

The Lost Property Office.

BY WILLIAM G. FITZGERALD.



LOADING before my mental vision as I write is a wondrous *olla podrida* of lost property; and no wonder. For many weeks I have almost lived in huge, dim-lit warehouses, proclaimed by playful fancy to be the store-rooms of the kleptomaniacs of the universe. The great Lost Property Offices of London are a truly eloquent testimony to the catholicity of forgetfulness; and the task of classifying their amazingly diversified contents might well appal a Hercules, or even an alien Hebrew accustomed to deal with such things on a big scale.

You can understand a man losing himself, or his pipe, or his umbrella; but how account for a man leaving in a cab a canvas bag containing £700 in gold? Yet Mr. Howard, the jovial Assistant-Commissioner of Police at Scotland Yard—whom I saw in the absence of Mr. A. C. Bruce, the controller of this department—assured me that this large sum was left in a hansom by a banker who drove to Waterloo Station. The great terminus being crowded at the time, the driver, after receiving his pecuniary and parting with his human fare, was promptly ordered out. On searching his cab he found the bag and took it to Bow Street Police-station, whence news of its reception was wired to Scotland Yard. Next day the banker called at the Scotland Yard L.P.O., and received his bag of gold intact.

The *pro rata* reward was £105, but the cabman was satisfied with £75, wherewith he purchased a cab and horse of his own. This handsome reward was handed to him by Superintendent Beavis, who has had charge of the lost property department for upwards of fifteen years, and to whose courtesy I am indebted for much interesting information. Besides

the able superintendent there are three inspectors, two sergeants, and four constables wholly employed in the Lost Property Office.

In the first picture we see the interior of the Scotland Yard office for the reception of lost property from drivers of public vehicles—cabs, omnibuses, tramcars. A smart-looking cabman has just come in with a pocket-book, which the sergeant in charge is examining. A driver or conductor is under a penalty of £10 to deposit at the nearest police-station, within twenty-four hours, lost property of every kind found in a public vehicle. At the police-station the article is registered in a book with the date and hour of finding it, and either the route of the omnibus or tramcar or else the place where the cab was discharged. The finder has a receipt given him, and is required to sign a label, which is affixed to the article with sealing-wax and sealed in his presence. There are two despatches a day from all the police-stations to Scotland Yard, and to most of us the little, chocolate-coloured lost-property cart, driven by a policeman, is a familiar sight. If the property is claimed, the owner must pay a reward in proportion to its value. The present ratio is half a crown in the pound for ordinary property and three shillings in the pound for money, jewellery, etc. The reward payable on recovered property over £10 in value is left to the discretion of the Commissioner of Police.



SCOTLAND YARD L.P.O. ; A CABMAN DEPOSITING A POCKET-BOOK.

The minimum reward is a shilling, and the system is cash before delivery.

The Lost Property Act has been in force since 1853. Prior to the year 1870, property was retained at Scotland Yard for twelve months before being disposed of, if not claimed. Under the Act of 1870, property unclaimed after three months is either sold or given back to the finder—if he feels inclined to come for it. And he actually receives a letter of advice when it is due to him. Cheque-books, photographs, papers, and the like are kept for a year and then destroyed. The finder, however, receives a shilling for his trouble. In the next illustration we see part of the contents of one of the police carts, just delivered at Scotland Yard from one of



ARTICLES JUST BROUGHT INTO THE SCOTLAND YARD L.P.O.

the outlying police-stations. Each article is red-taped, labelled, and sealed, and will presently be dealt with by the clerks. There are some wraps and a Gladstone bag; a couple of fans, a few books, a lady's boa, a box, a coat, a hamper, and a couple of opera-glasses. Monday is the busiest day. Mr. Beavis assures me that one Monday last season 198 articles were brought in; one "article" was a diamond set, worth nearly a thousand pounds.

The number of articles brought to Scotland Yard in 1869 (the last year under the old Act) was 1,912. During 1894 the number was 29,716. These included 13,874 umbrellas and sticks, 2,693 purses, 2,255 bags, 696 opera and field glasses, and 142 gold and silver watches. Of these, 15,987 articles were restored to their owners, who simultaneously parted with £2,270 in the shape of rewards.

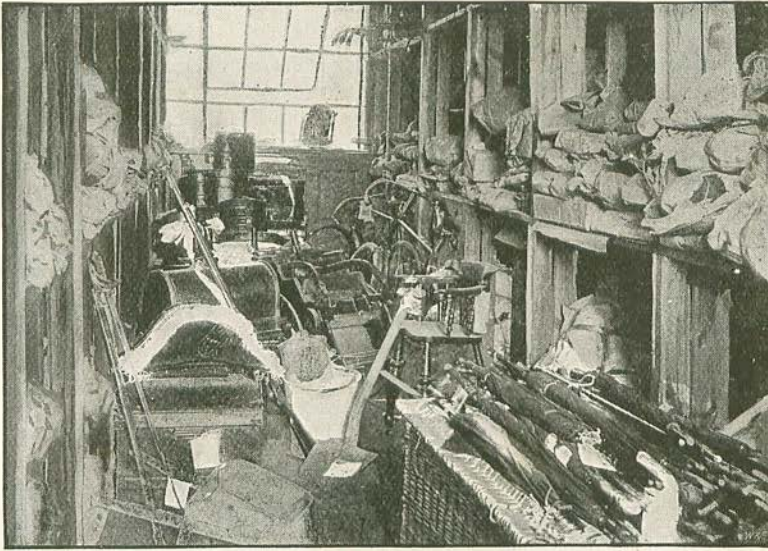
As Mr. Beavis conducted me through the various departments of this most interesting of offices, he pointed out numerous huge cupboards, each containing a certain class of article. For example, there was the men's cupboard, filled to overflowing with every conceivable article of male attire, from a dress-suit to a pair of navy's boots. All articles of value, such as watches, rings, purses, etc., are carefully deposited in a safe, which stands at the end of the public inquiry-room.

