

CHINESE PIG-TAIL LOST IN THE MAILS.

## Found in Uncle Sam's Mails.

BY LAURA B. STARR.

[From Photographs taken expressly for George Newnes, Ltd.]



HERE is a museum connected with the Dead Letter Office at Washington which contains the most heterogeneous mass of stuff ever collected together.

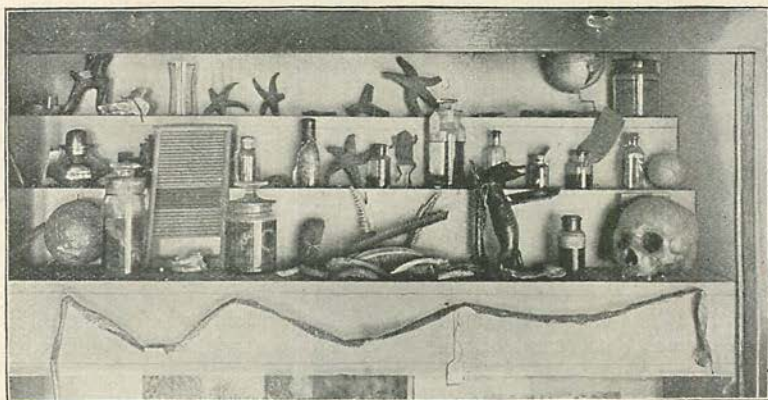
It consists of a variety of articles whose transmission by mail is forbidden, and those for which owners could not be found, some of the most curious of which have been from time to time collected in this room.

It would strike an outsider that, even without a law to forbid it, no one would wish to send rattlesnakes through the mails, would it not?

But, stringent as are the regulations, it is

ing near talking to the superintendent, when she heard a peculiar sound which she recognised as the deadly rattle. She turned her eyes, not daring to move, and was transfixed with terror to see a rattlesnake coiled ready to spring at her.

A carrier who was just coming in took in the situation at a glance, and threw a full mail pouch upon the reptile, and trampled upon it, until someone appeared with a poker and killed the snake. This one and its two companions were put into alcohol, and now stand on a shelf in the museum. This small but dangerous family may be noticed in the bottles shown in the illustration on this page. Naturally the clerks who open packages do



SHELVES OF MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTS SENT THROUGH THE MAILS, NOW IN THE MUSEUM OF THE DEAD LETTER OFFICE IN WASHINGTON.

not long since there was received from Australia a perforated tin can containing three rattlesnakes, very much alive. The superintendent sent to the Smithsonian Institute for someone accustomed to handling such reptiles to come and chloroform them.

The man performed the operation successfully as he thought, and left the dead snakes in the open can, under the superintendent's desk. A day or two later a lady was stand-

ing near talking to the superintendent, when she heard a peculiar sound which she recognised as the deadly rattle. She turned her eyes, not daring to move, and was transfixed with terror to see a rattlesnake coiled ready to spring at her.

Another gruesome object on one of the shelves is a grinning skull, shown in the lower right-hand corner of the same picture. This was very likely sent by someone to an impecunious medical student, as also probably were the fingers and toes and human ear, which were caught in Uncle Sam's toils somewhere between the sender and assignee.

The illustrations in this article are mainly intended to convey an idea of the extraordinary diversity in the interesting contents of



TOY ALLIGATOR,

Uncle Sam's Museum. Take, for example, the three shelves shown on the first page. The long and undulating skin of some once-dangerous

snake ornaments a case which holds sharks' teeth, skulls, starfishes, lamps, bottles of tabloids, medicine, dried frogs, and several other things, seized by lynx-eyed inspectors.



PLASTER MANIKIN.

nut, a card upon which is inscribed the Lord's Prayer in fifty-two languages, and a mail pouch covered with blood, which a carrier in the Far West had given his life to defend from the Indians.

Fastened to a card is a lock of hair cut from the head of Guiteau, the slayer of President Garfield.



CRUET

There is a copy of a marriage certificate which declares that Samuel Whitehead and Jane Miller were married in the Parish Church, Manchester, England, June 4th, 1804. There are deeds of property, musical instruments, corn-poppers, cups and saucers, horns of animals, a hack driver's license, a tarantula (which was quickly done up in alcohol), a bottle of consumption cure (which it was a pity not to have forwarded to its destination), Chinese curios, canvas needles, and a potato-bug exterminator.



MORE SHELVES IN THE MUSEUM.

