



PACKING PARCELS INTO HAMPERS.

THE PARCEL POST.



HERE is, perhaps, no Government establishment that affords so much satisfaction to the public as the Post Office. The reason of this is not far to seek; for, in addition to the efficient manner in which it discharges its numerous and important functions, it does not fall upon the already overburdened shoulders of the taxpayer for its support. It has, moreover, especially of late years, uniformly shown itself

the preliminaries necessary to pave the way for the practical realisation of this great scheme; and so thoroughly does he appear to have mastered the details connected with it, that he was able after the first year to make a prediction that has been verified. Sir William Harcourt, in his first Budget speech, gracefully referring to this, remarked: "I desire to say one word of a man whose memory I am sure is cherished by the House—I mean the late Mr. Fawcett. In July, 1884, he predicted that the number of parcels would be 27,000,000. The figures of last year (1885-6) are 26,527,000. That, I think, will show that his foresight and prediction were accurate." In this connection, too, mention must be made of the services, already recognised by the State, of Mr. F. E. Baine, C.B., to whose untiring zeal and capacity for organisation much is due. At this moment, the Foreign and Colonial Post is advancing month by month under his skilful guidance, and it may safely be predicted that before very long postal relations for parcels will have been established with every quarter of the globe.

eager to adapt itself to the varying and growing needs of the community. Changes in a concern that has the collection and distribution of two thousand million letters, post-cards, newspapers, &c., yearly, that transacts the telegraph business of the country, that is also a medium for effecting payments by means of money and postal orders, and does a savings-bank, life assurance, and annuity business, are not to be undertaken lightly, and imply an amount of thought and consideration of detail that can be understood only by those actually engaged in the matter. Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, the Post Office seems to be ever ready to accommodate itself to the public requirements, in which respect it is an example not only to other Government institutions, but also to many private enterprises.

It is now three years since the Parcel Post was introduced, the greatest postal improvement yet made, after the penny post. The people of this country will not soon forget the man under whose auspices this great reform was inaugurated. It was Mr. Fawcett (to whom we are indebted for many other minor improvements in the same department of the public service) who undertook and successfully accomplished all

The benefits conferred upon the public by the Parcel Post are very apparent, and have contributed largely to swell the number of parcels sent throughout the country. There is the increased ease with which the parcel can be started on its journey; there is the knowledge of the time when it will be delivered, and the certainty of its being delivered; then there is the fixed charge—formerly there was no telling what expense might be incurred by sending a parcel by the railway companies, or where the charges would end. In addition to these palpable advantages, the public have confidence in the Post Office; and that this confidence is merited we have abundant proof from a casual visit to the General Post Office at the busiest time of the year, viz., Christmas. When we say that during Christmas week the amount of parcels sent through the Post Office is more than double what it ordinarily is, the reader will easily under-