Fancy a man leaving jewellery worth £3,000 on the top of an omnibus! His carelessness cost him £75, but was, of course, very cheap at that. The biggest thing in the way of a deposit that Mr. Beavis remembers was a black bag, containing £3,500 in cash and securities. This bag was left in a cab, and the lucky driver received a reward of exactly £100. He betrayed no sign of emotion as he watched the counting out of this handsome sum, but the charitable opinion entertained at "the Yard" is that he was too full for words; which is obscure.

After having thoroughly "done" Scotland Yard—an arduous task, this—I turned my attention to the great railway companies. Elaborate preliminary arrangements are necessary if you want the assistance

of these powerful corporations, but once the pendulum of their complaisance swings in your direction, they will move Heaven and earth—not to mention mountains of lost property—to carry out your wishes. The first railway official I had the pleasure of meeting was Mr. Groom, the district superintendent of the North-Western Railway at Euston. On the occasion of my visit, this gentleman's handsome and spacious office was set out as for a board meeting. There were a couple of big tables placed end to end, and on them were nice clean blotting-pads, pens, ink, and paper. A few of Mr. Groom's subordinates assisted at this interesting function, and others dropped in when required.

First of all, I shall show a corner of the L.P.O. at Euston. Here we see despatch boxes; a sewing machine; an admiral's cocked hat, with a sword and rifle; a navy's



A CORNER OF THE L.P.O. AT EUSTON STATION.

shovel and pail; a child's mail-cart and wheelbarrow; a couple of bicycles; some umbrellas; golf clubs; and a host of parcels, which may contain anything from a lady's dress to a few sandwiches.

There are at Euston an inspector and four men who do nothing else but look after lost property. Two of these are on the platform to answer inquiries, take particulars of all missing articles, and institute search therefor. The inspector and the other two men are at the depôt, where the lost luggage is registered and searched for clues as to ownership. Every station-master throughout the North-Western system reports to Euston and to the Railway Clearing House any unclaimed luggage he has on hand. Consequently, a passenger arriving at Euston without his luggage will receive news of it within twenty-four hours, if it be lost on this particular system. And even if it be lying at some wayside station on another railway altogether, he is certain to recover it through the medium of the Railway Clearing House, to which well-known institution every company reports lost property.

On an average, about 30,000 articles are received at the Euston L.P.O. during the year, and these range from a set of false teeth, found in a sleeping carriage, to a pile of huge Saratoga trunks. Upwards of three-fourths of the larger articles are restored to their

owners. In addition, something like 7,000 inquiries are registered, respecting articles that are never found on this system. There is nothing appertaining to civilized man that gets lost so frequently as an umbrella. The photograph reproduced here gives a capital notion of the umbrella-racks in the Lost Property Office at Euston Station. Something like 4,000 unclaimed umbrellas are sold by this company every year.

At this great terminus all unclaimed luggage found on the platforms after the trains have been cleared is at once removed to the Lost Luggage Office, and there registered by the clerks. Probably



ONE OF THE UMBRELLA-RACKS AT THE EUSTON L.P.O.

before twenty-four hours have elapsed the staff are enabled to trace the owner; but if the property is still on hand at the end of a week, it is passed on to the depôt, where it is opened by the inspector and his two men in the hope of finding something that will give a clue to the ownership. Perhaps the searcher will chance upon a book with a name and address written on the fly-leaf. A letter is at once sent to the person whose name appears, and the reply comes in due course: "I lent that book to Mr. —, of —." Yet another official intimation is sent to this gentleman, but he merely takes the clue a step farther by stating that he, in turn, lent the work to his father-in-law, who is now in the north of Scotland. And so the laborious task of tracing the owners of lost property goes steadily on.

Besides having a special lost property staff, and an elaborate system of reporting, telegraphing, tracing by inquiry and through the Railway Clearing House, each of the large companies have several "luggage-searchers," whose time is entirely taken up in travelling from one end of the country to the other in quest of missing luggage. The luggage-searcher visits all the Lost Property Offices and Depôts of the various railways in connection with his inquiries.

Asked what was the most fruitful cause of the losing of luggage, one of these officials unhesitatingly replied, "Old labels and wrong labels." The travelling Briton, it appears, loves to see his luggage plentifully besprinkled with labels representing diverse localities. When the average railway porter handles a portmanteau bearing the names of two or three English and four or five Continental resorts, not to speak of half-a-dozen steamship labels, how is he to know the destination of the passenger? Then there is the Margate tripper who deliberately labels his luggage, "Shepherd's Hotel, Cairo," in order to impress his friends. Mr. Groom assures me that, owing to faulty labelling, he has had London luggage returned from Paris, Brindisi, Quebec, and Cape Town. Ordinary Liverpool luggage, too, is occasionally taken for a trip across the Atlantic in a White Star liner.

