A RIDE IN A MAIL CAR WITH THE BUSY POSTAL CLERKS

Dangers of Their Profession Are Many—Safer Cars Being Introduced—Their Memories and Dexterity Astonishing—Some Hairbreadth Escapes.

Of all the public services rendered by the federal government, none perhaps come home more closely to the individual citizen than that of the railway mail, and of none is he so greatly in ignorance. Nothing short of a strike of the thirteen thousand railway mail clerks in the United States would bring this closeness home to him, and as such a strike is an almost unspeakable improbability, it is doubtful if he will ever know how much of happiness, of peace of mind, of business promptitude he owes to the hard worked, danger daring, faithful men who man the postal cars.

The average citizen knows that the fast trains carry these postal cars, and that there are men in them to look after the mail. He knows that in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred these cars are directly back of the locomotive tender, and that in case of a wreck they are generally the first to go to pieces. He may, indeed, have growled at the number of these wrecked postal cars, but it was because of the amount of mail destroyed, and with little thought of the clerks who give up their limbs and their lives in this line of duty and public service.

This man who is being served so well knows nothing of the pains that are taken to hasten his letters, his papers, his miscellaneous packages to their indicated destination; a hastening that means the counting of every minute and frequent overtime work without extra pay. He has no idea of the careful checking of every error in handling and sorting and the punishment meted out when a clerk gets too many black marks. He does not realize that the mail clerks must stand from ten to fourteen hours in swaying, tumbling cars, handle weights that would tire a ditch digger, shuffle letters by the thousand as though their fingers were of steel and exercise continually a memory that has at its command thousands of postoffices and scores of train schedules.

SAFER CARS COMING.

That the government is beginning to insist that the railroads supply steel frame cars for the travelling postoffices is of interest to the public chiefly because it will afford greater protection to the mail. In this move the postal clerks see a glimmering of official humanity which will eventually remove them from the extra extraordinary risk lists of the accident insurance companies. Ten new mail cars, which are ribbed with steel and floored with mineral matter, have been recently put on by the Pennsylvania Railroad. The Erie is experimenting with a car built entirely of steel, which is riveted up like a locomotive. The Southern, too, has a number of new cars which are stouter than Pullmans, and from other sources come evidences of improved postal rolling stock.

Of the long distance mail runs out of New-York there is none more interesting perhaps than that which carries the bulk of mail to the South over the Pennsylvania and Southern railroads. The train is No. 33 as far as Washington, the most particular train on the Pennsylvania, on which even railway officials are not allowed to ride and passengers other than postal clerks actually on duty are not carried.

From Washington south as far as Atlanta the train, which carries nothing but mail, is the Southern's pride, No. 97, and so great is its reputation that the number has become a synonyme for speed in the Carolinas and Georgia. While not as fast as some of the Chicago limited trains, its run becomes a mighty achievement of modern railroading when one remembers that it is made over a single track road crowded with growing traffic, and on a line which curves along a mountain ridge for a great part of the distance. This is the most expensive mail train which the federal government supports. Something like $175,000 a year it costs, and every Senator and Representative from the South stands up and fights for the appropriation each time the bill comes up.

With the necessary permission from Captain James C. White, general superintendent of the railway mail service, and after unwinding much railway red tape a Tribune correspondent boarded this mail train at Jersey City the other night to make the run to Atlanta with mail for all the South.

TAKING ON THE MAIL.

The floors of the cars were already piled high with mail bags when the reporter entered and the clerks began to tussle with the accumulation of letters and papers several hours before the time of departure. From time to time other mail wagons were ferried across the river from New York and delivered their heavy loads to the waiting train.

At two o'clock there was a rumbling of wheels and a clatter of hoofs.

"Here come the Indians," explained one of the clerks.

Half a dozen wagons, drivers shouting like wild men of the plains, come tearing down the roadway between tracks. The wagons were filled with Sunday newspapers which fill four storage cars on this special mail train.

"There goes your outfit of tigers," said the station master as a big wagon drawn by a bay team dashed by. He meant that the wagon was loaded with Sunday Tribunes for Baltimore, Washington and Southern points.

At 2:26 to the second, the huge racing engine at the front of the mail train gave a series of jerks and the race against time to the Southland was under way. In two minutes she was out of the yards and making for Philadelphia on a no-stop run at a rate of more than a mile a minute.

