



Four Years
IN A
Country
Post Office

By **RICHARD F. LAWSON**

ONE DOLLAR

FOUR YEARS

IN A

COUNTRY POST OFFICE

BY

RICHARD FRANKLIN LAWSON

FORMER POSTMASTER AT

KINMUNDY AND EFFINGHAM, ILLINOIS

Copyrighted, 1899, by Richard F. Lawson

SUPPLEMENTED BY

FOUR FOUR MINUTE SPEECHES

AND OTHER MATTERS

PRICE ONE DOLLAR

LAWSON PUBLISHING COMPANY
(Not Incorporated)
4455 North Robey Street
CHICAGO

A MONUMENT OF WORDS.

Richard F. Lawson.

A
man
of worth
tho' humble
birth this day
our Nation mourns;
a man whom every-
body loves, with a
love that's true and
warm; a man that
was true to every
trust, and to his
country too; a name
most dear to every
man, who wore the
soldier blue. He was
indeed the soldiers'
friend, in battle or
debate, but 'twasn't
that alone, which
made him so truly
great; but it was his
moral courage, his
integrity and truth,
that made him our
Nation's hero, and
an example for its
youth. But death,
the great destroyer,
whose shadow hangs
o'er all, laid its hand
upon him, and he an-
swered to the call.
His work on earth is end-
ed, he is free from every
care, he has entered into
glory, a jeweled crown to
wear. No doubt you all
well know him, the man of whom
we write, for many of you follow-
ed him, to victory through the fight.
We know you must remember him,
for you oft have heard his slogan, but
we will tell you who he is, his name is
|||||## GEN. JOHN A. LOGAN ##|||||
the husband, father, friend, so kind
so true and loving, to life's fitful end.
Be kind to the bereaved ones, bid
them not to weep, the one they loved
so dearly, is now in a blissful sleep.

The above "Monument of Words" was composed and constructed from hand set type, by the light of a coal oil lamp, and published in the Kimmundy Express, Dec. 31, 1886, of which the author was editor. Thirty-five years later it is re-set, on an Intertype line casting machine, by a seventeen year old student in the Printing department of a Manual Training School for Boys, Chicago, of which the author is superintendent.

PREFACE.

The story of "Four Years in a Country Post Office" was written at Effingham, Illinois, in the summer of 1893, soon after retiring from the position of Postmaster at Kimmundy, and is founded upon experiences and observations at that place.

The first public recital was given at "the old home town," the scene of its origin, and struck such a popular chord that it was soon in demand by lecture bureaus throughout the country, and during the following four years was delivered under various auspices in almost every State in the Union, seemingly being as much appreciated in such cities as Chicago and Washington, D. C., as it was in Salem and Farina, two neighboring towns.

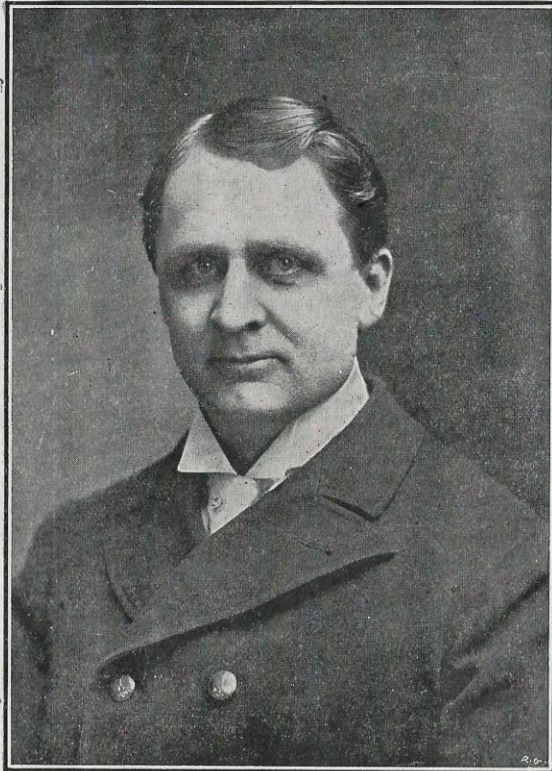
Soon after the election of President McKinley the author was reappointed as postmaster at Effingham, serving one term under McKinley and two terms under President Roosevelt, being the first person to succeed himself at that place, in the previous 55 years of existence as a post office, resigning in the middle of his third term in the second city in which he held the office under succeeding Republican Administrations.

During these years he served as the first president of his County, the State and the National Association of Postmasters of the Second and Third Class, until his second retirement from the postal service, in which capacity he had many interesting and highly enjoyable experiences. In 1899 the lecture was printed in booklet form, and met with an immense sale, a large edition being completely exhausted.

It has been suggested that the revised edition should carry the title of "Four Terms as Postmaster in Two Cities," but that would make a volume of 400 or more pages, and we prefer to stick to the original story and title, to which we have simply added Four Four Minute Speeches and a few other matters of general interest and similar import. At some future time, when the cost of paper and printing gets back to normal, the larger volume, for which the manuscript is ready, may be brought forth, should the public survive this edition, or vice versa.

R. F. Lawson

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, FEBRUARY 22, 1921.

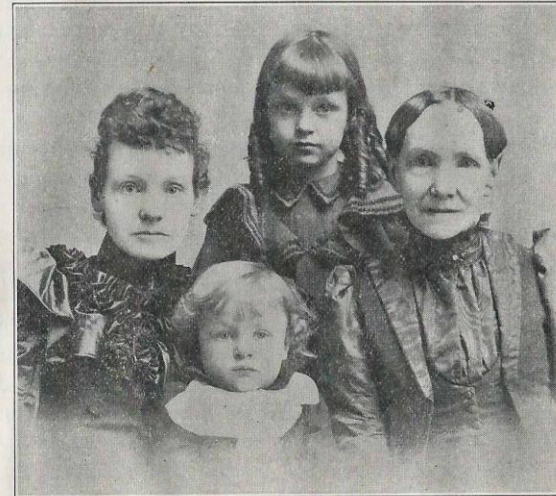


RICHARD FRANKLIN LAWSON

Author of *Four Years in a Country Post Office*, and Other Lectures.

FOUR YEARS IN A COUNTRY POST OFFICE

THE FIRST TIME I ever attempted to deliver this lecture was to a very select audience, composed of my little boy, then aged three, my little daughter, aged eight, and my little wife (whose age I never mention in public). The result of that home rehearsal was that the good wife was inclined to laugh,



MY FIRST AUDIENCE, AND GRANDMA.

the little girl felt called upon to cry, whilst the boy, beneath its soothing influences, fell fast asleep. That I considered a model audience, such as I am pleased to see before me here tonight, to whom I concede the same right, to laugh, to cry, or go to sleep as suits your inclination.

