

IN A POSTAL CAR.

OPERATIONS OF THE FLYING POSTOFFICE.

How the Clerks Handle the Mails—Catching Mail Bags on the Fly—An Arduous Occupation.



HE wonderful facility, rapidity and accuracy which has been attained in the transportation and delivery of our daily mails, although of such immediate importance are, says the San Francisco Chronicle, one of the most ill-appreciated benefits which an indulgent and progressive Government ever bestowed. The mighty stride from a lumbering stage coach, dusty, uncertain and slow, with one man for driver, mail clerk and postman, to the rushing special mail trains—grabbing and distributing the pouches as they tear along at sixty miles an hour, and with nearly 7000 railway mail clerks working like beavers to land the mail on time, has come so gradually that man, woman and child regard it as a matter of course, and rarely stop to wonder how it all happens.

Through the courtesy of A. H. Merrill, Assistant Superintendent of Railway Mail Service for this, the Eighth Division, a Chronicle representative was permitted a few days ago to ride with the mail to Sacramento and return to this city, and watch the whole progress of newspapers, business and love letters from their authors to the happy recipients. At the Oakland mole a great pile of at least thirty pouches and tie sacks was thrown into the car, and those not being "worked" were piled in a corner to make room for an installment of twenty more that were loaded in at Sixteenth street. The mail clerk on this particular day (Sunday) was fortunate enough to have the assistance of another clerk, who was enjoying a rest of five days after a five days' run, as the unusual weight of Sunday's big paper mail required two men. Both boarded the train an hour before it started to work up the first installment of mail. They had each a pair of overalls on, sleeves



WORKING UP THE MAIL IN LETTER CAR.

rolled to their elbows, and before the train started the perspiration streamed from their brows.

Along in the middle of the car, ranged on both sides, are the racks for pouches, with thirty bags up in each, and a box-shaped receptacle is arranged to slide along on ways between the two racks, so that they can get at either end readily to throw mail. It can be lifted out when not in use. Into this box the contents of every sack are dumped. All of these sixty pouches, strung open-mouthed in the racks, are labeled for every town or city, be it great or small, along the route with others named for roads and still others for destinations far beyond California. Now those clerks must inspect every paper, parcel and bundle of letters, for letters are sorted at the main office and many of them tied in bunches for different towns, for which they are labeled, and throw it into the correct pouch as fast as he can work.

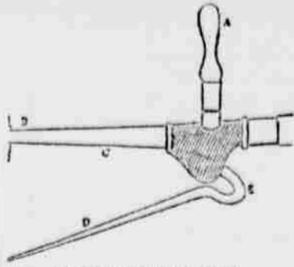
Papers, bundles, letters—everything fairly flies in that car. Cold Spring is away over in a corner sack; bang! goes ten pounds of papers, and then comes a



THE CLERKS DISTRIBUTING MAIL.

"handle-with-care" box of bonbons before the first has hit—exactly where it belongs. In the mean time the train is

thundering along and the whistle gives warning of an approaching station. The clerk grabs a pouch, stuffs the last letter in, hurriedly locks it and rushes to the door to heave the sack out and grasp the handle of a queer-shaped contrivance that hangs on the side of the car. It is the "catcher," that grabs a pouch as they fly along. Tip! something hits the car, and in the crutch of the iron catcher a pouch doubles itself up like a jack-knife and is hauled in to be dumped and worked up.



THE MAIL POUCH CATCHER.

This catcher is a great invention. It is simply a sort of two-tined pitchfork fastened to the door jamba, so that it will turn, and a handle is provided to turn it with. The mail at a by-station is done up in a special sack, strapped in the middle to make it narrow-waisted, so as to slip way into the catcher and not fall, and is hung on a scuffolding by means of turning hooks, which are placed in rings at both ends of the pouch. When the catcher is turned horizontally—one time, as it were, sticks out, and the narrow part of the sack slides up into the crutch, when the catcher hits it, sometimes sticking so hard that it is difficult to remove it.

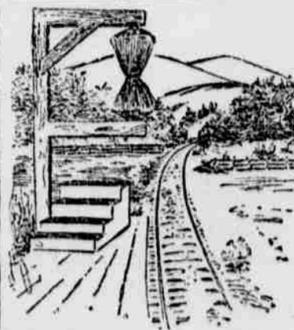
Mail received on the route has to be opened and distributed instantly, as there may be something for the very next station, and where the train runs fast it requires some lively work to get the pouches ready.