Of course the great romance of the Lost Property Office lies in the vast numbers of strange and fearful things that find their way into this essentially human institution. In the accompanying illustration we see the Euston lost property cat mounting guard, as it were, over the lost property canary. And yet the surroundings show that the lines of this very real pictorial idyll are cast in a truly sordid place. Almost every railway Lost Property Office I visited had a cat that had been sent in a hamper from one place to another, and had somehow been thrown on the company's hands. The handsome cat shown here was sent from Liverpool, but neither consignor nor consignee could ever be traced. The animal now patrols the



L.P.O. CAT AND CANARY AT EUSTON.

whole department, prying into musty corners and exterminating the mice who nibble the umbrellas and clothing.

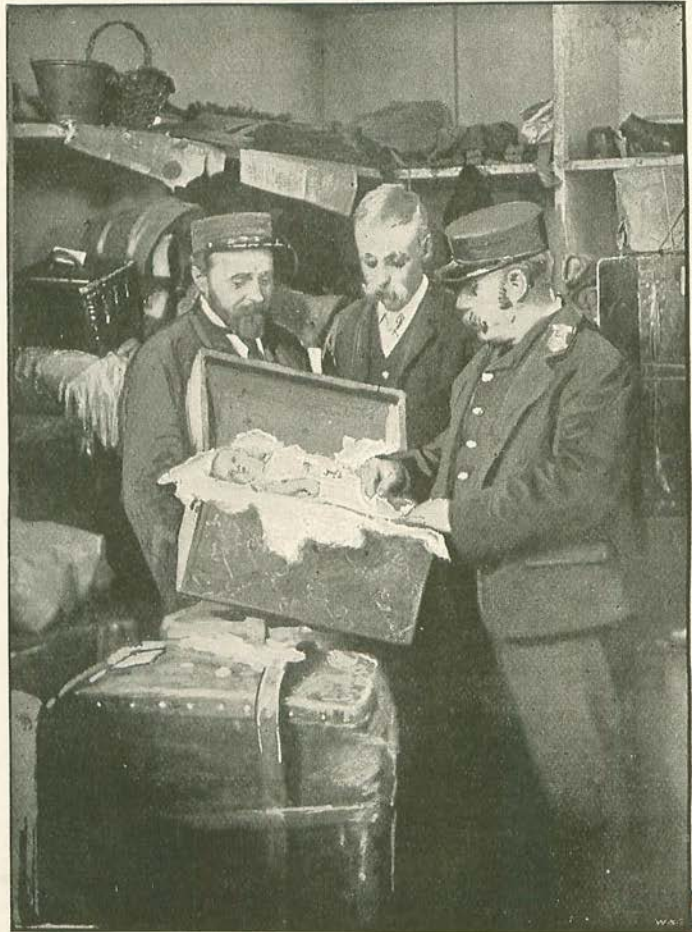
The stories told by railway officials respecting the queer folk they meet are well-nigh incredible; but you must remember that the total number of passengers carried last year by the companies I visited was 428,709,919, besides 516,195 season-ticket holders, so that there was ample margin for eccentricity. I pass over the exasperating individual who doesn't know his own luggage when he sees it (it frequently happens that he has borrowed the portmanteau from a friend, and presently forgets what it looked like), and come at once to the curious applications received at Euston concerning lost property. One gentleman—a first-class passenger from

Liverpool to Euston—bemoaned the loss of his expensive artificial teeth, which he had unwittingly thrown out of the carriage window somewhere down the line. He had bought a basket of plums on the platform at Crewe, and supposed that, in disposing of the stones, he had taken the plate of his teeth from his mouth and thrown it out of the window. This passenger was unable to locate the precise spot, but the line was searched, and the teeth found, appropriately enough, in the vicinity of Nuneaton, about 100 miles from Euston.

Hundreds of soldiers' and sailors' kits are found. The former are returned periodically to the various Government depôts, while the latter are generally restored to their owners if the name of any ship is found on the contents.

It is a sad fact that dead babies figure largely in the contents of the railway Lost Property Offices. These are at once handed over to the police, and a formal inquest is held. Some little time ago, Mr. Groom tells me, a live child was found in a small box on the departure platform, close to the eight o'clock Scotch train. The little one was cosily packed in wadding, and was provided with a feeding-bottle. A few holes had been drilled in the box—which, by the way, was covered with wall-paper, and was addressed to a home in Kilburn. The authorities of this home, however, refused to take in the child, as no money had been sent with it. So the poor, lost property infant was handed over to the police, who, in turn, passed it on to the workhouse, where it was christened "Willie Euston," and lived for four years. I succeeded in obtaining a photograph of the finding of this child, and the incident is shown in the accompanying illustration. The official on the right gave his own Christian name to the poor little waif.