Every man of the eighteen in the mail crew went on with his work, seeming to gain in speed with the speed of the train. In one car two clerks from the Baltimore postoffice were distributing letters directed to that city. Before them were half a hundred pigeon holes, each one marked for a carrier route. By the time the train reached Baltimore the letters were tied in bundles which could be delivered without further handling to the carriers who distributed them about the city.

In the letter end of another car a mail clerk who knows Washington as a good Mahometan knows his Koran distributed letter mail for the Capital City for every carrier in the main office and to Station G. He also made separate bundles of mail for the different departments of the federal government, including one bulky package for President Roosevelt. The letters were stamped with the train number, and the distribution en route saved one residence and two business deliveries.

ACCURATE SORTERS.

The paper clerks worked like machines, standing at the table with one foot in front of the other as a brace against the swaying of the flying train. They would pick up a paper, glance at the address and toss it into the proper bag or box with unerring aim. Perhaps the bag was thirty feet down the car and at the moment the clerk threw the package the train was tumbling around a curve; yet, on the entire night run of five hours, hardly a single piece fell short or stumbled into the wrong bag. It was the proficiency of practice.

The mail clerk is proud of his skill in this regard and occasionally has an opportunity to show it when not on duty. Many a Coney Island faker who gives knives or canes to those who toss rings over them has been put out of business by the accuracy of a visiting mail clerk.

At Philadelphia a new consignment of unsorted mail was dumped into the cars and the train hurried off to Baltimore with no let-up in the activity of the clerks. At Baltimore the two local clerks and the two "short stops," who have been handling the mail bags and doing other heavy work left the train. Between Baltimore and Washington came the final "tying out," in which the sorted letters were put into neat bundles and tossed into their proper sacks. The tension then let up a little and the grim silence of the rush hours was broken with a running fire of conversation.

A huge bundle of letters for the Dead Letter Office in Washington brought forth this from one of the older clerks:

"What's a dead letter, anyway?"

"Give it up," said his "end man," promptly.

"A dead letter, Mr. Bones, is one a wife gives her husband to mail for her."

At 7:30 a. m., on time to the minute, the train pulled into the Washington terminal, and as all the night's mail had been properly distributed the clerks were off duty as soon as the sacks had been transferred. If there had been an overrush of mail they must have remained in the cars until the work was done, and in this way they are sometimes held two or three hours. Of this particular crew, half were scheduled to return to New-York at 6:50 that night and the remainder at 6:55 the next morning. They work six days on and six days off, but about half of their vacation must be spent in studying their scheme books or postoffices and routes in order to pass the examinations which are held at frequent intervals. The head clerk on this train receives $1,500 a year, as it is made up of three cars or more. The salaries of the others range from $1,300 to $900 for the "short stops." Every man of the crew must have from twelve thousand to fifteen thousand postoffices in his head. He must know their locations just as he knows that Roosevelt is President of the United States. He must be familiar with hundreds of train schedules, for some of the offices are reached by two lines, and he must know which train gets there first. All things considered it is little wonder that many of those who pass the Civil Service examination cannot stand the strain on their memories and have to leave the service.

A BAD SCARE FOR ALL.

In the Washington station train No. 97, of the Southern, is coupled up and waiting. It consists of three mail cars and one filled with express matter. There is just time to transfer the mail from New-York before the train starts for Atlanta, the Georgian capital, six hundred and fifty miles away, which distance the train is scheduled to cover in sixteen hours.

The motion of No. 33 gave the correspondent trouble to keep his feet, but it was nothing to the way No. 97 tore through Virginia that beautiful Sunday morning. The train was light enough to feel every motion of the powerful locomotive. It seemed to take the curves on two wheels, and to whip the rear cars half off the track. One soon understood that there was foundation for the story Colonel Armstrong, one of the vice-presidents of the Southern, tells of his experience with this train.

"I was out on the line in my car," he said, "and was in a hurry to reach Atlanta. I telegraphed orders for No. 97 to stop and hook on my car. I stood it for about forty miles, and then I sent word to the engineer to hook me off the first siding he reached."

In the two sorting cars of the train eight men were at work, with Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Florida letters and papers. Only the most pronounced curves and jolts bothered them, for they had the feel of the road and well developed "sea legs." Every man was intent on his work, handling letter after letter with marvellous precision and speed.

With a suddenness which usually accompanies a falling star or the batting of an eyelash, accompanied by a shriek from the locomotive whistle so shrill that it froze the blood, the train seemed to stop an instant. Then it rose from the track, came down with a terrible jolt; up again, down again, with frightful grinding noises arising from every underlying wheel of the huge trucks which carried the car.

