

OUR POSTAL SERVICE.

BY THE EDITOR.

HOW THE EXPRESS COMPANIES INTERFERE WITH THE DELIVERY OF
PARCELS SENT BY MAIL.

ON several occasions books have been forwarded to the Editor of THE OPEN COURT from foreign countries, and postage on the same prepaid in full to destination, and on these several occasions the American Express Company has in some manner intervened between the postal service and ourselves, obtaining possession of the goods and removing the stamps from the packages and then assessed heavy charges for import at New York in addition to storage charges and other items of expense.

Recently a Thibetan English dictionary published under the auspices of the British Government in Bengal was forwarded to the editor of our publications by mail, *postage fully prepaid*,* and the package was held up at New York by the American Express Company with a charge of \$4.10 for entry fees, etc.

We found it difficult to understand how a private corporation, or quasi-public corporation conducted for private profit, could intercept postal matter and extort fees and charges that are not assessed by the postal authorities, and we took the liberty to inquire at the Treasury Department, the highest authority of the Post Office, but the answer, briefly told, reads:

“The Department can afford you no relief.” †

We are not isolated in our experiences with the Post Office. A Postal Progress League has been founded and resolutions were passed, but the prospect of accomplishing a reform is not great. At

* The Bengal Government had paid \$2.25 in order to have the book delivered to us free of charge, and the delivery would have been accomplished in any civilised country, England, Germany, Japan, Russia, etc., except in the United States!

† Quoted from a letter of February 19, 1904, from the Treasury Department, Office of the Secretary (12224, GS.) to The Open Court Publishing Co.

one of their meetings measures were proposed to procure for the United States a parcel post, and the views uttered in the debate, as published in *The Publisher's Weekly*, throw some light upon the situation:

"Mr. John Brisben Walker, of the *Cosmopolitan*, was convinced from thirty years' experience in postal matters, that this would have about as much effect as water on a duck's back. John Wanamaker, when Postmaster-General, had told him that there were four insuperable obstacles to the obtaining of a parcels-post: 1st, the Adams Express; 2d, the American Express; 3d, the Southern Express, and 4th, Wells, Fargo & Co. Mr. Walker predicted that the express companies would always have power to defeat such a bill; that Congress in fact would pay no attention to it. 'Merchants agree,' said he, 'that the government must first buy out the express companies at any price. The Government is probably losing \$250,000,000 by not having a parcels-post.'

"Mr. Walker strongly favored circulating books as cheaply as periodicals. He said that a man like John Wanamaker or Marshall Field at the head of the Post Office Department could, if given a free hand, organize a system that could carry any kind of mail matter profitably at one cent pound. But when Mr. Wanamaker actually did attempt reorganization of the Post Office he found himself bound hand and foot by private interests.

"H. Gaylord Wiltshire, of *Wiltshire's Magazine*, described some of the petty persecutions to which he had been subjected by Third Assistant Postmaster-General Madden, with the result that his magazine is now printed and mailed in Canada to all parts of the United States and to Great Britain and her colonies at $\frac{1}{4}$ cent a pound, (the Canadian rate having been recently reduced from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ cent per pound on magazines). Mr. Madden refused his magazine entry to second-class rates on the ground that it 'advertised' Mr. Wiltshire, because his portrait was frequently inserted and editorials were signed 'I'.

"Mr. Walker said there was not a single periodical safe from Mr. Madden's rulings as at present put forth."

We here reproduce an article from *The Financier*, New York, a high-class periodical which in business circles is considered as responsible and reliable in its statements. *The Financier* calls the Post Office a national disgrace," and continues:

"The United States Post Office Department is a disgrace to the nation. Eliminating the scandals which have cropped out from time to time as the result of dishonesty and lax administration, the De-

partment is a quarter of a century behind the age in every particular. We are the only large nation in the world without a parcels-post system; we are the only large nation whose postal service is conducted at a loss, despite the fact that our charges for transmitting mail matter are far above those of other countries. In brief, the system from top to bottom is in need of thorough renovation. The United States pays the railways exorbitant rates for carrying mails, and the express companies, favored by lower charges, are actually underbidding the Government and handling at a profit the cheapest forms of mail matter, on which, according to the postal authorities, the Government loses large sums annually. If the express companies can make money handling matter at one-half cent and one cent a pound, why, it may be asked, do they require rates hundreds of per cent. higher on ordinary business?