On the next page is depicted an extraordinary article of lost property which was found packed in an ordinary case in the Outwards Parcels Office at Euston, four years ago. It bore no address, whatever, and no one knew whence it came, though it was surmised that this strange "parcel" had been collected by van from one of the North-Western receiving offices. Mr. Groom is of the opinion that this is an emblem belonging to some secret society, and that it was used at the ceremony of swearing in members. Howbeit, it is a gruesome relic. It consists of a small ebony coffin, silver-mounted, and resting on silver frogs. At the head is an hour-glass, surmounted by a small skull, and at the foot a dice-box. From one side spring two curved forks, supporting a two-handled cup, in which is a pair of tweezers apparently for letting blood. Beneath the cup is a real human skull, which, by means of clock-work



THE FINDING OF THE BABY, "WILLIE EUSTON," AT THE NORTH-WESTERN TERMINUS.



THE MYSTERIOUS COFFIN EMBLEM AT EUSTON.

mechanism inside the coffin, moves its jaws in an indescribably horrible manner, and emits a weird, whirring sound. Behind the skull are seen a scythe and a sexton's spade. In front are a couple of real human bones, kept crossed by a silver snake.

This railway company's sale of lost property takes place at their Broad Street goods station; and besides passengers' unclaimed luggage, cloak-room parcels, and miscellaneous articles found in the trains and on the platforms, the stock on hand in the goods department is also sold in the same way. This stock consists of merchandise either unclaimed or for which a claim for compensation has been made and paid. Samples figure largely in the unclaimed section. A builder may actually receive a sample case of new fire-bricks, or a grocer a sample of blacklead; but both may refuse to receive and pay carriage on the consignments. Then, again, a lady may receive a costly dress too late for some social function; or a bicycle may be damaged in transit, and perhaps in both cases the consignees will refuse to take the goods, and put in a claim for damages. This accounts for the amazing diversity of articles and "lots" that figure in the sale-room.

Pre-eminent among the extraordinary articles ever held by a railway company is the fossilized Irish giant, which is at this moment lying at the London and North-Western Railway Company's Broad Street goods depôt, and a photograph of which is

reproduced here. This monstrous figure is reputed to have been dug up by a Mr. Dyer, whilst prospecting for iron ore in Co. Antrim. The principal measurements are: Entire length, 12ft. 2in.; girth of chest, 6ft. 6½in.; and length of arms, 4ft. 6in. There are six toes on the right foot. The gross weight is 2 tons 15 cwt.; so that it took half-a-dozen men and a powerful crane to place this article of lost property in position for THE STRAND MAGAZINE artist.

Briefly the story is this: Dyer, after showing the giant in Dublin, came to England with his queer find, and exhibited it in Liverpool and Manchester at sixpence a head, attracting scientific men as well as gaping sightseers. Business increased, and the showman induced a man named Kershaw



THE IRISH GIANT AT BROAD STREET GOODS STATION.

to purchase a share in the concern. In 1876, Dyer sent his giant from Manchester to London by rail; the sum of £4 2s. 6d. being charged for carriage by the company, but never paid. Evidently Kershaw knew nothing of the removal of the "show," for when he discovered it, he followed in hot haste, and, through a firm of London solicitors, moved the Court of Chancery to issue an order restraining the company from parting with the giant, until the action between Dyer and himself to determine the ownership was disposed of. The action was never brought to an issue, and the warehouse charges, even at a nominal figure, will amount to £138 on Christmas Day, 1895. In addition to this large sum, there is the cost of carriage, and about £60 legal expenses which the railway company incurred. The injunction obtained by Kershaw which prevents the North-Western Railway Company from dealing with the giant is still in force, and the sanction of the Court must be obtained before it can be removed from its resting-place at Broad Street goods depôt; where it remains—a weird relic of distant ages in a vast hive of latter-day industry.

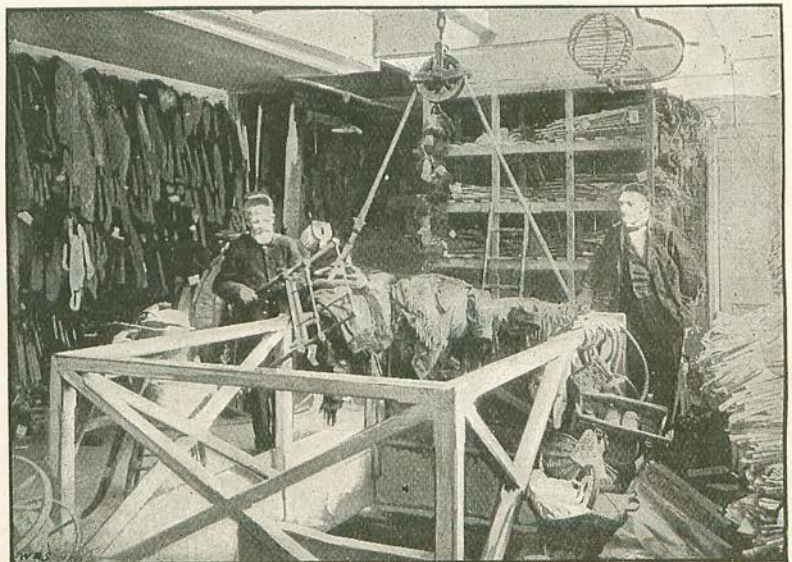
My next visit was to the Great Northern Railway Company at King's Cross, and here is a view of the interior of their depôt for the reception of lost property. The articles are first of all received and registered by clerks on the ground floor, and are subsequently hauled up into this dingy emporium, where, in due time, the auctioneer and his staff arrange things for the annual sale, which takes place in an immense warehouse at one side of the station. The sorting of the articles takes six weeks. In this picture the superintendent of the department is watching his man hauling up part of a small bedstead; and to the right of him is seen an immense pile of newspapers taken by the porters from the railway carriages. About two tons of newspapers figure in the Great Northern annual

sale. In the illustration are also seen a surprising variety of old clothes, a bicycle, and a string of ladies' muffs; several bundles of umbrellas, and a fitted luncheon basket.