On this page may be noted an ornamental alligator with a fetching parasol, a little clay doll, a cruet, and a remarkable zoological monstrosity (shown in the lower right-hand corner of this page), which may be one of the animals which Alice saw in Wonderland. Our centre illustration contains several explosives, from fire-crackers to a large-size cartridge with a loaded revolver,

The next page gives an added idea of the incongruity. First we have a negro parson



WHAT IS IT?

delivering a sermon from a pulpit made of feathers. The poor little preacher looks lonesome on his shelf. Beneath him lies a little work-basket, woven by the Indians, and this in turn is supported by a diminutive Bruin, represented resting on a small stool, in an attitude of expectation and respectability. Near this clay bear is a sea urchin, attached to a bit of string, while in the immediate neighbourhood is an old and dilapidated boot, and a finely-etched glass flower-holder. How many children in the United States have waited in vain for the postman to deliver these knick-knacks, and what a lesson it is to people as to the



THE NEGRO PARSON IN HIS FEATHER PULPIT.

value of securely wrapping their parcels and obeying the postal laws.

The receipts of the Dead Letter Office from all sources are about 20,000 pieces for

every business day of the year. The manual labour of handling such a bulk is something enormous.

In addition to letters, newspapers, and a few hundred small articles which Uncle Sam allows to be transported through the mails, at certain rates of postages, there are a thousand and one other articles which are contraband that are continually being emptied into the mail bags.

Many of these are mailed through ignorance of the postal regulations; others are sent forward with malice aforethought, to avoid express charges or customs due, while the remainder are the result of carelessness or momentary aberration of mind. Unfortunately for the senders thereof, Uncle Sam's officials have a way of discovering the nature of such as are dutiable, and the majority of such packages are confiscated either at the mailing station or a subsequent one.

When the contraband contents are discovered, the packages

are sent to the Dead Letter Office, where they are prepared for burial after every effort has been made to return them to the sender, or to forward them to the addressee—who is asked to send the proper amount of stamps to pay for the transportation.

Parcels of merchandise are held two years, if not sooner delivered, and are then sold at auction. Unaddressed parcels and such as are found loose in the mails and received at the Dead Letter Office more than six months prior to the annual sales are included in such sales.

About the middle of December the annual sale of property parcels takes place, and many are the curious mistakes that occur at this time. Although there is a brief description attached to each package, it is wrapped so that no one has an opportunity of examining the contents. One day a gentleman who was bidding on a parcel for a maiden lady in the country, discovered to his horror that he had bought a complete layette for an infant. The average price received for these packages is seventy-five cents.

It is amazing how careless people, even business people, can be. One would think no person would send cheque or money without giving name or address, but thousands of letters pass through the mails in that condition, and in many cases it is impossible to discover the owner. After a lapse of four years the unclaimed money is turned into the U.S. Treasury, which is the richer by about \$50,000 each year.

A miniature obelisk, cut from the bark of a

Californian redwood, rears its proud head from one corner of the room; by the side of it lies a pair of gloves taken from the steamer *Oregon*, after having been in the water fourteen days.

There is a large collection of photographs of soldiers and sailors—evi-



OLD BOOT.



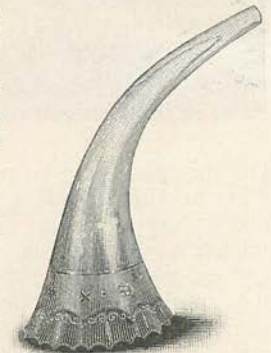
NEEDLE BASKET.



BRIG-A-BRAC BEAR.



SEA URCHIN.



ORNAMENTAL FLOWER-HOLDER.

dently mailed in war times, from the uniforms which all wear. Once in a while one of these is identified by some visitor, but most of them will for ever remain unknown. One's sympathies are touched when it is remembered that in most cases these were probably the last memento of some loved and lost one.

Chinese cash, eggs, dogs, a buck-saw, a box of geological specimens, a lemon-squeezer, candle-snuffers, boot-trees of various sizes, Chinese junk, fans, hair flowers, stuffed birds, horned toads from California, hand mirrors, birds' nests, Indian canoes, a miniature skeleton (shown in the accompanying illustration), a toy gondola (seen below), shells, watches, cheap jewellery of all sorts, a set of false