"The answer is simple.

"The United States has no parcels-post system, and the express companies are at liberty to charge what they will, competition being impossible. The result is that the merchants of the country lose millions of dollars annually in trade which otherwise they might obtain.

"The recent United States Consul in Guadeloupe, Louis H. Ayme, estimates that this country is losing \$2,000,000 a year in small mail orders from the West Indies through the refusal of our Government to enter in the International Parcels-Post Union. The West Indies is a very small portion of the globe, and the losses from other and more important centers of trade must be many millions more.

"If the situation were not so serious it might be well termed ridiculous. The humiliating spectacle of the British Government making a contract with a private United States express company to handle its parcel business in this country because the American Postal Department was too supine to undertake the work, or to urge legislation authorizing it to do so, is too recent to require more than passing attention, but the incident is characteristic of the administration of our Postal system.

"How long will this condition of affairs continue?

"Just as long as the express companies are strong enough to prevent reform, or as long as the Postal authorities continue too weak and vacillating to combat them.

"Contrasted with our advancements in other directions the Post Office Department is a travesty on American business methods.

"Post Office reform, as regards both honesty and intelligence of administration, and the adoption of a common sense system of

transmitting merchandise at reasonable rates, would, if made a party issue, win more votes from the business interests of the country than any abstract theory or political principle.

"The present intolerant conditions should not be allowed to continue much longer. We have had too much politics in the Post Office Department for many years past. What is needed now is a little practical business ability."

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST GOOD LITERATURE.

Some time ago the Religion of Science Library was excluded from the second-class mail on the ground of the "completeness in itself," as stated by the superintendent of second-class mail (W. B. Getty) in Chicago. Upon inquiry, addressed to the same superintendent, concerning other periodicals published in different cities, which were still coming through the mails at second-class rates, although in every particular of the same character as the publications of the Religion of Science Library as regards completeness, etc., and conforming in all particulars to the requirements of the postal laws, but differing from the Religion of Science Library only in that they were reprints of classical literature rather than of *scientific* and *philosophical* subjects (among which may be cited an excellent periodical, *Bibelot*, published by T. B. Mosher at Portland, Me.), the superintendent of second-class mails in Chicago replied that not all postmasters or superintendents looked at the matter in the same light, that what he might consider as matter to be prohibited another postmaster might consider permissible, and if the postmaster in Maine did not see fit to exclude *Bibelot* that did not affect his decision in excluding the Religion of Science Library.

Being asked how it was that the citizens of the same country could be subject to different interpretations of the same law, he answered that that was a matter that did not concern him. He was here to interpret the law according to his intelligence, and accordingly he excluded from the mails what he considered to be in violation of the law. In other words, the Religion of Science Library excluded here—if published at Portland, Maine, would be entitled to second-class rates, and *Bibelot* included there—if published in Chicago would not be entitled to second-class rates.

The then superintendent of second-class mails (W. B. Getty) has since been promoted to a more important post at Washington and the postal authorities at Washington, especially Mr. Madden, Third Assistant Postmaster-General, seem to take the position that it is the duty of the officials to cut down the labor of the Postal De-

partment to the utmost—a policy at variance with private business houses (who, according to the increase in business, adjust their forces to handle it) and it is no wonder that the Post Office does not pay.

The Supreme Court has decided in a number of cases that Postmaster-General was wrong in excluding those periodicals that conform to the postal laws and regulations from the mails at the second-class rates, and ordered the papers then fighting for reinstatement to be readmitted.

Among these was a quarterly periodical entitled *The Pocket List*, being a small book about pocket size containing the list of our railway officials in alphabetical order and a list of the various railroads and the prominent officials of each, the purpose of this periodical being to supply manufacturers and others who had business with railroads with a directory to enable them to locate the proper officials by name and address in order to do business with them. As this publication complied with the postal laws as regards specifications of printed sheets not bound in substantial covers and being issued at a yearly subscription price in serial numbers, etc., the United States Court ordered it reinstated. The department acknowledged its defeat in court, but refused to reinstate other periodicals unless they first go to court and get a decision—relying on the expense thus caused to keep out a large number.