At the sale the umbrellas are made up into lots of from six to thirty-six, according to quality, and fetch from two guineas a lot downwards. They are bought by Jewish dealers, and are subsequently displayed for sale on barrows in the poorer quarters of London. The sale of lost property realizes quite an insignificant sum. The amount derived from the Great Northern sale last year was £170; and in this sale were included 1,000 walking-sticks and 1,300 umbrellas.

The Midland Railway Company's lost property staff at Derby consists of several men, two of whom are searchers, and are constantly travelling all over this and other systems in quest of missing luggage. During 1894, 17,188 articles were dealt with at Derby. The number of umbrellas found in trains and not claimed was 3,538, besides 1,404 walking-sticks. I am told by Mr. Eaton, the assistant-superintendent of the line—who received me most courteously on the occasion of my visit to the Midland headquarters—that his company also adopt the system of daily reports from every station, advising the Clearing House, and so on. Property is retained at all local stations, including even St. Pancras, for seven days, and if it then remains unclaimed, it is sent on to Derby.

On the next page is seen a queer group. It consists of a couple of barber's chairs found



HOISTING A BEDSTEAD TO THE DEPOT: KING'S CROSS L.P.O.



BARBER'S CHAIRS WITH CHICKEN AND PIGEONS
(MIDLAND RAILWAY COMPANY, DERBY).

on the platform at Leeds, and a parrot's cage, containing a live chicken and a couple of pigeons. The cage has long been in the Derby Lost Property Office, but our artist utilized it to hold the birds, who had previously occupied an unobtrusive corner of the depôt. The chicken came from Sheffield, while the pigeons were found at a station on the Dore and Chinley line.

There is no end to the strange things that figure in Lost Property Offices. In this illustration we see some framed pictures, and a front driving safety bicycle; a peripatetic knife-grinder's apparatus; a pair of

crutches, found in a third-class carriage—as though the former owner had lighted on a local Lourdes and then discarded his hitherto indispensable supports; a mail-cart and a trombone; a couple of hat-boxes and a lawn-mower; a gun and a Union Jack—all standing out against a background of umbrellas and parcels, whose number is only equalled by their miscellaneousness. Mr. Eaton also showed me capacious drawers stuffed full of all sorts and conditions of pipes, hats, shaving utensils, books, spectacles, and a host of other small articles. In addition, the genial assistant-superintendent of the "Ideal Railway" tells me he has recovered a portmanteau from Moscow, and missing luggage from remote parts of America.

Upwards of 20,000 entries concerning various articles are made annually in the books of the Great Western Lost Property Office at Paddington; and from 1,200 to 1,500 of these are parcels which require to be opened in search of clues as to ownership. I should like to relate here a few incidents in connection with the Great Western Railway Company's detective department.

Some years ago a canon of the Church of England was going from Paddington to the West of England. He was a most punctilious man, and personally supervised the packing of the luggage, of which there were eleven packages, each carefully numbered and labelled. When the reverend gentleman reached his destination he found that a very valuable trunk was



A CURIOUS COLLECTION AT DERBY (MIDLAND RAILWAY COMPANY'S L.P.O.).

missing, which he declared most emphatically he had himself seen placed in the train.

About 150 telegrams of inquiry concerning this trunk were at once dispatched throughout the country, but no news was heard. At last an inquiry was made at the canon's house in London, when the missing luggage was found upstairs. Of course, it had not been taken from the house.

Here is a queer story, strange, but absolutely true. An elderly maiden lady who had buried a relative was returning home with—among other articles of luggage—a big box full of antique silver, that she had acquired under this relative's will; the lady had to change at Bath, and, on arriving home, she missed the box of silver. Many months afterwards the railway company received a letter from some people at Bath, to the effect that an unclaimed box with Great Western labels was lying at their house. This proved to be the missing box of silver. It transpired that the day on which the old lady travelled, and by the same train, a new servant arrived from London for the house at Bath. The man sent to meet this girl at the station brought away the box of silver, thinking it was part of her belongings, both lots of luggage lying contiguously on the platform at the time. The box was taken to the house and placed beneath the girl's bed. She, assuming it to be the property of her master and mistress, said nothing about it; so that it was not until the servant had left their employ that the people were aware that the box was in the house.