AFTER being engaged in the publication of a local newspaper for a term of six years, during the greater part of which time I was compelled by force of circumstances to subsist on half rations and the broken promises of delinquent subscribers, with the monotony occasionally relieved by the receipt of a prize pumpkin, a basket of mammoth turnips, a peck of premium potatoes, a mess of early roasting ears, or some other choice product from the fertile fields surrounding the picturesque and pleasant little city of Kimmundy, Illinois, brought in by some admiring constituent desirous of seeing their name in print in connection with his or her achievements in agriculture or horticulture, which I never failed to mention, nor to put where they would do the most good, and the political party to which I had ever pinned my faith having won the election in November 1888, I conceived the idea of becoming a candidate for the position of chief stamp-licker for the community, in the hope of bettering my financial condition.

Confiding this desire to a few of my most intimate friends, and being assured of their good will in my aspirations, I at once set out to capture the much coveted prize. Being at that time in a Congressional district represented by a gentleman holding views opposite to my own upon the tariff and kindred questions then before the public, I found it necessary to take my case to a higher court, and accordingly made application through our representatives in the Senate, one of whom assured me that when the applications were all in they would endeavor to "Cullum" as seemed best, while the other thought I would "Far(e)well" when the time came to act upon such matters.

Without taking the community into my confidence, I then began securing letters of endorsement from the prominent men of my party at home, throughout the county, district and State, obtaining in all about twenty, copies of which I still have and value quite highly as evidences of friendship in time of need. Next I circulated a petition, securing the signatures of just twenty-five good and true partisans and patrons of the office

for which my hungry soul was yearning like a maid of sweet sixteen years for the coming of her best beau on Sunday night, with his pocket full of caramels.

March 2d, 1889, two days prior to the inauguration of the new administration, I mailed my application to the incoming Postmaster General, sending at the same time my petition and letters of recommendation to our representatives in the Senate. In a few days I received their acknowledgment of the same, and the encouraging assurance that my papers were in about the best shape of the many thousands received by them from all parts of the country, for I afterwards learned in conversation with one of them that from several states having neither Congressman nor Senator of that faith, men who had formerly lived in or passed through Illinois, or whose wife's relations resided in this state, appealed to our Senators for assistance in their ambitions to become public servants.

When the evidence was all in, I then tried to turn attention to business, which had long been seriously neglected in the very vexatious scramble for office, and to await developments, and when on April 2d, 1889, or just one month from the date of my application, I saw the announcement in the daily papers that Richard F. Lawson had been appointed postmaster at Kinmundy, Illinois, I at once concluded that the wisdom of the Harrison administration was established beyond a doubt, that the country was saved for all time to come, and that at least one country editor was placed beyond the possible reach of penury for the remainder of his earthly existence. But alas, how vain is all human hope!

THE TROUBLE BEGINS

That nothing succeeds like success was shown by the way many who had endorsed other applicants for the position were among the first to extend congratulations, and offer suggestions as to where the office should be located, how it should be conducted, and various other bits of advice, for which they charged nothing, and the natural or unnatural longing of the American people for place in the public service was demonstrated by the number of applications for the deputyship, there being no less

than twenty-two, out of a population of less than twelve hundred, including both sexes, ranging in ages from less than sixteen to more than sixty years, embracing representatives of all parties, who were willing to sacrifice their former political affiliations for the sake of a job, which they, like myself, had erroneously looked upon as a sinecure or a soft snap, and which each thought themselves peculiarly adapted, while in reality many of them were just about as competent for the position of deputy postmaster as the average politician would be qualified to preach the gospel.

In a few days I received official notice of appointment accompanied by a blank bond, in the penal sum of \$6,000.00, for the faithful performance of duty, which was promptly executed and returned to the department, together with the official oath, setting forth that I would at all times uphold the constitution of the United States, that I would answer all questions in a civil and scientific manner; lick stamps without kicking; keep inviolate the secrets of the office, ever refraining from opening the postal cards and reading letters of other people, besides various other vows and obligations of a like character.

After the unwinding of the customary red tape, and consideration of the usual protest from an outraged community, I finally received a commission, conveying to me the right to have and hold the office, together with all its vexations, honors and emoluments, during good behavior and the pleasure of the Postmaster General, signed by John Wanamaker, in about the worst specimen of reckless penmanship that came under my observation during my four years in a country post office, but which to my mind at that time was a master stroke of artistic beauty.

Armed with this precious document I called upon the gentleman in charge, who gracefully turned over to me everything about the establishment, including the antiquated equipments, books and records, some of which extended back beyond the date of my birth, and were just about as valuable as would be the opinion of a Hottentot upon the currency question, and as worthy of preservation as an equal number of defective teeth that accumulate around a dental office.

The morning I entered upon the discharge of my duties as postmaster I must have imagined that the world was mine with the fullness thereof. I guess I felt a good deal like the old maid, or as the are now pleased to call themselves, "the bachelor girl," whom tradition relates had spent full forty fragrant summers, and by a strange coincidence, an equal number of frosty winters, in single blessedness, and finally got married, as such giddy creatures sometimes do. After the ceremony and congratulations the minister asked the blushing bride what music she preferred for the occasion, and she replied that she would like for the friends to all join in singing that good old hymn entitled, "This is the Way I Long have Sought, and Mourned Because I Found it Not," but I like the aforesaid ancient maiden may have also, soon learned that "all that glitters is not gold," if indeed there is not really more pleasure in the pursuit than there is in the possession of either a husband or a country post office, for I verily believe that if there is an individual upon the face of God's earth whose trials and tribulations equal or exceed those of the overworked and underfed country editor, it is the country postmaster who tries to do his duty, and when you combine the two in one it's enough to make a saint or sinner of any man in five years; but thanks to the changing opinions of the American people, I got out in time to escape the inevitable.

EARLY OBSERVATIONS.

In the beginning of my administration I read from cover to cover a copy of the Postal Laws and Regulations, and the first problem that confronted me was how could I run the office according to law and at the same time please the people, or, how would I be able to please the people and keep out of the penitentiary, for there was scarcely a day passed without a request from some one, to comply with which would be at least a technical violation of some section of the very ambiguous Postal Laws and Regulations, the penalty for which is a fine of not less than fifty nor more than five thousand dollars, and not less than one or more than ten years in jail, or both.

The laws seem to be constructed upon the theory that all men are thieves, liars and total stranger to the individual postmasters, and when I become Postmaster General, I intend to see that they are reconstructed along the lines of common sense without unnecessary delay. The strictly cash system, however, is the one redeeming feature of the regulations, and I believe that it would be far better for the country at large if more generally applied in private affairs.