Every man in the mail crew went up into the air as though shot there, and the Tribune correspondent went up with them. He was the only one who came down, however, for each of the postal clerks managed to grab one of the twin safety rods which run the length of the car roof, and hold on. The correspondent came down hard, and was rolled among the mail bags. Half dazed by the fall, certain that the mail train was going into the ditch, remembering fully the details of a score of wrecks in which the mail cars suffered worst, the reference clippings of which even then reposed in his pocket, there was a moment in which he gazed with fascination at the mail crew dangling from the safety rods. One of the men, as he swayed with the plunging train, was murmuring the act of contrition of his church, shortened to meet the exigencies of postal service dangers.

NOTHING MUCH, AFTER ALL.

"O Lord," one heard him say, "I am truly sorry for having offended Thee with my sins."

Then the train came to a stop, with a final bound, and one heard the healthy hiss of steam escaping through the proper vents from the locomotive, and knew that a wreck had been avoided.

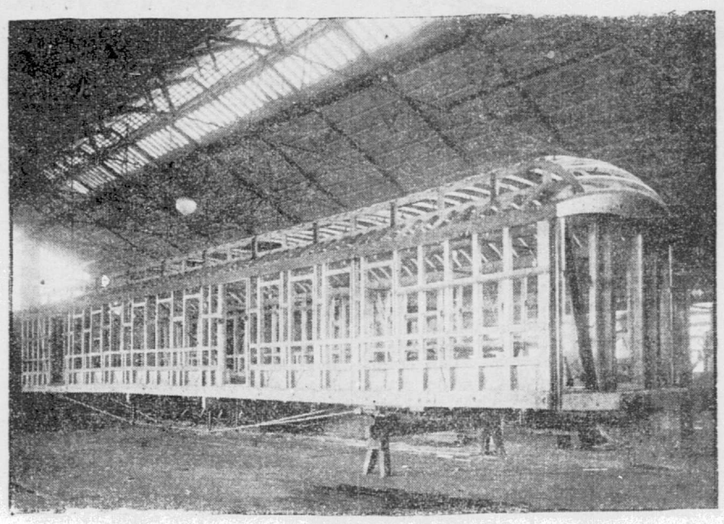
The postal clerks dropped down from their perches on the safety rod, picked up the letters which had been scattered over the floor with the first jolt and went on sorting mail.

"What happened?" the correspondent asked, after untangling himself from the mail bags and rubbing half a dozen bruises.

"The engineer put on the emergency brake for something or other," was the explanation. "It might have been a wreck, so we took to the safety rods."

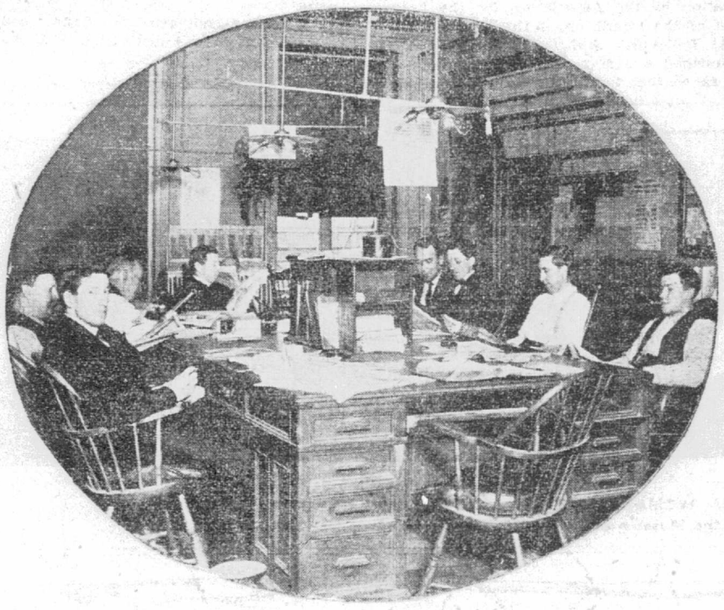
It developed later that the operator of a signal tower at the entrance to a deep cut had received a message for the engineer of No. 97 just as the train was approaching, and flashed the danger signal almost under his nose. After getting his orders the engineer climbed back into his cab, and the train went on.