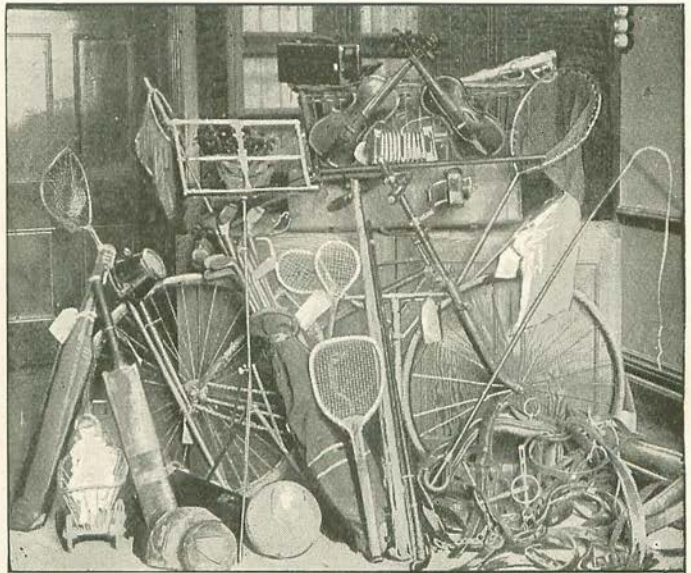
Some years ago a Greek gentleman journeyed from Paddington to Oxford with a case full of ancient manuscripts, which he valued at £1,500, and was about to submit for the inspection of an expert at the Bodleian Library. The Librarian declared the manuscripts were worthless—which is more than likely in view of subsequent events. The Greek, on returning to London, said that he brought the case to Oxford Station (G.W.R.), and saw it labelled for Paddington, but on the arrival of the train at this terminus the precious documents were not to be found.

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Result—a claim for £1,500, for it was not a small thing. It is no exaggeration to say that every inch of the way was searched, from Oxford to Paddington, but in vain. The quest might well have been postponed—and that with peculiar appropriateness—*ad Græcas kalendas*. The guileful Greek had simply gone to the North-Western Station at Oxford, and travelled to Euston, at which terminus he had claimed his trunk full of manuscripts. He got nothing for his trouble except twelve months' hard labour.

The queerest Lost Property Office deposit on record here is a lot of rifles with deal stocks and galvanized iron barrels, intended for trading purposes in Africa. If all the arms smuggled into the Dark Continent were of this sort, surely, "gun-running" were a comparatively innocuous pastime.

The accompanying picture, representing various "sports and pastimes," is from a photograph of a corner of the Great Eastern Railway Company's Lost Property Office at Liverpool Street Station. The group is composed of a Kodak camera, a couple of violins, and a plebeian concertina; a music-stand and some fishing-nets; tennis rackets, golf clubs, cricket bats, and footballs; a bicycle and



A "SPORTS AND PASTIMES" GROUP, LIVERPOOL STREET L.P.O.

some fishing-rods; a few toys, a whip, and a complete set of harness.

Without going into the goods department, there is a truly extraordinary variety of articles included in this company's passenger lost

property. An analysis of last year's sale was specially made for this article, and a few notes from so very human a document cannot fail to be interesting. Well, then, 140 handbags turned up, and there were five huge cases of books; 459 pairs of boots and shoes; 614 collars, cuffs, and fronts; 252 caps; 505 deerstalker hats; 2,000 single gloves; 230 ladies' hats and bonnets; 94 brushes and combs; 265 pipes; 110 purses; 100 tobacco-pouches; 1,006 walking-sticks; 300 socks and stockings; 108 towels; 172 handkerchiefs; 2,301 umbrellas; and seven big cases and 128 separate articles of wearing apparel.

The Lost Property Receiving Office at Liverpool Street is on the new east side of that vast station. The principal store-rooms, however, lie below this office, and are reached by a lift. In a corner here may be seen several sacks packed full of lost gloves of every description, each sackful representing a week's gloves. The contents of one of these was shot out on the floor to be photographed by our artist, and the photo. is



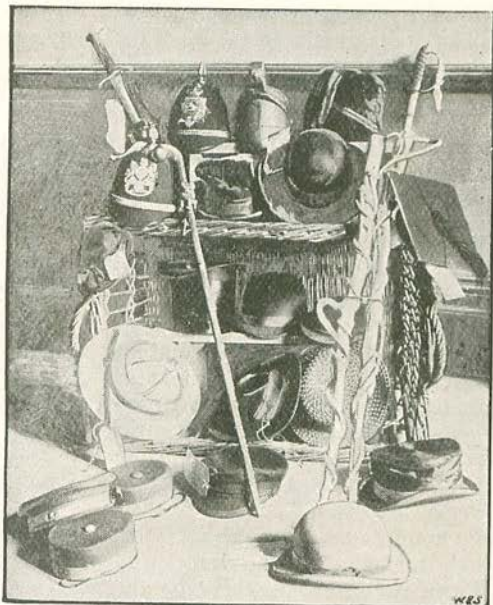
MISCELLANEOUS GROUP AT LIVERPOOL STREET L.P.O.

reproduced in the accompanying illustration. It is said that unclaimed gloves, after having been bought at the company's sale, are paired as nearly as possible, then dyed a sober black, and sold at the London markets on Saturday afternoons. Omnibus and cab-drivers also buy them for about eightpence a pair. At the last Great Eastern sale of lost property, one dealer bought 2,000 gloves for £4 12s. 6d.; while another bid was received for 200 old silk hats. The latter dealer would strip the silk from the better hats and stretch it on new frames; inferior "toppers" find a last resting-place on the head of the untutored savage of the West Coast of Africa.



A WEEK'S GLOVES (LIVERPOOL STREET L.P.O.).

