dealer, select your birds, pay in advance and take them right home with you unless you are sure that, like the famous George, he never told a lie.

## FEATHERS AND EGGSHELLS.

There were 550 new members added to the American Poultry association the past year. Entry fees, \$5.50. Next!

Uniformity in size, color and quality should be the aim of every producer of eggs. Put up the best and bon ton trade will do the rest.

A Mount Royal (Pa.) fancier raised nineteen twelve-toed chickens. This is bad policy. People kick at paying for eight toes now. The American boy is just now yelling for a turkey with four drumsticks, and there's a crown for the head that invents the quadruped.

A woman of Calvert, Md., declares flies cure chicken gapes. Some of our crude scientists declare that chicks get gapes from earthworms. You should educate chicks to differentiate lest of worms they partake and suffocate.

Poultrymen around Pittsburg will hopper feed dried grasshoppers this season. The insects were so thick in that vicinity that they stalled trains on the Union railroad.

A poultry plant at Brown's Mills, N. J., houses 25,000 layers. Its incubator capacity is 1,200 chicks per day, and during the past season it shipped out 166,000 eggs for hatching, 68,500 live chicks and at the same time sold many breeders and an immense amount of market eggs and poultry. When the roosters crow and those 25,000 Leghorn hens cackle a boiler factory is not in it.

Kwong Yuen Shing, a Chinese immigrant, argued with the custom officials that Chinese duck meat packed in peanut oil is not "meat preserved and prepared," on which a 25 per cent tax is imposed, but genuine dressed poultry. Why should they let a Shing argue? Why didn't they yank him by the cue and make him pay just what was due.

Give your hens lots of fresh air. It is also splendid for monkeys. They formerly died at the Chicago zoo with tuberculosis, but since getting the fresh air treatment they "sit on snow banks and eat their bananas." Let their human descendants sit up on a snow bank and take notice.

When the rooster show is over the real sport, when beaten, is only temporarily defeated. He does not go home to nurse a grievance, but to plan, hustle and sweat to make a better showing the next time. Then when he wins he does not get a puffed head, but he quietly puts in extra licks to make his next year's string the best ever.

The wise man is he who keeps his eyes and ears open and his mouth shut. He plods up to sure success, while others are wrecked in hot air ships of fancy.

So many draw a sad last breath because they talk themselves to death. They lie beneath a has-been slab because they overworked their gab.

Fowls are very regular in their habits. Winter and summer, tropical rainy season and dry, they arise and retire with the sun. They certainly teach a lesson to man in this fast age, when so many burn the candle at both ends.

6. M. Barnitz

# Farm and Garden

## "HELLO!" ON THE FARM.

Telephone Plays a Great Part in Agriculturist's Life, Says Census Folks.

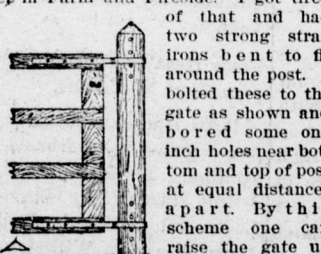
The special report on the telephone service of the country recently published by the bureau of the census contains a comment on the influence of the telephone in life on the farm. It is asserted that "no single factor has played so great a part in the amelioration of the conditions of life on the farms as has the telephone." Hundreds of thousands of instruments are now installed in farmers' homes. The report locates the beginning of the rural service in Connecticut in 1881, when a company operating in the cities of that state arranged for the connection of isolated village systems with the company's exchanges in the cities. This opened a new and almost limitless avenue of telephone service, but little was done in that direction for a number of years. The demand for service in the cities and larger towns kept the makers of the patented instruments so busy that little was or ever could be done in the way of rural extension. The expiration of fundamental patents in 1893 and the fact that by that time the urban field was fairly covered brought the telephone into wider use in villages and country homes.

The report states that at the present time no reliable figures are available as to the actual number of farm telephones. The year covered by the bulletin is 1907. It is presumable that the recently taken census, the details of which will not be available for several months, will include an accurate report of the present state of the service. The matter of special importance here is the comment of the investigators on the value and the nature of the service of the telephone in the farmhouse. Among the manifold uses of the instruments they note the access given to farmers to the markets in which their products are sold. "The grain grower in the west when approached by a buyer who wishes to purchase his wheat simply steps to the telephone and asks through the nearest exchange the closing prices in the Chicago market on the preceding day or the opening prices on the present day." The truck farmers in the neighborhood of large cities telephone to the city markets and find out whether there is any demand for their fresh vegetables or whether the market is glutted and prices low. If the report is unfavorable they wait for a better demand and better prices before carrying their vegetables or fruits or other products to the place of sale.

If an animal of value falls sick the veterinary surgeon is summoned by telephone. If a horse is stolen word is sent to all the farmers on the circuit. In case of fire or accident help is called with avoidance of the delay involved in the dispatch of a messenger who cannot well be spared at all at such a time. On many of these little country circuits a prearranged signal at or about some regular hour summons all subscribers to their instruments while "central" reads out the important news of the day and gives out the weather report. The instrument relieves the isolation of the women on the farm. Their days are often spent in loneliness while the "men folks" are at their work on some distant part of the farm or absent on some errand to the city or to some other farm. A few minutes of chat or gossip is a measureless boon to many so situated. With the installation of the telephone, the extension of the interurban street railway and the rural trolley line and the rural free mail delivery life on the farm has been greatly changed for the better.