One of the earliest callers the first day I was in office was a fellow who wanted a small supply of stamps, but had forgotten his purse, though he assured me he would hand me the change the first time he came in, but he proved to be the most forgetful fellow I ever met. At the first quarterly statement I rendered those stamps had to be accounted for, and "Jones paid the freight."

About noon of the second day a long, cadaverous looking individual came in and said: "Be you the Postmaster?"

At that time I was proud to answer in the affirmative, so his next question was, "You print a paper here too, do you?"

Candor compelled me plead guilty to an attempt of that kind, and he continued: "Wall, I read in a copy of your paper not long ago that when the editor got to be postmaster he was a gwien to sell stamps three fur a nickel. Is that so?" I admitted that such a statement had been made, whereupon he said: "Wall, I jist driv up from Salem, (a distance of twelve miles, the city that gave Bryan to the world), to lay in a supply fur me and my nabers; how meny can I git?"

I told him that he could get just as many as he had money to pay for and would be willing to accept two twos and a one for a nickel.

Becoming at once a living picture of disgust, he exclaimed: "Thar, dang it, I might a knowed it was a dirty perlitical trick, jist to git into office!"

I at once became more firmly than ever convinced of the great value of newspaper advertising, and he no doubt now patronizes home industry, especially in the purchase of his postage stamps.

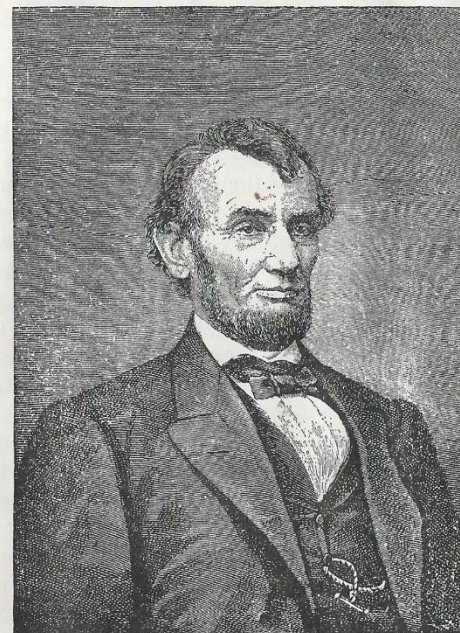
I was almost daily reminded of the language of Shake-

speare, wherein he says: "What fools these mortals be." Still I am confident that the community in which the fates had cast my lot as a country postmaster was and is made up of men and women fully up to the general average in point of intelligence, industry and good behavior, and that my experiences were similar to those of all other postmasters throughout the length and breadth of the United States or the world at large, and while many things occurred that would probably pass unnoticed by others, they were always fraught with much interest to the ever open mind's-eye of the newspaper man, who looked upon the incidents of which I shall attempt to relate a few, not so much as evidences of ignorance as of the simple innocence of God's noblest creatures — the so-called common people.

It is claimed with more or less accuracy that one half of the world does not know how the other half lives, but I believe that the country postmaster whose heart is in touch and tune with his people comes as near learning the dispositions, the likes and dislikes, the joys and the sorrows and the needs of the community as it is possible for any one to do. While other business men and women may have their personal friends and followers, the majority of them do not in the course of a year have dealings with twenty-five per cent of the people who live in or frequent their cities or villages, but the country postmaster, through the nature of his duties, comes in daily contact with representatives of all classes, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay.

LINCOLN AS A COUNTRY POSTMASTER

It is a fact familiar to all students of history that the first public position ever held by the Immortal Lincoln was that of a country postmaster at New Salem, Menard county, Illinois, and we find it recorded in a well-known history of the Lives and Graves of our Presidents, that he said while President of the United States that he enjoyed being a country postmaster because of the opportunity it afforded to read the papers that came to his office in that early day. That which I most enjoyed was the opportunity afforded to read **the people**, and it is not unlikely it was the superior knowledge of humanity gained by



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Who entered public life as a Country Postmaster, and became the greatest, best loved human being the world has ever known. The first Martyr President of the United States. — See pages 41, 42.

Lincoln in that lowly capacity that accounted for much of his success in after years, and prompted him to say to his aspiring young friend Richard J. Oglesby, "If you keep close to the people, Dick, you will always be right."

The country post office is, as it were, one of the principal shoals along the broad river of life, through which the great stream of humanity is constantly flowing in its ever onward course to that mystic though mighty ocean of eternity, revealing as it does in passing over the shoal, either its crystal clearness and purity, or by its murky condition concealing from view the many beautiful pebbles that are strewn along the channel; or it may well be compared with the water in the mill-race, where one wave comes tumbling along, murmuring and complaining at the hardships of being dashed from reel to reel in grinding the golden grain for the bread of life, while the next one comes rolling along, happy, laughing and glad at being able to sing and soothe the industrious miller to sleep ere his days work is done, and a close observer, standing upon the shady shore of one of these shoals of time has an excellent opportunity to view humanity in all its phases and to learn as but few others can that this life is largely what we make it, through the dispositions born or cultivated within us.

Why, I have had people come into the office on the fairest day of the year, when the atmosphere would at once seem to become heavier, all would grow dark, and the shadow of their sorry souls hover like a funeral pall about the place as long as they remained, while the very next caller might be one of those sunny dispositioned men or women whose coming was always like a burst of sunshine through the clouds of gloom, shedding light and lustre wherever they go, all because of that buoyant spirit of cheerfulness, that flourisheth like a fragrant flower within the fruitful soil of the human heart; just as the spider finds naught but poison amid the fairest flowers that bloom, while the industrious, right-minded little bee extracts the sweetest of honey from among the wayside weeds.

Some people were like ice-bergs from the Arctic region, almost causing the ink in the bottles on the desk to congeal every time they came about the place, and one cold-blooded

fellow did actually freeze fast to a fine five dollar fountain pen, and never thawed out!

Some men were so dry that actually they couldn't moisten a stamp enough to make it adhere to an envelope, while others were so full of blarney that they would remove all the adhesiveness at one swipe of the tongue, and then find fault with the government for not putting more "stickin' stuff" on their stamps.

Why, I got so I could tell whether a man was good to his wife and children or not, simply by the way he **licked** his postage stamps.

It is as much trouble for some women to lick a stamp as it is for others to lick a fourteen-year old boy. It was always amusing to me, to watch a dainty specimen of the fair sex catch a chromo of the father of her country gently by one corner and alternate it from hand to hand making four strokes of the tongue to complete the apparently arduous task of licking a stamp. I could never fully understand just why the dear creatures do this, unless, perhaps it is to save wear and tear upon the talking apparatus for future domestic use. I have known many of them, however, to be "stuck" on the males without any effort whatever.

I also learned that a postmaster is a great deal like a physician—the more **patients** he has the better he succeeds.