Yet another miscellaneous group, consisting of an ormolu clock and a siphon of soda-water; an ice-cream machine and a butcher-boy's tray; some tools and a coster's naphtha lamp, fruit and parsley, a section of cable, and a baby's chair. And the next illustration is even more interesting, depicting as it does a museum of all kinds of hats. The Army is re-



AN ASSORTMENT OF HATS AT LIVERPOOL STREET.

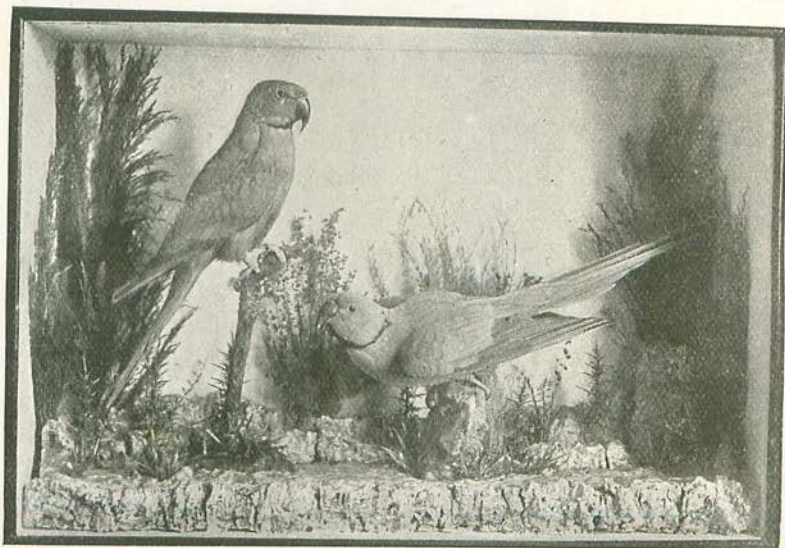
presented by infantry helmets and a hussar busby; then we have the Navy, the Church, and the Indian Service. There is a fireman's helmet, even; also an excursionist's straw hat, an academic "cup and saucer," a few costers' hats, and an irreproachable and an unspeakable silk hat.

The system adopted at Waterloo is similar to that in vogue on other lines, but I thought the superintendent of the South-Western line, Mr. White, might have something interesting to communicate anent the 13,084 articles found by his staff last year. There were 3,572 umbrellas; 1,872 sticks; 1,740 paper parcels; 2,300 pairs of gloves and 1,296 odd gloves; 184 coats; 103 mackintoshes; 340 hats and caps; 872 books; and 443 pipes and pouches. The number of unclaimed articles was 8,990.

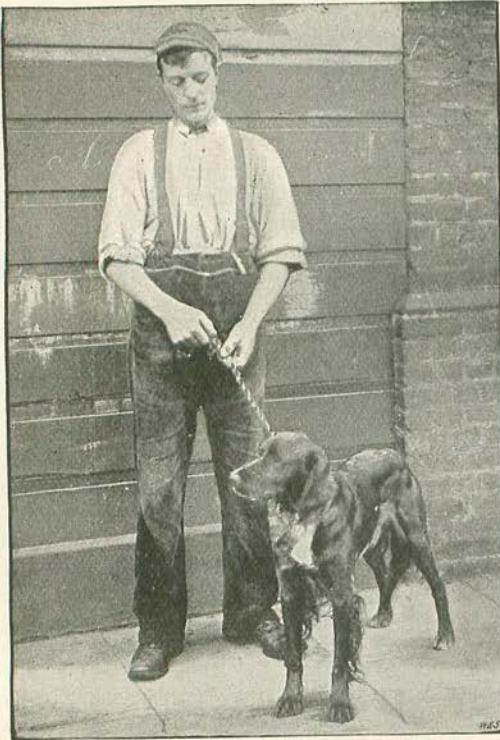
A few years ago a baboon, about 4ft. 6in. high, turned up as lost property at Water-

loo Station. It was taken from the guard's van of a Southampton boat-train, and had probably been brought direct from South America. It was maintained for a long time at the company's expense, the inspector in charge feeding it on nuts and milk. Within this same official's memory are records of dead children—of course; live kittens, dogs (three or four a week are found), rats, and white mice, which somehow escaped, increased and multiplied, and filled the Lost Property Office, and were, by the irony of fate, destined to be chased and eaten by a lost property cat.

Look at these parrots. True, they are now in a glass case—mere examples of the taxidermist's art, but listen to their story. They, too, were found in a Southampton train, and probably belonged to a discharged soldier or sailor. For eight years they lived in the Lost Property Office, the solace and amusement of the officials in that depressing department. They had few vices, but they essayed at times to answer the inquiries of irate passengers who were storming at the counter about property that had been lost. With strange sensitiveness these birds took the abuse unto themselves and replied with surprising vigour, feeling morally certain they had done nothing to deserve this thing. They were patriotic, too, these parrots. During intervals of lucidity they would greet every inquirer with a hoarse scream, "Three cheers for the Queen." This was irrelevant and provoking to a man who had lost a pile of luggage, but when it was followed by a torrent of glib oaths it was apt to overwhelm



ORNITHOLOGICAL OFFICIALS (LOST PROPERTY PARROTS), FORMERLY AT THE WATERLOO L.P.O.