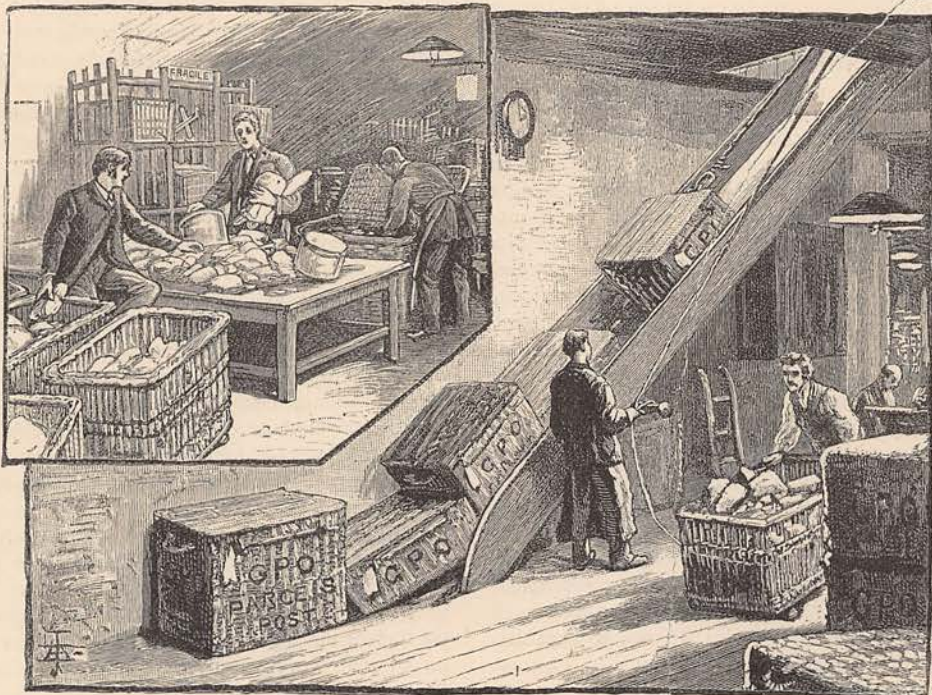
stand that at such seasons the department can afford to lose no time. It consequently happens that a carelessly made-up parcel—and some of them are very carelessly made up—now and then comes undone. In such cases the unfortunate packet is taken to “the hospital,” and carefully repaired. Here are a few of the invalids that we observed undergoing treatment. A fragile card-board box containing three eggs, all of which were smashed, three new pennies, and three pieces of holly. Another patient, also a card-board box, consisted of one fig, one raisin, one almond, a piece of cake, and a piece of Christmas pudding. Another was a brown paper parcel, containing a small wheel-barrow, a trumpet, nuts, sweets, oranges, a cake, a piece of pork, a jacket, and some tea and sugar. Another was a tin box full of raw tripe, about four pounds in quantity. Another brown paper parcel had a pound of tea with a half-sovereign in it. A collection of varieties was next disclosed in a card-board box, consisting of half a cooked fowl, a piece of bread, a piece of cheese, two potatoes, a piece of Christmas pudding, and a piece of cake. We have just one more to mention : it was a thick card-board box full of exceedingly precious articles ! These were one envelope, one sheet of note-paper, an old pen, a very small bottle of ink, two half-penny postage stamps, and a piece of blotting-paper. It was surely sent in jest, this packet, for the whole contents, if sold, would not fetch enough to defray the expense of carriage. We could not help imagining what would have become of these frail parcels if they had been in the hands of the railway companies. The fact is, however, people would not take so much liberty

with the companies, and we may assume that such parcels as those noticed are amongst the additional trade that was expected to follow on the introduction of the Parcel Post.

By the courtesy of Mr. Hunter, superintendent of the Parcel Post Department at St. Martin's-le-Grand, we are able to give our readers a list of the more curious articles that have been observed in transit. An unpleasant commodity to be damaged was a small wooden box, containing two live snakes. These were of course destroyed, for reasons that every one will readily appreciate. They might have belonged to a harmless species, still, Post Office officials cannot be expected to be naturalists ; besides, it is not every one that has the nerve to handle a snake, even though assured that it is perfectly innocuous. Not quite so disagreeable to put together, yet bad enough in its way, was a tin box full of live leeches, which were consequently sent on to their destination at Derby.

Here is rather a stupid collection to put together, especially, as was the case, in warm weather : curling irons, a pair of garters and socks, and some ice cream. The thoughtless packer, intent on pleasing a juvenile palate, never dreamt that the ice cream might melt. It did though, and soaked the other articles.

Amongst other members of the animal world that have been observed were two tame mice in a wire cage ; in a basket were two live pigeons ; in a small cage was a field mouse ; in a wooden box were about a hundred and fifty frogs, all alive and duly sent on ; then all the way from Belgium came two live canaries in a cage, and a day or two after from the same country two live



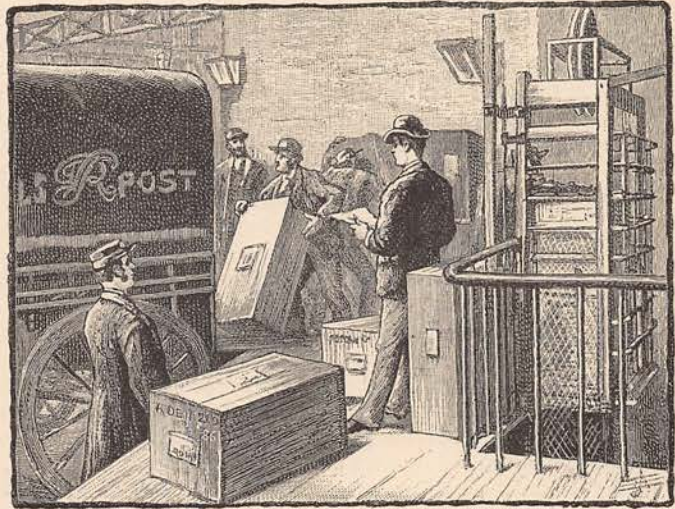
(1) PARCELS IN HAMPERS COMING IN FROM THE RAILWAY DÉPÔTS.