A QUEER CUSTOMER

One day while sitting quietly at my desk, trying to write an editorial upon some momentous question, an unfamiliar footstep struck the threshold, and in just three long strides the stranger reached the delivery window, a distance of about fifteen feet from the door, and thrusting his body through the window, up to where his home-spun suspenders forked at the back, in a voice calculated to awaken all the dead letters in the house, called out, "**Is this the post office?**"

As he wiggled back out of the window I walked over and sized the gentleman up, and I could not help but think, as the stamp said to the envelope, "I'm stuck on you." I in-

formed him that he was then at government headquarters for that locality. His next question was:

"Are thar eny mail fur eny of the Philips boys?"

I looked carefully through and informed him that there was not.

Then he became very communicative—told his troubles to the postmaster—as people frequently do, saying: "I 'lowed there 'ud be by this time,' cause a feller over at Zenia promist me a hound pup, and sed he'd drap me a keerd when it was ready to wean."

Before leaving he requested that if anything came for him that I should keep it until he called again, and I faithfully promised to do so. Though that fellow was a voter, that was in all probability his first visit to a post office, and quite likely he had never received a letter in his life, but he finally got the "keerd," and I presume he got the pup.

The second time he came into the office he walked up to the money order window as familiarly as if he had known me always, and said: "Dick, kin you tell me how much nine ties will come to at thirty cents a tie?" I said, "Yes, sir; two dollars and seventy cents."

With a look of blank astonishment upon his unsophisticated countenance, he exclaimed: "How in thunder do you know; you never figgered it!"

I tried to explain the simplicity of the problem, that three times nine were twenty-seven, and that thirty times nine would be two hundred and seventy, over which it was useless to waste the wear upon a pencil in figuring, and after some hesitation he said: "Wall, I reckon that's right; that's what John Rotan paid me for them."

He became a frequent caller, but I never saw him afterwards without being reminded of the story that comes from Posey county, Indiana. A young man is said to have grown to manhood out in "Hooppole Township," famous for its fruit and lumber (Hooppoles and Pumpkins), and celebrated his twenty-first birthday by going to town with his father, a distance of eight miles, for the first time in his life. Upon his return that night he was telling his mother of the many

wonderful things he had seen on the great journey over to Posey, and wound up the narrative with the declaration, "I'll tell you what's the matter, Ma, if this earth is as big in every direction as it is over towards Posey, by George she's a whopper."

TELL THEIR TROUBLES TO THE POSTMASTER

All classes of people seemed to take a strange delight in confiding their joys and sorrows to the sympathetic postmaster, and while very many unimportant tales of pleasure or woe were almost daily poured into his attentive ear, there were others extremely pathetic and interesting, awakening the tenderest sympathies of my innermost soul, creating impressions that will abide with me as long as life lasts.

There was one poor woman in particular, the image of whose careworn countenance is indelibly stamped upon my memory, whom I am confident that during the four years I was in office called at the delivery window full four hundred times. I soon learned her secret, and made it a rule to always look through the mail when she called, though I knew there was nothing there for her; and she would go away better satisfied. The name for which she asked most anxiously was not the name by which she was known in the community and received some mail, and one day when I handed her a letter addressed to her real name, her heart seemed to be in her throat and her soul within her bedimmed eyes, as she nervously clutched it; but I turned from the scene, which was more than I could bear, for it was one of her own messages of love and hope that had failed of delivery and was returned to her in an official envelope, from the dead letter office, and the look of horrible disappointment upon her wrinkled face as she discovered what it was, was one that cannot be forgotten in the brevity of a lifetime. But the letter she longed for never came.

Though day after day and week after week
She came, hoping and trusting that the absent would speak,
Her faith ever clinging as faith only can,
In the heart of true woman for perfidious man,
And I fancied then as I fancy now,
When the kind hand of Death calmed her poor brow,
And her weary soul took its last flight,
From the sorrows of earth to heaven so bright,

Her first thought was, as she entered the gate,
 To look, like the dove, for the face of its mate,
 Still hoping, still trusting, still doubting the truth,
 That she was deserted by the love of her youth;
 But she'll ne'er see it, for justice doth declare
 That no truant husband shall e'er enter there!

COMEDIES AND TRAGEDIES OF THE DEAD LETTER OFFICE

The Dead Letter Office is quite a mystery to a great many people, and I will endeavor to briefly explain some of the workings thereof. A printed or written address upon your envelopes or valuable packages will insure the return of all mail not delivered within the specified time, and if only the name and address be given, they are, under the law, returnable at the expiration of thirty days. All letters and valuable packages, without the return address, unclaimed for that length of time are advertised, and if not then called for, they are sent to the dead letter office at Washington, D. C., where they are opened. Ordinary letters that are intelligently signed by the writer are returned to them in official envelopes. Those unintelligently signed are destroyed. Letters with money or other valuable enclosures are returned by registered mail, in care of the postmaster. Letters with articles of value, signed only by the given or some pet name of the sender, as is frequently the case, are sent to the postmaster for identification and delivery, or returned to the department, when in time they become the property of the government.

Complaint was once made to me about a letter being lost between Kimmundy and Effingham. I reported the loss according to requirements of the Postal Laws and Regulations, and an investigation followed, but nothing was heard of it for two or three months, when one day upon opening an official package from Washington, I was pleased to discover the long lost letter. In making the complaint the sender gave me the wrong name, or the letter might have been overtaken at Effingham, to which office my first letter of inquiry was sent. The letter was addressed, Mr. Sni Billows, Effingham, Illinois, and though thirty miles away I could not understand why the postmaster did not recognize it as being for Mr. Schnabelius, a prominent gentleman of that city. For the information of my hearers I

will say that Kimmundy was then a "dry" town, though Mr. Schnabelius was not engaged in the dry goods business. The letter was an order for something with which to celebrate a birthday, but he did not get it—not by a jug full, though I am confident that the return of the small bills it contained put the sender in better spirits than would the receipt of the spirits anticipated when he started that letter out on its two thousand mile journey to Washington and return.

Quite a number of letters with little or no name signed to them were returned for identification, and I never failed by some means or other to find an owner for them. One "sample case" which I will venture to relate was a letter addressed to a young man well known in Kimmundy, at a small city in one of the western states, which failed to catch him; so it was advertised, sent to the dead letter office, and upon investigation was found to contain a small sum of money. It was then forwarded to the postmaster, with instructions to read the letter, and if from its contents the writer could be identified to deliver the same, taking their receipt therefor. After being properly dated the letter commenced:

"MY DARLING BABY BOY," and at the bottom of the fourth page of the gushiest kind of gush it was signed

"YOUR OWN DEAR PET."