A LOST PROPERTY DOG AT THE SOUTH-WESTERN COMPANY'S STABLES.

one. People used to come to see these birds, for whose benefit a small aviary was rigged up by one of the men in the Lost Property Office. Dogs are usually sent to the company's extensive stables; and in the accompanying picture will be seen one of these dogs—a brown setter—found on the station quite recently; the animal had come by train, but no owner could be found.

The purses found on this line yield on an average £100 a year. Persons who recover lost property have to pay a small fee—sixpence for a portmanteau, twopence for an umbrella, and so on. At this they

grumble; but such is human nature. The next illustration gives a good idea of the interior of the Lost Property Office at Waterloo. A claimant has just come in.

The record item of lost property on the London and Brighton system is a bundle of bank-notes to the value of £310, which was found by a guard under the seat of a first-class carriage in the month of July, 1891. The train had arrived at London Bridge Station from Goodwood, and the owner of the notes being discovered and the property restored to him, he generously gave the guard a £10 note. Mr. Humphriss, the courteous assistant-manager of this popular line, remembers the finding of at least twenty lost property babies—mostly dead. Unclaimed articles are disposed of at a three-days' sale, generally in May.

My informant also remembers the depositing of a rusty old saucepan that was found in a third-class carriage at Portsmouth. It had remained in the London Bridge Lost Property Office about three months, when very early one morning, a little after three o'clock, the watchman on duty beheld dense volumes of smoke issuing from the basement depôt, where lost property articles of long standing are stored. The saucepan was the cause of an outbreak that might have ended in the destruction of this immense terminus. It was half filled with phosphorus, and half with water; in due time the latter evaporated, and spontaneous combustion followed.

Mr. Humphriss has a capital story, which I really must let him tell in his own words: "One wet Derby night a gentleman, who was



INTERIOR OF L.P.O. AT WATERLOO STATION.

returning to town from Epsom Downs Station, dropped in the mud a diamond ring worth £300. There was no mistake about the value; it was a magnificent stone. A Metropolitan constable, specially hired by the company for duty outside Epsom Downs Station on that day, thought he saw some valuable ornament fall and glisten, but, owing to the crowds that were surging into the station, partly to get under shelter, he only just had time to stoop and grab a handful of mud. In this, however, he found the ring, which he brought to me next morning.

"A few days after this, I was reading my paper in the train, coming up to my office, when I saw an advertisement setting forth that a very valuable ring had been lost in a first-class carriage between Epsom Downs Station and Victoria. I wrote to the advertiser asking him to call on me, although I had not failed to notice the discrepancy in the venue of the loss. Pending the arrival of the possible owner, I got the loan of a lot of rings somewhat similar to the one that had been found.

"These I mixed nicely, but the gentleman instantly picked his own ring from among the others, and without doubt he was the owner. He was an American, and the ring was a legacy that had been left to him by his deceased father. Next came the question of reward, concerning which I wrote to the Chief Commissioner of Police; and, eventually, it was arranged that the constable was to receive unconditionally a reward of £10; and I had the pleasure of handing him this sum myself."

That is the story; here is the sequel: "Some time afterwards this same constable called upon me at my office and besought me, with tears in his eyes, to accept a prize canary in a handsome cage. He bred these birds in his spare time; and, needless to say, the canary that tootled on my desk had gained as many medals and distinctions as the most brilliant diplomatist. I took the bird home with me that night, and it was the pet of my family for many years."

During 1894, 18,143 packages of lost property were received at the Cannon Street depôt of the South-Eastern Railway Company; of these 6,705

were claimed. A good annual sale will realize £500 or £600. The queer articles on record here include an infernal machine, wrapped in an old ulster; and a baby boy, who was sent to the City of London Union, and, fourteen years afterwards, entered the Royal Navy.

Mr. Abbott, the South-Eastern Company's chief station-master, showed me quite an amazing collection of crates of straw hats, lost out of the windows of seaside trains, for your tripper likes to survey an unfamiliar country. Seeing a consignment of stray straw hats brought in one day, Sir Edward Watkin, who happened to be on the platform at the time, anxiously inquired whether there had been an accident, but was assured that it was merely a weekly collection from stations down the line. Passengers commence to lose their property at an early age. I was shown at Cannon Street a perfect museum of tiny boots and shoes, kicked off by the fretful babies of the hop-pickers.

But the most interesting lost property item I heard of at Cannon Street was unquestionably Whit, the South-Eastern dog, whose intelligent head is shown here. This dog—a splendid Irish retriever—was found frolicking on the footbridge at Cannon Street one Whit Tuesday—hence its name. It wore no collar, and was otherwise without means of identification. A porter took the dog to the Lost Property Office, where with infinite difficulty it was kept for a week or two; then, as it was not claimed, it was christened Whit, and from that day became a kind of canine official with undefined duties.

Whit lived for ten years in the service of the company, and was quite spoiled by the passengers, who used to take the dog into the refreshment-rooms and treat it to all kinds of delicacies. Whit used also to carry a newspaper every Sunday morning to Mr. Abbott's house, but he never looked for it on a week-day.

One morning—probably owing to an extraordinary system of dietetics—Whit was found dead in the bath chair that is always kept under cover on the platform for the use of passengers. His head was sent to a taxidermist, and stuffed by order of Mr. Abbott, in whose house at Lewis-ham this interesting relic hangs.



HEAD OF "WHIT," THE SOUTH-EASTERN DOG.