Later in the day, when approaching Greensboro, which is the end of the run for the Washington-South clerks, the value of the safety rods in case of accident was explained. When a mail car is wrecked the first thing to go is the floor, which splinters up in a most inconceivable fashion. Then the sorting tables and the mail boxes come clattering down, and everything movable in the bar breaks loose and goes swishing around with a force that would break limbs and crack skulls if any are in the way. Swinging from the safety rods, the clerks avoid these dangers, and have some protection against the final shock. They know the feel of the road so well that the moment the emergency brake is slapped on they jump for the rods.



NEW PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD POSTAL CAR IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION.

Showing steel frame which gives it the stability of a Pullman in order to afford greater protection to the clerks in case of accidents.



RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS IN THE READING ROOM OF THEIR DORMITORY, AT NO. 28 VESEY-ST.

TALES OF DISASTER.

There were tales of a dozen wrecks, and every man on the crew showed scars to support his testimony. They were honorable scars; scars received in the line of duty just as truly as the wounds a regular receives in the jungles of the Philippines.

They told of the luckiest unlucky clerk in the Southern service, S. N. Dykeman, who since 1879 has run between Greensboro and Atlanta. He has been in three serious wrecks, and each time crawled back from the edge of the valley of shadows.

Near Greenville, one night several years ago, his train went into a rock slide. The tender of the locomotive came crashing through the roof of the car, and planted itself firmly on the very spot on which he stood sorting mail. They hauled him out from under the firebox an hour or two later terribly burned and broken.

Then No. 97, running over branch lines to avoid a serious washout, experienced a head-on collision with a freight at Rock Hill. He was riding an old mail car, which simply went to pieces. He shot out through the roof and landed sixty feet down the grade. If he had gone in his flight a few inches farther he would have been scalded to death in a stream of boiling water from the broken boiler. It was two days before he knew that anything had happened and he was in the hospital for months.

In the third week the postal car went to pieces as usual. He went up with the roof and they found him on top of it some distance from the track. His partner was crippled for life and a number of the train crew killed. The railroad paid him $26,000 in damages for the three accidents, for the postal clerks have the same right to sue for damages as a passenger travelling on a purchased ticket.

A short time ago train No. 11 was badly wrecked. They picked the mail clerk and postoffice inspector out of a sadly battered car. Noises were still heard inside, though the clerk said that every one was out. On entering the wrecked car again they found an excited but absolutely uninjured rooster flapping about. He had been in a crate in the baggage car behind when the smash came, and must have been shot by the concussion through the small trap door leading to the mail car.

As a result of the dangers of their workaday life accident insurance companies put the risk on postal clerks at such a figure as practically to prohibit their carrying policies. Accordingly they organized a company of their own, which for $10 a year pays $15 a week and $3,000 in case of permanent disablement.

READING SEALED LETTERS.

At three o'clock in the afternoon 97 reached Greensboro and a new crew took possession of the mail cars. Their work was sorting letters for Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana, which up to this time had rested in pouches in the storage compartments of the cars. As they opened up the bundles every clerk was careful to toss the twine and facing slip scraps into a waste bag, and one witnessed one of the many little economies of the service. This waste is sold to paper manufacturers and nets the government a considerable sum each year.

It is surprising what tales of romance and tragedy a bundle of letters picked at random from the piles which crowd the car will tell. On top, perhaps, is a bulky envelope which speaks the love of a girl for a man. The next may be a cold business communication. Then comes one addressed in the cramped hand of age, which is probably from a mother to her son. A black bordered envelope carries its message of sorrow along with the square envelope which bears a bid to a wedding. The postal clerk, despite the rapidity with which he works, gets much enjoyment out of the letters which pass through his hands. In time he becomes a handwriting expert of no mean ability.

Every bundle of letters opened up en route holds its "nixie," which is the mail clerk's name for a letter improperly addressed. There are many addressed to postoffices which do not exist in the State named on the envelope. People are constantly mixing North and South Carolina. The postal clerk may be sure that "N. C." has been intended for "S. C.," but he has no authority to redirect and must send the letter to the nearest postoffice which supports a "nixie" department, which in the case of this train is Atlanta. Lovers are forever tangling up their addresses, as this example shows:

Miss Mary Johnson,
Maryville,
Georgia.

There is no such postoffice. The writer had Mary on the brain. When it came to the address he wrote her name and added "ville" to it. The letter will eventually go to the Dead Letter Office, and one can only speculate over the sorrow that will result from the carelessness.

THE NEGRO PROBLEM.