Now the name on the envelope was as plain to me as A, B, C. for I knew the young man well, but the problem for the intelligent postmaster to solve was whose "Darling Baby Boy" was he, or, who was his "Own Dear Pet." So putting this and that together, I cast my suspicious eye upon a woman old enough to know better than to write such a letter, and the first time she came into the office I ventured to say:

"Pardon me, Miss, or Mrs.——, (as the case may have been), did you upon such and such a day, address a letter to Mr. So and So at such and such a place?"

With a look of injured innocence upon her bewitching countenance she said, "Why, n-o-o! How dare you ask such a question?"

O, I was just asking for information; no harm done, I

hope." But woman like, she became very indignant, saying, "But I demand to know, sir, why you have the audacity to insult me in this manner?"

"Well, now, hold on my good woman; don't get excited; nothing interferes with the good looks of a lady more than to lose her temper. I ask the question for the simple reason that I have such a letter for identification, and ——" and with a look that would have frightened a bachelor into spasms she sprang at me, saying, "Give me my letter!"

"Ah! but you just declared with uplifted hand that you did not write such a letter."

Becoming as meek as Mary's little lamb, and with a smile any professional beauty would envy, she said: "Well, now, Mr. Lawson, I'll tell you I did write that letter,—just—for—fun; you know I did not mean any harm by it; please give it to me."

I handed her the receipt to sign, but she flew the track again saying, "No, sir; I'll sign nothing."

"Very well, until you sign this receipt the letter will remain with me, and I'll read it three times a day—just for fun."

She said, "O, if I must, I will; give it to me!"

She nervously signed the receipt, and grabbing her letter as though it contained her death warrant, made a dash for the door, but returned to the desk, and shaking her trembling fist in my smiling face, said: "**Dick Lawson, if you ever tell this I'll kill you!**"

I attempted to tell this when I delivered the lecture, for the first time in public, in Kimmundy, but as I mentioned no names I still live, notwithstanding both parties to the transaction were in the audience. They afterwards married, and both have since passed on).

Every Christmas season there are hundreds upon hundreds of letters sent to the dead letter office as unmailable, because addressed to that famous old individual called Santa Claus. One of them came under my observation, the first Christmas season I was in office, and though a slight infraction upon the postal laws, I became a Santa Claus, opened that letter and found it to contain a modest request from an innocent, confiding child, whose every wish was gratified at an expense of

less than one dollar, and the Santa Claus protém learned then as never before that it is truly "more blessed to give than it is to receive."

The incident reminded me of the story of the sweet little girl who was deprived of the tender care of a mother's love in early infancy, but fortunately had fallen into the kind hands of a devoted Christian Grandmother, who had taught her precious charge the story of the cross, and to know and to feel that her mamma was with the angels of God in Heaven. The seed of a noble Christian life had but scarce been sown in the tender young heart when the dear old grandma too was called to her home on high, and as the remains lay in the darkened room this little orphan indeed was seen to enter the chamber of the death and kneel beside the body as if engaged in prayer, but when the covering was removed to place the corpse in the casket there was discovered gently pressed within one of the withered hands a sheet of paper neatly folded and childishly addressed "To my Mamma in Heaven, in care of Grandma," and upon which was written a childish note so full of faith it was calculated to make even the angels weep. It told how grandma had taught her to love and pray to her Angel mother, and though she was sorry to lose and would miss grandma very much, she she was glad of the chance to send some word to her Mamma in Heaven, for she knew that grandma was going there too, and that she was coming when she got through taking care of grandpa.

Though that pathetic letter could not be delivered in its material substance, I am confident that its touching contents were read with celestial joy by both Grandma and Mamma in Heaven.

O, my friends, when we see such abiding faith manifest in an innocent child, how much stronger it should be in the hearts and minds of mature men and women. It is such faith as this that enables one to take hold of Heaven ere they let go of earth, by raising the eyes and voice towards God in such praises as:

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee."

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

I presume that every one has their disappointments and discouragements, their trials and tribulations, their blue spells, as it were, when it seems as if the whole world was against them, everything conspiring together for evil, but when a fellow tries to be twins and there is only one of them, he is sure to be afflicted with that indigo feeling. I shall ever remember one occasion, when I was rushed far beyond my mental capacity. Had had a heated interview with an irate individual who had taken exception to something which had appeared in my paper about him, when he should have been returning thanks to God and the editor for the many truths left unsaid about him; and submitted to the daily lecture from some one who imagined that that particular post office was no being run for their special benefit, to say nothing of the other ills that beset the average editor-postmaster. Retired late at night with a severe headache, which produced a sort of restless nightmare and troubled dreams of printers' "pi" and post office rows. Bouncing out of bed the next morning I landed squarely upon a tack to begin with, which reminded me very forcibly of the income tax. When I attempted to start a fire in the gasoline stove the heads popped off of three or four matches and the blaze puffed out a time or two before I finally got it to burn. When I undertook to wash even the toilet soap seemed inclined to give me the slip, for every time I took hold of it it would slide out of my hand and onto the floor, until it finally landed in the slop jar and I finished washing without soap. Got to breakfast late, and in my haste took a swallow of tea so hot that it gave me a taste of the hereafter for those who die in their sins. That put a stop to further attempts at eating, so I started for the office, with a heart as heavy as an old corn pone, and a brain as bewildered as the proverbial wild goose in a snow storm. As I trudged along to the office I was mentally debating whether I should struggle on bearing the double cross or return to John Wanamaker that beautiful commission and take to the woods. Emptying the morning mail out upon the sorting table the first thing that attracted my attention was a paper without any wrapper. I laid it to one side and

went on distributing the letters, papers and packages, expecting to find the wrapper for it, as was frequently the case, but that morning none appeared. Blue as I was, like unto the lost piece of silver of old, I was particularly intersted in getting that wrapperless paper to the rightful owner, and was examining it closely for a possible name, when my eye fell upon an alleged poem, which I read, and with the kind indulgence of my audience, will undertake to recite. It was entitled:

THE PREACHER AND THE CALF

There was a preacher who had a calf,
That is, he owned a calf, I mean,
And you should have seen him feed it,
When it was ready to wean.

His heart was full of kindness,
And he thought it quite a shame,
That man should e'er be cruel
To a beast so innocent and tame.

Now the milk of human kindness
Is all right in its place,
But if you try to wean a calf upon it,
You are sure to fall from grace.

This man of God full twice a day
To the calf's domain would go,
And mixing up the milk and bran
Say "Come, Calfie, so, Calfie, so."

All went well as a marriage bell,
And the calf was getting fat,
Until it became too frisky,
And with the preacher had a spat.

'Twas on a beautiful Sabbath morning,
As off to church he sped,
When the thought occurred to him,
"The calf has not been fed!"

Laying his Bible upon the fence,
He hastened to the barn,
And taking a bucket half full of milk,
Stirred in a quart of bran.