The letters that are scattering—that is, few for any one town—are tied in a bundle and addressed simply to the road, as "Ogden and San Fran." These are placed to one side in the distribution and have to be "worked" in the letter case. This case has innumerable pigeon-holes, each one labeled for a town or a mail route, and there again the accurate knowledge of every burg in the State is required; for all those letters must be separated, examined and posted in the case without the slightest delay. Subsequently they are again tied into bundles and thrown into sacks for their destination.

Errors are rigidly checked against every clerk and he never ceases to study and improve himself. Sometimes people write a horrible address or only half a one; perhaps there are several towns of one name in a State or similar names in different States and the State is left out, or again a new town springs up in a night. These worry the poor clerk to death. Then there are the "mix-ups." These are letters addressed to places that do not exist, papers and parcels from which labels have become detached, bundles unwrapped and the address destroyed and many other things.

All of these are bunched and sent to the nearest main division office marked "mix-ups" and perhaps reported to their senders, as it is impossible to tell where they are to go.

Another convenience to people is the car "drop," where a love letter, still warm and perhaps still throbbing, is deposited—maybe because just finished, and maybe so that the young local postmaster in a village wont know who is corresponding with whom. These letters must be kept out as fast as they fall. The stamps have to be "killed" and the letters distributed immediately. Each



A MAIL POUCH READY FOR THE CATCHER.

road has a different stamp, so that receiving offices know who handled that mail.

Of course the small stations occur at very short intervals, and the consequence is a continued jumping about of the clerk to land things on time. After the first big receipt of mail is worked up the sacks from these stations keep coming along and intervals are very short. However, rests come once in a while; and then a portion of the trip report embracing every transaction is written up, or a lot of sacks are tied and locked. The lock that Uncle Sam uses is very cumbersome and slow, often vexing the clerk more than the mail itself. A number of new devices have been patented, but the Government does not care to buy them. The labor of locking sixty sacks and dragging their heavy weight along to pile them up ready for dumping is itself a big job, and as fast as hooks are emptied new pouches must be spread open on them to receive more mail.

Registered packages are treated with unbounded precaution. Every man who receives one in its transit must examine its condition and then give a receipt to the last man, make out and forward one for himself, keep a special record of it in a book provided for the purpose and include it in his trip report. He is required to keep a receipt for it for five years, as in tracing a lost one every re-

ceipt must be shown until the responsible person is found.

The postal clerk has need to be robust in health, active in mind and body and enduring of fatigue above almost any other calling. Frequently they are obliged to work steadily for from twenty to thirty hours, and this in a close, stuffy car, rocking and swaying along while they toil like troopers and eat and sleep when and where they get a chance.

The Grant Triplets.

The well-known Grant triplets, of Torrington, Conn., Matthew A., Daniel A. and William A. Grant, reached their seventy-first birthday anniversary on Friday.

The three were born on September 23, 1821, in an old two-story farmhouse in the center of Torrington, and must have been strong and healthy children, for they have had hardly a day of sickness in their lives.

William and Daniel look much alike, and are very often mistaken one for the other, but Matthew is of a little different type, being shorter and more thick set.

They all have light gray eyes, white hair, and bronzed and weather-beaten countenances, and look uncommonly well for men seventy-one years old.



William and Daniel live together in Torrington, but Matthew is by himself in a house in West Barville.—New York Sun.

Odd Decoration of the Tibetan Bird.

The somewhat remarkable bird depicted in the cut is to be found on the borders of China and Tibet, but more frequently on the slopes of the Himalaya Mountains. In appearance it has a great resemblance, in many respects, to the pheasant. The plumage is very beautiful, being dotted with round, white spots on a brown and reddish ground. The male bird is distinguished by large wattles, which extend from the cheeks



THE HORNED TRAGOPAN.

down the whole length of the neck, while behind each eye rises a soft, fleshy horn. Both the horn and the wattles may be dilated or contracted at pleasure. They are of a bluish-purple color, mingled with scarlet. The color deepens when the bird is excited by anger or pleasure.