Toward the end of the run of this fast mail the clerks enter a race against time to prevent being "stuck," which is their term for arriving at a terminal with mail undistributed. Several New-York periodicals having large circulations in the South are known as "stuck sheets." One day each week and two days each month these papers by their number and bulk stick mail crews all over the country.

On this particular Sunday there was a huge grist of Augusta "stuck stuff," and the crew had to make the stiffest sort of a struggle to sort it. They won out just as the train entered the Atlanta yards, a minute or two after midnight, having made up an hour of lost time, but hitting a seventy-mile gait part of the distance from Greensboro.

On these runs most of the mail clerks are native born Southerners, and the race problem is one of some annoyance. There are several negro schools in the South which specially prepare young negroes to pass the Civil Service examinations for the mail service. The white clerks object to having a negro in their crew, but are powerless. They do insist, however, that he provide his own drinking cup, and that he eat his meals alone. If he will not buy his own cup the white clerks get one for him.

The eating problem on a through mail train is ofttimes a serious one, and many a mail clerk has to work for hours on an empty stomach. The northbound crew on the Vestibule, to which two mail cars are attached, however, never leave Atlanta without laying in an elaborate meal, which is spread on one of the sorting tables after the mail for Georgia offices is made up. Newspapers serve as a tablecloth and plates are considered superfluous. The same cup serves all of the crew with coffee, which is boiled over an open gas jet. Chicken pie, sweet potatoes, corn bread and yam pie made up the truly Southern meal, far more tasty than that to be had in the dining car behind, even though served in less style.

PICKED UP ON THE FLY.

An interesting operation is picking up mail at small stations through which the Vestibule passes at full speed. The local clerk, on getting a signal from the engineer, steps to a door in the side of the car and with a lever throws out an iron "V" shaped arrangement into which the speed of the train flings the hanging bag. As much as fifty pounds of mail can be taken on board in this way, and the faster the speed of the train the more sure the catch. If a bag is dropped the train is not stopped, but a notification card is sent to the postmaster to look for the bag.

The feeling between the mail clerks and the trainmen is friendly as a rule, but sometimes there is a little friction. The engineer of one of the trains saw a woman tumbled over by a mail bag tossed from the car at a station on the Southern. He reported that the clerk had knocked a woman "head over heels." The clerk, on being called up, answered: "If I did knock the woman head over heels, it seems to have been a very proper thing, for that is her normal position and she must have been standing on her head when the bag struck her." Nothing more was ever heard of it.

The New-Yorker has little idea how far away from the metropolis the working of New-York City mail begins. On the return run five clerks begin to sort New-York mail at Greensboro at 11 o'clock at night, thirteen hours before it can possibly reach Jersey City. They have a scheme of the city showing every sub-station, and only a small portion of the mail—that which bears no street address, chiefly—goes to the General Postoffice. Several deliveries can be gained by putting on the exact street address, yet it is surprising the number of firms which print their return envelopes with no further address than "New-York City." Fifth-ave. mail is a continual puzzle to the clerks, as the even numbers go to one station and the odd numbers to another. Many persons address their mail to street corners, and there is no way of telling. Separate packages of letters are made up for banks, for hotels, for hospitals and for newspaper offices, and much valuable time is saved by this distribution en route.

As the night wore away on the return run the head clerk offered to make a postal car berth for the weary correspondent. New mail sacks, turned inside out, furnished clean sheets and covering for the improvised bed on top of a pile of filled sacks. A smaller sack, containing letter mail, largely the big square envelopes fancied by women, served as a pillow and soon brought dreams of love letters sent and received. The dreams went back to the beginning of things of that sort, when an empty tomato can in a fence corner served as a postoffice. Then they ran through the long and varied range of loves—of the youth, of the freshman, of the newly graduated man facing an indifferent world—even to the letter of the last love which rested then in the heart pocket of his coat. It was not altogether a troubled sleep, though some of the dream letters did clash, and the dreaming mind had barely run the gantlet of loves when a tug at the shoulder announced that Alexandria had been left behind and it was time to change mail cars at Washington.

JAPS FIGHTING BUBONIC PLAGUE.

Exceedingly Drastic Measures to Prevent Its Spread to Army in Manchuria—Will They Succeed?

Although Russia has ceased to be her foe, Japan is now confronted with an enemy in Manchuria which, if it should once get a grip upon her army, would inflict far greater losses than the Russian forces caused.