The hour was late, the calf was dry,
As into the food it stuck its nose;
When it suddenly choked and let her fly
All over his Sunday clothes.

Catching the calf by the ear he exclaimed "Dad-tucket!
If it wasn't for the religion of the
Lord, Jesus Christ in my soul,
I'd ram your damned head through this bucket!"

That piece of poetry, bordering as it does almost upon blasphemy, came at that time as a balm to my weary soul, and my friends, I believe as firmly as I believe that I am addressing an intelligent audience at this time that that wrapperless paper was addressed to me, by the Divine hand of Providence, to awaken me from my lethargy, to take courage anew, and make of each burden a stepping stone to something higher and better, instead of allowing it to bear me down into deeper despair, demonstrating beyond a doubt the truth of that Divine declaration which you have all heard so often, that

"God moves in a mysterious way,
His wonders to perform."

A more elegant poem than that would in all probability have passed unnoticed by me in my then miserable frame of mind, and it was therefore the right thing in the right place, and taught me

A SURE CURE FOR THE BLUES.

There is nothing so good for the blues by half,
As that which will give you a good hearty laugh;
For though I was blue, blue to the core,
I laughed and laughed 'till my sides were sore,
And now when I feel life's galling yoke,
I accept it all as a splendid joke;
And if there is nothing else to make me laugh,
I recall the Story of the Preacher and the Calf.

PECULIAR ADDRESSES

I also learned that the American people are very versatile spellers, there being no less than a dozen different ways of spelling Kimmundy coming under my observation during my Four Years in a Country Office. A prominent citizen of Chicago always insisted upon spelling it CinMunday. That always reminded me of what some of my subscribers used to tell me when asked for the price of the paper—"I can't pay you today, but maybe I kin Munday."

There were few people whose names were not spelled differently by their different correspondents; even Smith, Jones and Brown being spelled more ways than there are letters in the original name.

A letter addressed to the man with the "Unspellable Name" was delivered to Alexander Boczkiewicz, who acknowledged it was for him. Long before I became postmaster this fellow came to town—and brought his name with him—for the purpose of subscribing for my paper, and told me confidentially that the way he spelled the last end of it was B-o-c-z-k-i-e-w-i-e-z. I have always understood that the gentleman came by that name perfectly honestly, having inherited it from his father, who was a prominent citizen of Poland, famous chiefly for his good name, which he left untarnished by any attempt at aesthetic orthography.

A letter addressed to "The Stock Buyer with a Crooked Nose" was promptly delivered. This was one of those cases where the face was familiar but they had forgotten the name. Another to "Mrs. VanArnum's Second Husband's Son Jim" was readily located. "Uncle Jack Jones' Son Sam" was the way one gentleman was distinguished from a cousin by the same name. When I took charge of the office I found a letter there addressed, "Mr. P. O. Master," and it occurred to me that it might be intended for the postmaster, so I opened it and it was, and was from a fellow who wanted the names of the members of the Board of Education, that he might make application for position as teacher in the public schools, but the letter had been there so long that the teachers had all been employed for that year. In fact, I could consume a volume in relating incidents of this kind, but suffice to say that there is at Washington what it termed a "Nixie Office," to which all imperfect addressed matter is sent, and statistics show (1893) that seven million articles find their way there annually, sixty per cent of which are deciphered by experts, while the remaining forty per cent go to the dead letter office for further investigation.

There is a family in Kimmundy by the name of Crank. A letter arriving there addressed simply "Kimmundy, Illinois," without any sign of a name, was laid aside to be returned for better address, but when it was discovered by the amiable assistant, she said, "Mr. Lawson, what are you going to do

with this letter without any name on it?" and I jokingly replied, "O, I guess you had better give it to Mr. Crank; nobody but a crank would send such a letter, and it may be from some of his folks." A few minutes later when I looked for the letter it was gone, and I said "Gertrude, what did you do with that nameless letter?" and it nearly took my breath when she replied, "Why, I gave it to Mr. Crank, just as you told me to." I thought Geewhillikins! my name will be Dennis next if I don't quit my foolishness. But it wasn't half an hour until Mr. Crank was back at the general delivery window in the best of humor, wanting to know how she knew the letter was for him, and she declared that Mr. Lawson told her to give it to him, and then he wanted to know how the postmaster knew it was for him, since it had no name upon it, but was from his father in Indiana. And then the assistant declared she didn't know how the postmaster knew, unless he was a mind reader. That was about the luckiest accident I ever heard of and equals if it does not exceed the delivery made by the postmaster at New York, who found in the mail from Ireland a letter addressed to "Timothy Flannigan, First House in America," without town county or state, but they found Tim, out at the light house, in the New York harbor.

LETTERS OF INQUIRY

The postmaster's personal mail is a veritable curiosity shop, and it was a dull day indeed when I did not receive from one to half dozen letters, covering the entire country, and almost every stretch of human imagination, about somebody or something. Women inquiring for missing husbands; men in search of runaway wives; bachelors and widowers wanting companions and housekeepers; maids and widows, many of whom probably would not accept a situation at any price, anxious to enter a life's engagement as wife and mother in exchange for the name and neglect of some horrid man. Letters from fond fathers and mothers asking about their wandering boys. A woman in Wisconsin wanted to know all about an invalid's chair which she had seen advertised in a St. Louis paper by a Kinmundy man, and if it would be too much trouble for the postmaster

to go and examine it and tell her all about it on a postal, (which she did not enclose). A Chicago firm wanted to know what system of water works and fire protection the city possessed, and I very frankly told them it rained there occasionally.

It is no exaggeration to say, that during the four years I was in office I received one or more letters inquiring about every business man and woman in the place, and a great many asking about people never heard of in the history of the community. A letter from a fellow in Northern Illinois wanted a sample of "the leading local paper," which I had no difficulty in determining by sending him a copy of my own, but in less than a week I had another from the same fellow asking the postmaster as to the general reputation for truth and veracity of the editor of that paper. I wrote him upon a sort of a combination letter head, having editor on one corner and postmaster on the other, that whatever the editor of the Kinmundy Express said the Kinmundy postmaster would swear to if necessary, but that put a very abrupt end to our correspondence.

THE ANONYMOUS LETTER FIEND

I always tried to give a prompt and satisfactory answer to all, ever in sympathy with the searcher for truth and information, as charitable as possible to youth, the aged and uninformed, but there was one small class of still smaller individuals for whom the splendid vocabulary of the English language is far too feeble for me to express my utter contempt. There may be some excuse for a man to steal, to appease the pangs of hunger of self or loved ones dependent upon him. There may indeed be some extenuation for the act of murder itself, when committed in the heat of a God-given passion over some real or fancied injury, but the contemptible coward who will deliberately sit down in the shadow of darkness, with naught but malice as an inspiration to his shriveled heart and distorted brain, and there seek to assassinate the priceless peace of mind, or spotless character of a fellow creature, through the damnable agency of the **anonymous letter**, is no more fit to dwell among decent people than Satan is worthy to inherit a home in God's kingdom.