## Gate Adjustable to Snow.

In winter I've often had to dig snow in order to get a gate open, says a writer in Farm and Fireside. I got tired of that and had two strong strap irons bent to fit around the post. I bolted these to the gate as shown and bored some one inch holes near bottom and top of post at equal distances apart. By this scheme one can raise the gate up above the snow and hold it there by inserting the pegs in the proper holes. This gate is also handy where we want to let hogs run from one pasture to another while the larger stock are kept in only one of the pastures.



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## BE NEIGHBORLY.

Two farmers who are good neighbors can save money by exchanging use of machinery. One man buys one machine, the other a different one, and both machines are used for all work required on each farm. If some of the machines require two or four horses the horses' work can be exchanged in the same manner. Farmers who benefit by exchange work should not forget there is equal gain in exchanging social life, thus strengthening one of the weak points of country life.

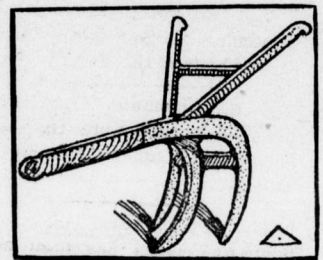
## GOOD FOR DRAINAGE USE.

Pick Plow, Easily Made, Described and Praised by Wisconsin Farmer.

I have used this plow for digging trenches for laying tile on my Wisconsin farm for many years and am surprised that so useful and efficient an implement is not in more general use, says a Wisconsin correspondent of the Orange Judd Farmer. Any good blacksmith, with an assistant, can make this plow in less than two days. An old smith and his son made nine in one day. The total cost was only \$8, including a heavy four foot chain for use in hitching to the plow when it is deep down in the ditch.

I first used it in 1894. I had heard that out in Minnesota men were charging 25 cents per rod to construct drainage ditches with the steam ditching machine. I was able to build ditches more cheaply by the means of this simple homemade contrivance. On one piece of work, by using this plow and two horses, four men made a ditch 1,050 feet long, from two and one-half to three and one-half feet deep and one foot wide, in one day, from 8 o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock in the afternoon. This was in clay soil, which at the time happened to be very dry and was shoveled easily. If the ground had been wet, of course, so much could not have been accomplished.

In building ditches for tile I first plow it as deeply as possible, usually going over it twice with an ordinary plow. All the dirt that is not thrown out by the plow is then shoveled out. Next I go up and down the ditch with the pick plow. Ours is made to cut twelve inches wide, and by having it so strongly constructed that there is not much spring in it a uniform width and straight sides can be maintained in the ditch. After the ground is loosened we shovel out the loose dirt and then go over it again with the pick plow. We use an evener eight feet long, so that the horses work far enough away from the ditch that there



PICK PLOW IN DRAIN DIGGING.

[From Orange Judd Farmer.]

is no danger of their falling in. As additional depth is secured the ditch is lengthened, and the plow can be used in digging ditches three to four feet or more deep. Where we have to cross an elevation in the field which requires greater depth we go over that spot two or three times with the plow, bringing the bottom of the ditch down to the required level. Broadly speaking, the depth to which this can be used is limited only by the length of the chain to which the evener is fastened.

There is an old Flemish proverb which reads as follows: No grass, no cattle; no cattle, no manure; no manure, no crops.

## Dairy Doings.

An ounce of the fluid extract of black haw in a pint of warm water will be found very valuable for a cow threatening abortion. A half dose can be repeated in two or three hours as often as necessary.

To the man of little money and many children the Shorthorn is a bonanza, supplying milk and butter and a good salable calf at weaning time. The Jersey, Ayrshire and Holstein are great milk and butter cows, but their calves are not to be considered when seeking cattle for the feed lot.

Calves are often troubled by ring worms. It is due to a vegetable parasite. The best treatment is sulphur ointment, made of powdered sulphur, lard, oil or grease. Wash the part affected with soap and water and then apply the sulphur ointment.

Cows require from one to eight ounces of salt per day. The more concentrates they receive the more salt they require. It should be where they can have access to it every day. According to an experiment made at the Wisconsin station, about two ounces per cow per day is the average amount required.

The Kansas Agricultural college grades cream as follows: First grade cream, 30 or more per cent of butter fat; second grade, 25 per cent and less than 30; third grade, having less than 25 per cent butter fat. Creameries like to get high testing cream, say 30 and above. They make more butter from this, as the overrun is greater.

Alfalfa hay is a most excellent feed for dairy cows. The animals always relish clean, bright alfalfa hay, and its milk producing value is high. The dairyman that has plenty of alfalfa is especially fortunate.

Never allow the cows to be excited by hard driving, abuse, loud talking or unnecessary disturbance. Do not expose them to cold or storms.

If you have six cows and no separator sell one of the cows and buy a separator. You will save work and make money by the deal.

Kindness to cows is one of the essential elements in profitable dairying. No matter how well cows are fed and sheltered, they will not be good milkers if they are handled roughly.