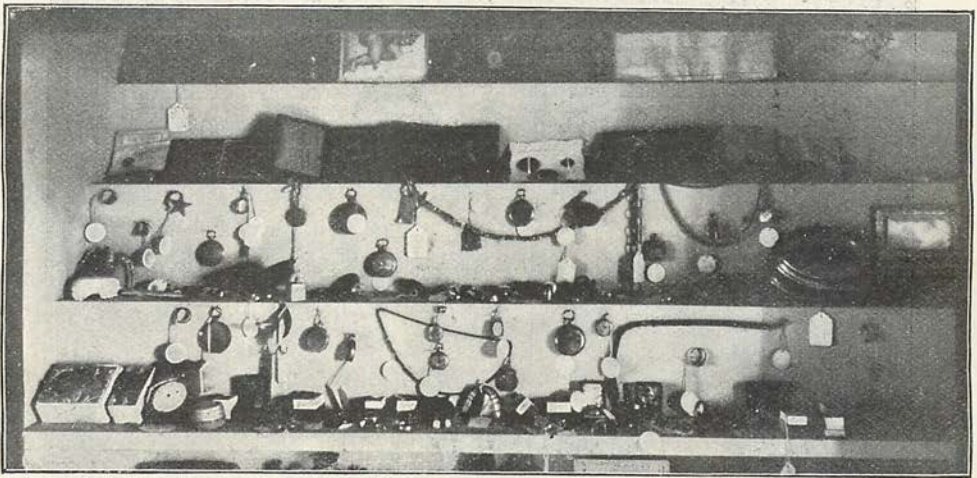
MINIATURE SKELETON.

addresses, and a set of account-books kept by Benjamin Franklin when he was Deputy Postmaster-General for the Colonies in 1753, the accounts of which are kept in £ s. d.

In spite of the fact that all notices sent ask for minute details as to time of mailing and careful description for identification, it is not one time in a hundred that they are given. A case occurred a few years ago when a resident of a western city applied for a missing set of false teeth. As he did not furnish

the required details, there were sent to the post-master at his office several sets of teeth, which had been found about the time mentioned in his application.

They were all returned to this office,



A FEW WATCHES LOST IN THE MAILS.

teeth, door plates, valentines, painted fungi, toys, jewelled daggers, and a letter indorsed: "If not delivered in thirty years, return to the Farallone Island."

The illustration in the middle of this page shows four shelves, two of which are filled with all sorts and conditions of watches—some of them old-time cumbersome "turnips," others of fine gold, ornamented with costly gems. Every watch is tagged, awaiting ownership, but the unfortunate time-pieces will probably remain on those lonesome shelves, marking time till the Day of Judgment.

There are collections of coins extracted from the mails and framed specimens of envelopes with "blind"

accompanied by an indignant communication from the complainant, stating that the teeth sent him were "just common Texas store teeth, and could not by any possibility belong to so refined a mouth as mine."

Again, people sometimes get very impatient at what they consider the unnecessary delay of the postal officials. The following is a case in point. A few years ago a parcel of infant's clothing addressed to a woman



MINIATURE VENETIAN GONDOLA.

missionary in Africa was detained for want of proper postage. In reply to the notice sent her the woman very angrily wrote as follows: "The child for whom the garments were intended has not yet been eaten by the cannibals, but it has quite outgrown the clothing, and it may be returned to the sender whose address I inclose."

One shelf, as may be seen in the accompanying illustration, is given over to dolls of

sealed packages are seized annually in the New York Post-office. In an average year, according to one authority, 25,000 unsealed parcels are confiscated at the same office, and released on the payment of fines which are equivalent to the duties. Some very ingenious methods are employed for transmitting dutiable articles by post. Not long ago a package from Germany was found to contain a small roll of butter. A wire



DOLLS, LACE, MASONIC APRON, BELLOWS, AND OTHER OBJECTS IN THE MUSEUM.

different varieties, for whom the would-be recipients are probably still mourning. The same illustration also shows a Masonic apron, lace, bellows, a steel trap, and various other objects, the study of which will doubtless cause a broad smile. One is made and dressed entirely of corn-husks, with red hair made of the corn silk. There are also in the museum bricks, and old umbrellas that would have been a joy to Sairey Gamp; new-fangled coffee-pots, lamp shades galore, a baby's boot-tree, and a Gargantuan cigar a foot long.

The inspectors keep a sharp look-out for smuggling through the mails. About 750

passed through it met with an obstruction, which proved to be a tin box filled with valuable jewellery. Probably a dozen silk handkerchiefs are found wrapped up in newspapers in every mail from China. The skill exhibited by the postal clerks in detecting such contraband inclosures is wonderful. Silk stockings are mailed from France in the same manner. An odd kind of smuggling is the sending of mushrooms by mail from Italy. They are of a peculiar kind, dried, and are much relished by the natives of that country in the United States. They come in small bags, and are easily distinguished by smell.