The feathers of the crest, the chin and the back of the neck are black; the upper part of the breast, the neck and shoulders are light cinnamon, with a dash of carmine and purple, variegated by the white, eyelike tips of the feathers; the wings and part of the back are rich amber, mottled with brown, and also decorated with white spots. Little is known of the habits and manners of the tragopan; but from their strong legs and round wings it is thought that they do not fly very much, but depend more on their swiftness of foot than on any power of flight they may possess.

In the breeding season the tragopan is to be seen at his best. His condition and plumage are then in the highest state of perfection, his beautiful wings and tail are expanded, his horns erected, his wattles inflated and glowing with bright colors.

There seems no reason why these birds should not flourish in other countries. They live in a cold climate or temperate region, and soon die if taken into the hot plains of India. Their food consists of grain and seed, and their flesh is a delicacy, having much the same flavor as that of the pheasant.—Mail and Express.

The Barnian Theory Vindicated.

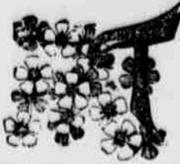


Human beings do sometimes spring from apes.—Puck.

RUSSIA'S RULER.

DAILY LIFE AND CHARACTER OF CZAR ALEXANDEL.

Simple in His Habits and Very Fond of His Family—Richest Man in the World—The Czarina.



HE daily life of the Czar of Russia, says Frank Carpenter in the New York World, is simple in the extreme. He keeps his great frame in good condition by regular exercise, and, like Gladstone, he often goes out and cuts down trees in his forests. He sometimes saws these trees into lengths with a cross-cut saw and he does all sorts of manual work. He is an athlete of the first order and he is fond of playing with his children, and during his stay in Denmark he had a number of wrestling matches at the palace there, in each of which, I am told, he came out victorious. He is fond of horseback riding and has 150 saddle horses in his stables here. His stud contains some of the finest horses in the world. He knows all about horses and is anxious to improve his stock and is very careful about the character of the horses which are brought into the army. He often drives himself, with his wife beside him, in a phaeton about Gatchina, and he holds his reins with arms stiff, in the Russian fashion. I visited the museum in which the imperial carriages are kept, the other day, and spent hours wandering about through the hundreds of golden coaches and gorgeous landaus, each of which is worth many, many thousand dollars. I handled harness which was made with precious stones and the metal work of which was of solid gold or silver. I saw harness cloth embroidered with pearls, and the total value of these trappings and coaches runs high into the mil-

years since he attended a court reception at Paris, and there met Empress Eugenie.



EMPERESS OF RUSSIA.

All the beauties of the Paris court were present, and as the Empress chatted with him she asked him to point out to her the most beautiful lady in the room. The future Czar replied that he was too much of a barbarian to think any woman more beautiful than his own wife, and his actions toward her from that time to this have shown that he has continued of this opinion. Still his marriage to her was one of diplomacy rather than of love. She is, you know, the daughter of Christian IX., of Denmark, and her name was the Princess Dagmar. She had been engaged to the Czar's elder brother, who died at Nice, and in this way the present Czar became heir to the

throne. Her necklace is of many strands of the purest pearls, and her vest is a mass of rubies, sapphires and diamonds put together so that they blaze like fire. One of her gowns is of emerald velvet with a train of white velvet which is fairly covered with gold embroidery and the front of which is linked with strands of purest coral. The jewels on one of these robes would make an American village rich, and their value surpasses computation. In the treasury at Moscow I saw the Empress' coronation robe. The train of this was of woven silver, and there was enough of woven silver cloth in the robe to have carpeted an ordinary parlor.

The Empress is the member of the imperial family who most fears the assassination of the Czar. She is in suspense whenever her husband is away from her, and every time that his life is attempted her nerves become shattered. She worries about her children, and I doubt not she often longs for her girlhood life in peaceful Denmark. It is for this reason largely that she is so fond of dancing. She can forget herself when she is on the floor, and as long as the mad gallop goes on she does not feel the presence of the specter which continuously hangs over the Russian throne.

I don't suppose there is a family in the United States which has a more



THE CROWN PRINCE.

happy home life than that of the Czar. He has five children—three boys and two girls. The eldest is the Grand Duke Nicholas, who is now twenty-four years old and who shows himself to be a bright, aggressive young Prince.