(2) OPENING THE HAMPERS AND

SORTING PARCELS.

paroquets. Just before Primrose Day in 1886, ten thousand packets of primroses were sent from the country to London. We are not aware that firewood is scarce at Saffron Walden, and if it were, one would hardly think the Post Office the best medium, on the ground of expense, for relieving such scarcity; all the same, however, nine small bundles of this very useful and necessary article in the domestic world passed through the Post Office last March—an exceedingly cold month, as readers may remember, and therefore making a present of firewood or any other combustible material exceedingly desirable at that time. From Arbroath, a town in Forfarshire, there came up to a charity school in London a collecting box full of money, not secured in any way except by being wrapped round with brown paper and a piece of string, which had become loose, and was carefully replaced before the parcel left the office. A similar packet came from Bournemouth, destined for a boys' home in London. It was in June that these offerings were made, and it might be a reasonable inference to make that they were in response to the appeals, frequent in the summer, for funds to afford an outing to the unfortunate little ones that are so numerous in our large cities.

An interesting proof that the Parcel Post is more expeditious than other carrying agencies was furnished in 1885. The then Postmaster-General caused a hundred test parcels to be sent from different places in the country to other places at a distance by the Parcel Post, and at the same time the same number of parcels were sent through the railway companies and other agencies from and to the same places, a record being kept of the times of despatch and delivery. Out of the hundred sent by the Parcel Post, seventy-one arrived earlier than the corresponding seventy-one sent by any other agency. The average time occupied by the hundred sent through the Post Office was twenty hours and twenty minutes, while the average time in the other cases was twenty-five hours and fifty minutes. Here, however, the advantages of the Parcel Post do not stop, for all the hundred that went through the post were delivered at the houses of those to whom they were addressed; in the other cases nearly three-fourths of the parcels were left at the nearest railway station. In addition to all this, it was found that the Post Office was, on the whole, the cheaper mode of conveyance, sixty-eight cases out of the hundred being less, twenty-four being equal, and eight only being more. It is somewhat surprising that the Post Office should be able to carry parcels cheaper than the railway companies, seeing that it has to pay the latter fifty-five pounds out of every hundred it receives on account of parcels sent by rail. Surprising though this is, there it is proved as clearly as the nature of the case will admit. We shall revert to this further on; meanwhile, here is another



AT THE LIFT—DESPATCHING PARCELS IN BOXES.

point of superiority possessed by the post over other carriers—it damages fewer packages. For every ten thousand parcels only one is damaged; it is also ascertained that only one out of every ten thousand is lost; even this small liability to accident may be said to be now reduced as nearly to zero as is consistent with human fallibility, for compensation is now granted for damage, and moreover, by the payment of a small fee a parcel may be insured. In this respect the post has until recently been behind the private carriers, who acknowledged the receipt of a parcel in writing, and hold themselves responsible for its safe delivery.

In speaking of the Post Office charges for parcels as compared with the charges of other agencies, we expressed surprise that the former should be the lower, for besides having to disburse the greater proportion of its receipts to the railway companies, the Post Office has by far the most arduous part of the work to do in collecting and distributing the parcels sent through it, the railways having simply to convey them from station to station. It is quite true that up till now the Parcel Post has not paid. In the year 1884-5 it was carried on at a loss of £90,000; the receipts of the year 1885-6 exceeded those of the previous year by £40,000, and began to overtake the expenditure, a process which is expected to continue. If we were to judge the Parcel Post by these facts alone, we should be in error. The increased convenience of this post has undoubtedly increased the number of parcels sent throughout the country, and from this country to other countries. Now when any one despatches a parcel, he generally writes a letter, or at least a post-card, and when any one receives a parcel he generally does the same. Thus the Parcel Post stimulates letter-writing, and there ought certainly to be placed to its credit a considerable sum derived from the letter service. It is, therefore, not so great a loss to the revenue as the figures would make it appear; moreover, we must judge so young an institution tenderly, for it has had a hard struggle

to attain the position it now occupies as the most comprehensive carrying agency in existence. It is now linked with the postal organisations on the Continent and in the colonies. This has increased its usefulness as well as its business, the foreign and colonial post sending and receiving six thousand packages per week.