Bubonic plague made its appearance at New-Chwang, Manchuria, on October 12, and ever since the Japanese sanitary experts have been fighting against the disease with deadly earnestness, knowing that the spread of the pest to the army of one million men in the north would cause a terrific harvest of death. The military administrator of New-Chwang, a colonel of the Imperial Guards, carries the responsibility of the stamping out of the pest upon his shoulders, and if for any reason the army should suffer he would, to use the solemn words of the sub-administrator, "be in duty bound to commit hara-kiri," or suicide.

On the first appearance of the plague an infected district about five hundred yards square was walled in at the dead of night, so that when the Chinese inhabitants of the section awoke they found themselves entirely cut off from the outside world. The Japanese declare that they will burn the buildings within this quarter to the ground if the pest becomes an epidemic.

Chinese and Japanese sentries were placed at the entrances to the infected district, and no one was allowed to enter or to depart. Water and necessary foods were furnished free by the authorities to those quarantined, and liberal compensation allowed to those who suffered damages to property from necessary disinfective methods.

At the further spread of the pest another district of similar size to the first was surrounded. Surgeons examined every inhabitant of these districts, and all suspicious cases were sent to isolation hospitals. Floors and roofs of many houses were torn out, and the entire place was drenched with disinfectants. The surgeons who carried on this work were garbed in oilskins, rubber gloves, automobile goggles and respirators, in which dress they were objects of great amusement to the Chinese.

Later the plague spread to outlying towns and hamlets, and the officials found it necessary entirely to wall in these villages and inspect every inhabitant. Over three thousand and twenty persons were examined, one by one, under this order. Firewood for cremation and other necessary supplies were sent down from the army in plentiful quantities and the surgeons generally equipped for the fight before them.

The Chinese greatly object to having bodies cremated, for, according to their ideas, a person whose body is destroyed on this earth will have no body to use when he arrives at the future world. The Chinese, to save themselves from cremation, or from loss by their business buildings being closed, secrete the dead, and thus require careful surveillance. One family, when a member of it died, tried to get the body away by carrying it across the Liao River in a trunk, and one of the first cases was smuggled away to an outlying village, where death occurred.

The Japanese surgeons, after finding several infected rats, began a crusade upon the rodent family. Over 480 traps were placed, and of the seventy animals caught within the infected district about two-thirds were declared to be infected with the pest. In fact, the Japanese began a crusade on rats early last spring, offering a reward of ten sen, or five cents, gold, for every head, and as a result of this reward over five thousand were turned in on an average every month. As a further incentive to rat hunting, at the outbreak of the plague a lottery system was formed, and for every rat turned in a tag bearing a number was given in exchange. At certain periods lots were drawn from a duplicate set of numbers held by the authorities, and prizes awarded to lucky numbers. In some cases these prizes amounted to $59, gold. Naturally, when a Chinaman thinks of securing $50 for a rat he puts forth his best efforts to capture as many as possible.

Since the cases so far discovered are largely sporadic, and since the Japanese surgeons consider plague epidemic with New-Chwang, for the last year they have been giving the Chinese quarter of the city daily overhaulings and inspections. This former work has greatly aided in the prevention of an epidemic.

HOSPITAL REFORM.

Continued from first page.

would it secure if adopted by all institutions. If all our hospitals used the same system of accounting a contrast of their reports would show where economy was being practised in one and wastefulness in another. In this way each would strive to obtain the best results."

LIST OF CHANGES NEEDED.

The first suggestion made by the committee, of which Dr. Brannan is chairman, to prevent the waste of medical and surgical supplies is "the adoption of less expensive materials and methods than those commonly in use, which we are assured can be done without lessening efficiency."

The committee accordingly advised the following reforms:

Ether—Surgeons of large experience whose results are nowhere surpassed use ether costing considerably less than the article which now practically monopolizes the New-York institutions. The open method of inhalation, as compared to the closed method (the results being the same), consumes 100 per cent more of ether.

In addition, the use of ether as a washing fluid for preparing the skin in the field of operation is unnecessary. By these economies the cost of ether alone can be reduced fully one-half without any lessening of efficiency.

Dressings—Towels which can be easily washed and resterilized can be used time and time again in place of gauze, which is more expensive and only once employed.

The same material used on clean wounds for dressings should be rewashed and resterilized and repeatedly used.

Gauze swabs used in clean surgical wounds should also be saved, washed and resterilized for repeated use.

Plain cotton wadding, which costs one-fourth as much as absorbent cotton, can be employed in a large number of instances where the more costly material is now wasted. Cotton itself can even be employed where gauze is now used.