With all his greatness the Czar is more simple in his manners than any monarch in the world. There are no frills or furbelows about him. He talks in a simple way to his friends and to his officials, and though he is the Czar in every sense of the word he is not puffed up with conceit. He is probably the richest monarch in the world. His income amounts to more than \$10,000,000 a year and he owns more land than any other person in the world. He has more than a million square miles of cultivated land and forest, and he has gold and silver mines in Siberia, and his receipts are so large that no one knows how large they are.

I wish I could describe for you his wonderful palaces. There is nothing like them on the face of the earth. I saw a single crown in the winter palace which had more than a million dollars' worth of jewels in it, and the treasury at Moscow contains cart loads of gold and silver plate. The winter palace is so large that it covers acres, and there is a story that when it was burned not long ago a cow was discovered in one of the unused rooms where a servant had been keeping it and the people of the palace knew nothing about it. There are 2000 acres about one of the summer palaces near here and it takes 600 men to keep these in order, and the palace of Peterhof surpasses in its beauties those of Versailles.

A Clock Made of Flowers.

A little masterpiece of mechanism, and at the same time a model of garden decoration, is the floral clock which decorates the garden of an ingenious Parisian.



A CURIOUS FLORAL CLOCK.

The appearance of this oddest time-piece is shown in the accompanying cut. The dial, which is not less than thirty feet in diameter, is composed entirely of choice plants of various colors. The hands, which actually move over the face of the clock, are made in the same manner, and the whole effect of the arrangement is that of an immense basket of flowers. The mechanism which drives the hands is lodged in a large chamber built in the garden immediately beneath the dial. It is composed of the usual machinery employed in operating large clocks, except that it is particularly constructed to move the great weight of the earth which must be supported by the revolving hands. This is cleverly accomplished by making an ordinary clock train release a volume of water every minute and this by its gravity operates the wheels that send the heavy hands forward. The whole arrangement is exceedingly ingenious and interesting, and, according to the Philadelphia Record, is the daily admiration and wonder of hundreds of the inventor's townsmen.



A BALL AT THE WINTER PALACE.

lions of dollars. As I looked at them I could not but think of the simple carriages which the Czar really uses and how far his spirit is removed from that



THE CZAR.

of ostentation. He leads a more simple life, in fact, than many of his nobles, and he cares nothing whatever for style. He is one of the hardest worked men of his Empire. He rises at daybreak and takes a cup of coffee, says his prayers and then begins work, looking over his State papers. At 1 o'clock he takes breakfast with his wife, and after breakfast he exercises for a while before going back to work. He keeps his system in perfect condition, and his stomach never goes back on him. He has his dinner at 6 o'clock, but, like many big men, he eats little, and his drink is confined to a glass of Burgundy. He always dines with his family, and his family relations are most beautiful.

The Czar of Russia is in love with his wife. This is an extraordinary thing for a Russian monarch, and both peasants and nobles have spoken to me in the highest terms of his purity in this regard. He spends his evenings with his family and often reads to his wife while she embroiders, and there are a number of stories here which illustrate this part of his character. It is now twenty-five

years since he attended a court reception at Paris, and there met Empress Eugenie.

The Princess Dagmar was much in love with Alexander's brother and she did not want to be married to her present husband. Alexander himself had a sweetheart whom he was anxious to marry, but State reasons made both these young people give up their cherished ideas, and Alexander III. wooed the Princess Dagmar and married her. Love came after the marriage, and though this was more than a quarter of a century ago, they are lovers still.

The Empress of Russia is the reverse of her husband in appearance. She is as slender and petite as he is strong and not homely. Her nose is slightly retroussé, but her features are otherwise well formed and her eyes are bright and kindly. She is one of the most beautiful dancers in Russia, and she is as fond of dancing as a Danish country girl. At the winter palace in St. Petersburg are given each year some of the most wonderful balls of the world. Seven thousand people can live in this palace, and the thousands of dancers trip the light fantastic toe over floors of ebony, of rosewood and of ivory. Now and then



"GOOD DAY, MY CHILDREN."

the Empress appears at these dances in her royal robes. She wears a gorgeous crown which fairly blazes with dia-