

MAIL TRANSPORTATION IN CITIES.

BY WALDON FAWCETT.

The best methods to be employed to secure a speedy and economical movement of the mails in the larger cities is a problem which has received and is receiving an immense amount of attention from the officials of the United States Post Office Department. Thoroughly revolutionary influences have been at work in this field of late years, and as a result there has been in progress an almost continuous evolution of the utilities employed. Comparatively a short time ago branch post offices were practically unknown outside the very largest cities, and the pouches of mail matter were transferred to and from railroad trains in wagons which did not represent particularly rapid transit, even were there not taken into consideration the ever-present danger of delays from congested street traffic. Now every city of any size enjoys the advantages of sub-stations for postal distribution, and electric cars, pneumatic tubes and automobiles are displacing the old-fashioned vehicles in the transportation field.

This transformation is, of course, a gradual one. For instance, there are yet in existence in cities something over two hundred wagon routes for carrying mail pouches between the sub-stations and the main post office, or the main office and railroad stations and *vice versa*, but there are also in operation close to three hundred electric and cable car routes which perform the same service. In several cities it has been found possible to so arrange the electric-car mail routes as to entirely discontinue wagon service, the cars not only covering all that had previously been done by wagons, including the carrying of the mails to and from railroad stations, but also furnish supply for a number of newly established mail stations.

It is the hope of the postal officials to ultimately be enabled to entirely dispense with the wagon service, which in addition to being slow is decidedly expensive as compared with the more modern system. To indicate this conclusively and convincingly, it may be noted that the latest statistics prepared by the Post Office Department show that the average cost per mile traveled by the wagons is over 16 cents, whereas the cost for the electric and cable car service averages less than 6 cents per mile traveled. Computing the cost of each service for a full year on the basis of the aggregate length of each class of routes, it is found that whereas the wagon service has entailed an expenditure of \$481 per mile of length, the outlay for electric or cable car service was only \$143 per mile.

In some cities the plan has been followed of attaching a letter box to the guard on the forward platform of the street cars in the postal service; and when any citizen living on the route desires to mail a letter it is only necessary to signal a car and deposit the letter in the box. In the cities where this plan has been introduced letters move more rapidly from the writer to the mail-train than anywhere else in the world.

However, the great mission of mail cars on the electric lines and elevated railroads is to afford quick communication between sub-stations and the main post office. How extensive is this system of branch post offices will be appreciated when it is stated that there are in New York city about two dozen sub-stations, in Boston about twenty, in Chicago approximately the same number, and in San Francisco eight, the other large cities being supplied with proportionate liberality.

The rapid growth of American cities and the expansion of the territory covered by free delivery, as well as the distance of many of the postal stations from steam-railway stations, has greatly complicated the whole problem of delivering mail by carrier as well as its transportation in bulk. It was to promote the efficiency of both branches of the service that the scheme of sub-stations was introduced, and the department is now seeking to still further expedite the handling of mail matter in the larger cities by urging business people and all large patrons of the postal service to have printed upon their envelopes and stationery the number of the carrier, or, if the addressee lives outside the delivery of the central office, the branch office or station from which he is supplied.

Judged from any standpoint, one of

the most important utilities in suburban mail transportation is found in the pneumatic service, now unfortunately discontinued. The utilization of large tubes for the transmission of mail matter has heretofore been largely of an experimental nature, but the investigation which the government has been conducting as to the cost of construction, operation and utility of



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these systems has concluded with favorable results, and an effort will be made to secure heavy Congressional appropriations each year until the pneumatic mail delivery service has been fully installed in large cities.

The automobile also, as a factor in city mail transportation, is scarcely past the experimental stage. Thus far it has been introduced principally for collection purposes. The initial introduction of the auto-



SORTING MAIL EN ROUTE ON A TROLLEY CAR.

mobile in postal service in this country was made at Buffalo, where an electric phaeton of one ton weight made a run from the main office to a sub-station in nineteen minutes, the return trip consuming but eighteen minutes. Following this speed test a collection trial was made, and 150 pounds of mail collected from twenty-two regulation boxes and eight package boxes in thirty-three minutes.

The first trial with an automobile manufactured especially for mail collection purposes was made in

Cleveland some months later. The route selected was twenty-two miles in length, and mail was collected from 120 boxes. Under ordinary conditions a collector with horse and wagon required exactly six hours to cover this territory, but the automobile made the circuit in two hours and twenty-seven minutes, and this under the most unfavorable circumstances, since a fierce snowstorm was raging almost the entire time. In Detroit a carrier's route that ordinarily requires two hours and thirteen minutes for collection was covered by an automobile in one hour and eight minutes. Several manufacturers are now working upon motor vehicles designed expressly and exclusively for postal service, and the postal officials express full confidence in the universal use of the horseless vehicles as soon as there have been evolved autos which can be depended upon to travel over all kinds of roads, in all kinds of weather, and invariably prove vastly superior in speed and safety to the wagons and carts drawn by horses, which are now employed in the free delivery service in cities.

Enormous Personal Injury Damages.

The annual report of the Brooklyn Rapid Transit Company, just issued, shows that the enormous sum of \$971,867 was paid during the year on claims for personal injuries, says the Railway Review. The legal and claim department expenses swelled this amount to \$1,142,962—or nearly 10 per cent of the company's gross receipts. The report says: "A large part of these excessive payments is unjustly exacted. So low has the standard of professional ethics fallen, that to-day it is common to see attorneys, physicians, clients and witnesses leagued in a conspiracy to mulct railroad companies, manufacturers and merchants, each of the parties to the conspiracy having a contingent interest in the verdict and being tempted by the hope of success to exaggerate injuries, pervert facts and corrupt jurors. It used to be illegal, and has always been deemed improper, for an attorney to have a contingent interest in the result of his litigation, but it is not too much to say that not 50 per cent of the money which your company paid last year in damages through attorneys reached their clients."

Burial of Soldiers.

Instructions have recently been issued by the War Department to insure uniform sanitary methods for the burial of the remains of soldiers dying outside the limits of the United States, and to facilitate their subsequent disinterment for removal to this country for final burial, says the Medical Record. For this purpose, wooden coffins are used, having holes bored in the bottom to facilitate the escape of fluids. The remains are clad for burial in ordinary clothing, and the space remaining in the coffin is filled with freshly burned lime. As it is desirable that the soft parts shall disintegrate as rapidly as possible, the use of hermetically sealed metallic coffins is discouraged. The remains of soldiers who have died of contagious disease are wrapped in sheets wet with corrosive sublimate solution or formalin and buried without coffins in graves packed with lime, the bodies being covered to a depth of six inches with the same material. On disinterment for return to the United States, the remains, usually left undisturbed for a year after burial, are at once wrapped in sheets wet with a disinfectant solution. The remains of each soldier are then placed in a metallic casket with a movable top which is tightly clamped down against a rubber gasket, previously thickly coated with white lead. An air-tight joint is thus formed. The casket is then inclosed in a stout box for shipment, being packed around with sawdust to prevent injury to, or movement of, the casket. During the first fiscal year, the remains of 1,825 officers, soldiers, sailors, and civilians have in this way been returned from the West Indies and the Pacific Islands, and given honorable burial in the United States.

One of the first reforms to which the new city administration of New York is devoting itself is the introduction of an adequate street sign system in New York. For four years, or since the Strong administration went out of power, this apparently small matter, which is really important to so many people, was persistently neglected.



AUTOMOBILE TROLLEY MAIL CAR IN BOSTON.