Bandages—What is true of gauze is true of bandages, since bandages are less apt to be soiled, can be rewashed, resterilized and used dozens of times instead of being thrown away, as is now the common practice after being once applied.

Alcohol—Probably the most flagrant and unnecessary waste of material in hospital management is that of alcohol. The demonstrations are clear that the quality of alcohol now used in the hospitals might be reduced by two-thirds and not lessen efficiency.

When alcohol is needed as a local application the 25 to 50 per cent alcohol should be substituted for the costly 90 per cent.

Coal—Co-operation on the part of the institutions in the purchase of coal "in cargo" would reduce the cost to a great extent, and the proper substitution of the cheap grades of coal for heating purposes would be an additional economy in this necessary article.

Reduction in cost of electricity and gas—Co-operation among the hospitals would, without doubt, secure legislation which would compel the gas company to furnish gas to public institutions at the same rate at which it is furnished to municipal buildings. As to electricity, the hospitals should apply to the municipal government for light from its plant at a cost no greater than that which it will cost other public buildings.

SHOULD UNITE IN BUYING.

After making these recommendations the committee came to the conclusion that a great amount of money could be saved if all the hospitals united in buying their supplies.

The importance of a uniform system of bookkeeping and inspection in all the hospitals was emphasized by the subcommittee on accounting and reporting appointed as a result of the A. I. C. P. conference. Hoffman Miller, its chairman, who is also a trustee of St. Luke's, said:

"It has been said that it is impossible to provide a uniform method of accounting which will furnish the means of an accurate comparison between a general hospital and a hospital devoted to special work. To a certain extent this is the fact. Where the work performed by one hospital is totally different in purpose and scope from the work performed by another, a comparison of many items of expenditure is of no advantage. There are many items, however, such as administration expenses, cost of maintenance, wages, food supplies and the like which must necessarily depend upon the number of patients cared for, and by a comparison of these items much, we think, can be learned, and, in many instances, economies effected."

The committee of which Mr. Miller is chairman drew up a comprehensive scheme of accounting, which would, as far as possible, specify in detail the use and cost of everything pertaining to a hospital.

NO ITEMIZED DETAILS.

The following was offered as a suggestion as to the way an account should be kept of the steward's department:

	Unit.	No. of units.	Amount.
1. Salaries and wages			
2. Provisions:			
(a) Meats			
(b) Poultry			
(c) Fish			
(d) Eggs			
(e) Milk			
(f) Cream			
(g) Ice cream			
(h) Cheese			
(i) Butter			
(j) Lard			
(k) Flour			
(l) Bread			
(m) Sugar			
(n) Syrup			
(o) Potatoes			
(p) Other vegetables			
(q) Fruit			
(r) Coffee, tea, cocoa, etc.			
(s) Miscellaneous			
Total provisions			
Total expenses steward's department			

In most hospitals at the present time such expenses would not be recorded item for item, but in lump sums, which would conceal the exact amount used. Mr. Miller also said:

"The contention of our committee is that if the suggested method of hospital accounting is adopted by hospitals throughout the State a start will be made in the right direction, and that the experience derived from the actual use of such method will discover defects, if any, and cure them."

That the hospital is in danger of waste on all sides unless accurate and uniform records are kept in every department was strongly emphasized by Frederick A. Cleveland, professor of finance of the School of Commerce, Accounts and Finance of New-York University. Professor Cleveland was a fellow committeeman with Mr. Miller. He said:

"Although the superintendent and the several heads of staffs are in personal contact with some phase or phases of the work, every department and officer of the institution, and it may be said every employe may be made more efficient and the hospital work may be conducted with greater intelligence by having before them accurate and well digested statistics showing not only the services rendered by each department in detail, but also net results obtained; intelligent superintendence requires such a correlation of these results as will enable those responsible for management to exercise the highest discretion which experience and training may qualify them to use in promoting the purposes for which the institution is organized."

A CHAOS OF BOOKKEEPING.