People would come to me with these poisoned darts of cowardice to ask if I could tell who the writers were, and I always replied that I could not for two reasons. In the first place the law would not permit a postmaster to tell if he knew, and secondly, I would not want to accuse anyone of so mean an act upon the evidence of penmanship alone.

A family in Kimmundy was being persecuted by a fiend of this kind and the father appealed to me for assistance. I had a strong suspicion as to the guilty party, but the letters were always mailed at night and in the outside box. The first time the suspected party called for stamps I gave him a supply especially prepared for the occasion, and the next morning, to my great satisfaction, one of them turned up on another of his unprincipled epistles. I laid it to one side, and when he called for his mail I told him plainly that he was the anonymous letter writer, and that he must quit it or there would be war. Like the woman and the dead letter, he became very indignant, threatening to create a vacancy in the government service, and a charming young widow and two little orphans, in short order, if I accused him of writing an anonymous letter! I advised him to not get excited, as I had proof positive that he was the author of the mischief. He demanded the proof and I told him if he would show me the stamps in his note book I would convince even him. He placed four two-cent stamps upon the desk. I held them to the light and called his attention to some very small holes in the corner, which he admitted seeing. Picking up the letter to the victim of the series, I said: "Here is the other one of the five you bought last night, on this anonymous letter. Those holes are very small, made by the fine punch of a watchmaker, but they are large enough to convict you in any court of competent jurisdiction, of one of the meanest things of which a man can be guilty. Now, sir, who is the liar?"

Hanging his head in shame he said, "I am, and ought to be shot."

I told him we would not shoot him, on condition that he quit his meanness, which he promised to do, and did, for that put an end to the trouble, and that father will never know the

writer, or I fear that he too, would do a little job of perforating, and he would not use a jeweler's punch, either.

AN ELOPEMENT SPOILED

One Sunday morning in the usual grist of wants was a letter from a lady in a thriving city in Southern Illinois, describing a young man whom she said had enticed her daughter away from home, and praying for information concerning them.

I paid but little attention to the matter until a short time after I had closed the office for the Sabbath, when a young fellow called at my home to inquire if there was any mail for him in the office. I remembered that there was a letter for the name given, and I also recognized in him the individual described in the letter I had read less than an hour before. I went to the office and gave him the letter, which contained a money order for a small amount, which he wanted cashed, but I informed him that it was contrary to law to either issue or pay a money order on Sunday. He offered to discount it for cash, but that was no inducement, besides I could see in it a possible means of aiding an anxious mother in recovering her runaway daughter, so I told him the advice had not been received.

I wrote the lady that evening, stating the case. He came in early Monday morning and presented his order, but I was very sorry to tell him that the advice had not been received, (having neglected to stamp it as received). Then he became furious, saying that he just must go, and wanted to know if there was not some way by which he could obtain the money elsewhere. I told him I could receipt him for the order, and when the advice was received could issue another payable at any money order office that he might designate. To this he consented, ordering his mail sent to Mason the next day. He was a medicine vender, traveling in a fancy wagon, and thus they departed. On the noon train from the south the lady to whom I had written arrived. I told her of what had happened, and that the party would apply for mail the next day. She went there on the midnight train, and I forwarded the letter containing his money order.

The next evening I was very much surprised to see the old lady come into the office, accompanied by her daughter. She had overtaken the pair in the Mason post office, and stopped off on their return to thank me personally for the friendly interest shown in them, and the girl assured me she was just as glad to get back to mamma as mamma was to get her, and I am quite sure if the young man knew, or ever finds out the part I played in their romantic dream, he will at least send me a card of thanks, if he does not remember me in his will. The girl was restored to her parents and a good home, probably not half a dozen people will ever know of her foolish escapade.

RE-UNITED AFTER TWENTY-EIGHT YEARS

Another very interesting letter to the postmaster came from a man in the west, inquiring about a woman whom he knew to be a resident of Kinmundy twenty-eight years before that time. He wanted to know if I knew, or could ascertain by asking some old settler, what had become of her, if still living; if so whether married or not, and such other information as I could give.

Strange to relate, the person of whom he asked was a woman well known in the community, and whose husband was supposed to be sleeping the sleep of a patriot in an unknown grave in southern soil. Before answering the letter I sent word by one of her sons asking her to call at the office, which she did that evening. When she was seated in my private office I asked: "Mrs. Allen, did you ever know anyone by the name of M. G. Allen?"

With a start as one awakened from a dream, she replied, "Well, I should think I ought to; that was the name of my husband, who went to war in 1862, and I have never heard of him since."

I then told her frankly that I had in my hand a letter from him inquiring about her. At first she seemed speechless, and when she finally spoke it was as if in the presence of death, saying: "I have thought of him as dead for more than a quarter of a century."

I then read her the letter in full. At first she was inclined to berate him for the shameful manner in which he had treated her; then she relented, saying: "No! He is not so much to blame as the evil minded tale-bearer who carried him false reports of my conduct after he entered the army."

She told me to answer the letter according to the facts as I understood them, which I did that night. He was then in the Soldiers' Home, in Leavenworth, Kansas, while she was washing for a living, the postmaster's family being one of her customers, trying hard to establish her claim to a widow's pension. By return mail there came a registered letter from him to her, and a lively and interesting correspondence ensued, I doing her writing and reading his letters for her, in which the pledges of youth were renewed, and when he secured the expected pension he returned, after an absence of a generation, finding grand children larger than the two baby boys he kissed good-bye when he went to war in behalf of his country, and then forgot his duty to his wife and children. When I left Kinmundy this venerable couple were enjoying their second honey-moon, ever grateful to the country postmaster for the kindly interest taken in them.

A PUBLIC LETTER WRITER

As writing was somewhat in my line of business, a great many people seemed to think it was only necessary for me to turn a sort of a faucet in the think tank and the golden thoughts would flow out like maple syrup from a silver pitcher, and thought no more of asking me to write a letter for them than they would of taking a drink of water from the town pump in front of the office, and I never refused to comply with their request if at all possible for me to do without interfering with my official duty. Averaging them at one per day, which is a very low estimate, during the four years in office I wrote no less than fourteen hundred and sixty letters, in which I had not the slightest pecuniary interest, including almost every phase of correspondence, from ordinary business letters, letters of friendship, joy and grief, to the most sentimental declarations of love, and even proposals of marriage, for my timid friends, and I am confident that but for the earnest eloquence

of some of these epistles at least four people would not be situated as they are at this time, and it will not be surprising if some of our future governors, senators, presidents or country postmasters are traceable to these proposals.