We shall just say a word now about the chief office at St. Martin's-le-Grand. Here we have parcels coming in as they would at any other post office, being handed over the counter, weighed, stamped, and booked. For this purpose there are two counters, one facing the west for the convenience of those coming from that direction, the other facing the east for those coming thence. At these counters the ordinary business is at the rate of four thousand parcels per day. The other inlet for parcels is at the south end of the building, and receives all that are collected from the City and suburban offices as well as those passing through London.

In this end of the Post Office yard, scenes of rare bustle and animation are daily, and indeed hourly, to be witnessed. Van after van, with its freight of parcels, disengages itself smartly from the stream

of vehicles which flows along Cheapside, rattles into the yard, and in a few minutes its cargo of parcels quietly descends by the hydraulic lift, which carries them to the sorting rooms below. From a platform in this yard, too, parcel despatches, in almost constant succession, are being hurried off to the principal London railway stations, at each of which, it should be remarked, there is a large Post Office *dépôt*, into which, and from which, parcels are collected and delivered over a large surrounding area.

These latter and the parcels received at the counters are sent down to the basement, where they are sorted into racks, each rack being devoted to a certain district or town, the name of which is painted in large letters. From these racks the parcels are then removed by packers, those for one destination being carefully packed in one basket, and those for another in another, and so on. These baskets are then sealed, placed on a hydraulic lift, and hoisted into the vans, to be conveyed to the railway station. Everything is done with such method and such care that mistakes are next to impossible, and the only feeling with which one can view the scene on a busy day is a feeling of admiration for a truly wonderful system.

W. B. R.

NOTHING FOR NOUGHT.



GREAT deal might be written and very curious information given upon the whole subject of advertisements past and present, but it is only now to one class of them that we particularly wish to draw attention: a class most specially attractive in these days—the offers of work.

“Work for the Unemployed;” “Work for the Half-employed;” “Work for the Clever;” “Work for the Ignorant;” “Work to gain an Income;” “Work to gain Pocket-money.” “None of it

troublesome!” “All of it genuine!” “Position no hindrance!” “Distance no drawback!” “For those in society, work!” “For far-away country-folk, work!”

Such has been the tenor of the advertisement sheet of the newspapers through the many long weeks of the last few months.

No one, it may be taken for granted, is so fond of work as not to substitute for it in his own mind that which it represents—money. And is that indeed to be obtained so easily?

We speak only of what we have read. It is in print; it must be true. “No previous knowledge re-

quired.” So runs the advertisement. “Easy work; pleasant work; no pressure as to time; work to be done in your *leisure moments*—not even your disengaged *hours*. Quite private; no one need know anything about it. If you are a lady you remain a lady still.” (No one need know that you *worked* to buy your pretty hat!—such must be the inference intended.) “Ten shillings, twenty shillings, forty shillings easily gained every week.” Oh, delightful!

The pay is higher, certainly, than we are accustomed to hear of as being earned by women easily. True, very clever embroiderers, card-painters, or copyists may occasionally command the highest of these sums, and obtain it with less labour than those who can only gain the lowest. But what of that? It is not for them that work is so earnestly needed; they are the few, and their skill is in demand; but that has nothing to do with our subject; the work offered in these advertisements is so easy that it needs no knowledge or experience or special faculty. In some exceptional cases a little instruction may be required, but then success is assured at fixed periods:—*e.g.*, drawing of ordinary kinds you shall do in a week; designing, arabesques, flowers, &c., soon after. You need never have had a pencil in your hand before or seen a paintbrush, yet in a specified number of days you shall draw the human form divine with perfect accuracy—nay, more, with the success which is the test of excellence—the remunerative evidence of a weekly salary!