The diversity in the methods of accounting in various hospitals is shown by a compilation made recently by the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor of the reports of fifty-one hospitals. In only eleven of these was an estimate given of the cost of a patient each day. These eleven reported a daily expense for each one of its sick as follows: Bellevue, $1 39; Mount Sinai, $1 65; Roosevelt, $2 60; Lebanon, $1 16; Beth Israel, $1 48; Gouverneur, $1 65; Flower, $1 65; J. Hood Wright, $2 23; Harlem, $2 04; Fordham, $1 97; New-York Infirmary, $2 56. In only nine was the daily cost of food obtainable. Mount Sinai spent 24 cents a day; Roosevelt, 36 cents; St. Luke's, 30 cents; Presbyterian, 36 cents; Lebanon, 40 cents; Beth Israel, 22 cents; Flower, 28 cents; St. Mark's, 33 cents; New-York Infirmary, 30 cents. Only two made any comparison in the cost of care for a private and a ward patient. St. Luke's expends $3 a day for the former and $1 98 for the latter; the Presbyterian, $5 49 and $2 48.

Yet a study of all these figures gives no clue as to whether one institution is run more economically than another, as the quantity and quality of supplies bought are not shown.

TIPS ENCOURAGE WASTE.

The present agitation for hospital reform has caused the heads of several hospitals to order inspections to be made secretly, with results that in some cases were astounding. It was found in one institution that not only was there twice as much money spent in surgical supplies as was necessary, but that such extravagance was encouraged by tips and presents to attendants from firms from which the supplies were bought. The same species of "graft" was discovered also in the purchase of food. Meat was bought not from the butcher who had bid the lowest price for the best quality of beef or lamb, but from him who had "given up" the biggest "rake-off" to the steward. The meat bill for the year amounted to $20,000, and it was estimated that the butcher had to pay between $2,000 and $3,000 to "cinch" the contract.

The fruits and vegetables amounted to $8,000; but in this case the fruiterer, instead of paying cash for the contract, took a "friend" of one of the hospital employes into partnership. The total expenditures of the institution were $160,000 for the year, of which it was estimated $25,000 might have been saved by strict inspection and a detailed system of bookkeeping.

A proper curtailment of unnecessary expenses in all the hospitals in New-York, according to one physician well fitted to speak by his long experience and high standing, would save $1,000,000 a year, which is equal to one-third the sum spent by the city annually for its sick. This amount of money would build a splendid hospital of the type of the new St. Francis, which would have 1,200 beds, or nearly three times the capacity of the great Mount Sinai Hospital.

RAILWAY CLERKS' SLEEP.

They Have a Club Dormitory in Vesey-st.

There is no more economical dormitory in the world when one takes into consideration the comforts afforded than that which is conducted by the United States Railway Mail Clerks at No. 28 Vesey-st. From the very nature of their work the railway mail clerks are forced to be away from home nearly half the time. According to the regulations of the service they are permitted to live anywhere along the line of their route. Not many of them elect to establish homes in New-York City, where rent and living expenses are high. They have their homes at the other end of the run—little towns about Boston, Harrisburg, Pittsburg. The nights they spend in New-York they are the guests of their own dormitory association at a cost of dues less than 75 cents a month.

For a number of years the railway mail clerks had rooms fitted up in the loft of the General Postoffice Building, but the growth of the New-York mails crowded them out as it did Superintendent Victor J. Bradley and other railway mail officers. A year or more ago they rented a couple of lofts in a building in Vesey-st. There were two huge bedrooms filled with iron cots, which are neatly kept by a couple of caretakers.

In a large combination reading, writing and smoking room the clerks can spend their leisure hours as pleases their fancy. There is no end of reading matter, both ordinary periodicals and the publications which have connection with the service. On the walls hang maps showing the various mail routes throughout the United States, and the latest orders pertaining to the service are posted on the walls. There are easy chairs and lounges and small tables for games.

The right to use this dormitory costs a fee of $12 a year. Shortly after the new dormitory was established, Mr. Bradley, who has its general supervision, found that the cost of maintenance would be less than 75 cents a month for each member. He proposed cutting down the dues. Instead, the men preferred to have as many months of suspended payment as the surplus each year would allow. This is explained by the fact that the average postal clerk pays over the bulk of his salary to his wife, and that she hands him back from time to time what he needs for expenses. The $1 a month for the New-York dormitory is a recognized expense, and on months when no fee has to be paid the postal clerk has just that much extra spending money.

"We find that the dormitory is a mighty good thing for the service," said Superintendent Bradley to a Tribune reporter yesterday. "Every effort is made to promote sobriety, and the dormitory has proved a factor to that end. If the men go to cheap hotels the first place they are likely to make for is the bar, and as a result they might lose their run. No liquor is allowed at the Vesey-st. place, and it is indeed seldom that a clerk does not show up at train time.