SAMPLES OF SIMPLE INNOCENCE

It was no uncommon thing to have people come in, walk up to the stamp window and ask: "Do you keep stamps here?" A reigning belle from one of the rural districts came in one day and modestly inquired, "Do you keep postal cards here?"

Being informed that they were a part of our stock in trade, her next question was, How do you sell them?"

When told one cent each she said, "Well, I would like to look at some of them."

One each of the three sizes then in use were shown her, and like the Chinaman who bought the number ten boots, when sixes would fit him just as well, she selected the largest card, untied a knot in the corner of her hemstitched handkerchief, in which was secured three pennies, paid for it, and going to the public desk, wrote it, returning to the stamp window and calling the clerk away from her work long enough to ask "whether it required a one or a two cent stamp to send a postal card?"

It is popularly supposed that postmasters are not allowed to read the postal cards, but they simply do not read them aloud, that's all, and while I did not make a business of reading all the cards that passed through the office, I am willing to confess in the presence of these witnesses that I did take a few shy glances at that one, which, after being dated, started out, "I seat myself and take my pen in hand," when the truth of the matter is she was standing up, writing with a lead pencil.

The next time she came in she received a letter, and not having lost interest in her, I eyed her closely as she opened the letter, which contained a nice new five dollar bill. She examined both sides of the bill very carefully, and walking up to the money order window said: "Mr. Postmaster, will you please cash this?" And not to disturb the equanimity of her innocent young mind, I gave her silver for it, for she actually

didn't know the difference between a five dollar bill and a government money order! And still people will ask: "Is marriage a failure?" I am inclined to think under certain conditions it might be.

Another lady who passed muster in that community as an intelligent woman, being a great friend to the young postmaster, wanted to know what it would cost to send a barrel of apples to Wisconsin by mail? As soon as I recovered from the shock, I told her as calmly as possible, that if she would do those pippins up in four pound packages, the mail limit, it would only cost her about forty dollars. But like the young lady who was unable to express her feelings—she concluded to send them by freight. (This lady seems to have anticipated the Parcel Post by about twenty years).

But about the toughest tenderfoot that I encountered was a full grown man, whose first question upon entering office was "What are postage stamps wuth?"

I informed the gentleman that stamps ranged in value from one cent to one hundred dollars, which caused him to exclaim, "What on 'arth would anybody want of a hundred dollar stamp?" I told him that stamps for more than five dollars were not used by common people, being especially designed for newspaper men, and that an hundred dollar stamp would pay the postage on five tons of newspapers or magazines, and that hundreds of them were used every day, week and month, by the publishers of the great periodicals. (Under the wisdom of the present administration the use of these stamps has been abolished, publishers simply paying for the number of pounds mailed, taking a receipt for the amount.) But returning to my subject, I told the customer that ordinary letter stamps were two cents each. After hesitation he asked, "Aint that a little high?" I replied that was the regular price. Scratching his head awhile he asked, "Well, say, is this the only post office in town?"

I had been in office about a year when a fellow came in with a great grievance against the government, intimating that he had been robbed by the post office department, because as he said, he had sent some money to a man in Missouri about

eighteen months before, and had just received a dun for the amount. I told him if he could tell me about the date when it was sent I would look up the records and see what could be done about it. He said "date, date the dickens, why I've got the postmaster's receipt right here," and he produced the original order that he should have sent to his creditor at the time it was issued, but had held as a receipt. I explained that if he would send the order so as to get it there within two years from date (the limit is now one year), it would be paid; otherwise he would have to obtain a duplicate. He sent the order on, the date of which was evidence of good intentions, but that his information on postal matters was sadly defective.

In fact I conceded to him the championship for lack of information until a short time before I retired, when another full grown man came in and wanted to know what a government order for twenty dollars would cost. I asked him if he meant money order, and he replied that he did. Being informed fifteen cents (it is ten now), he said, "Well, I want one." I handed him an application blank, but he requested me to fill it up, as he reckoned I knew more about it than he did, and I was not long in discovering that that far he was correct. After filling in the name and address, amount, etc., which he signed, I issued the order, in payment for which he tendered the magnificent sum of fifteen cents, spot cash. I said, my friend, there is evidently some misunderstanding. The order is twenty dollars, and the fee is fifteen cents. He said, "Twenty dollars, the devil, why I want him to pay that!"

After considerable questioning and explanation I discovered that what the fellow wanted was that the man whose name and address he had given me, owed him twenty dollars for cutting broom corn, and he wanted an order from the government to make him pay it. I returned the order as not issued, and referred the customer to a Justice of Peace, who had more authority in such cases than the postmaster.

But that this simple innocence is not confined entirely to the patrons of the post office is clearly shown by the story of the fellow who was appointed postmaster a few years ago, at a little town out in Texas. For several days after he took

charge of the office there was no mail sent out from that point, which fact was reported by every railway post office crew to the superintendent of the railway mail service, who, in view of the numerous reports telegraphed the delinquent postmaster to know why he was not sending out any mail, and was very much surprised to receive a reply, also by telegraph, from the postmaster, who though he understood his business, saying, "I aint got one sack near full yet."

AND A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM

Before becoming postmaster I had heard so many stories of how post office inspectors were given to swooping down unawares upon unsuspecting postmasters and finding fault with everything in sight, that the first year of my service was spent in almost daily dread of a visit from one of them, lest he should get there before the office was swept out in the morning.

Desirous of giving my patrons better accommodations, I made application for a street letter box to be placed upon a convenient corner in our city. The matter was referred to an inspector for investigation, and in a few weeks he called upon me. Together we went out and viewed the proposed location of the box, which he approved. Just as we returned to the office my little four year old daughter came tripping in like a fairy, fresh from the nursery. Addressing her the Inspector said, "Why, how do you do! Are you the postmaster?" She said, "No, sir; I'm my papa's little deputy." With a laugh the Inspector caught her in his arms for a romp, and standing her upon a table said, "I had thought some of checking up this office while waiting for my train, but if **you** are the deputy, I know that everything is all right." After asking if my bondsmen were all living and solvent, he proceeded to entertain the child until time for him to depart. When speaking of bondsmen, stroking the little yellow curls, he said: "Well, I would consider a tie of this kind sufficient bond for the faithful performance of any duty." Complimenting me upon the neatness of my office, and the sweetness of my child he departed, and from that day unto this I have had an increasing regard for the manliness always found in post office Inspectors.

SANCTITY OF THE MAILS

That the American people are a set of Sunday letter writers is shown by the fact that on an average far more letters are mailed throughout the country on Monday than any other day of the week and fewer on Saturday, possibly because of the superstition about doing anything important on Friday, as well as that in the smaller towns the merchants are busier and do no write, some of them putting it off until Sunday. Monday's mails are generally laden with neat, white delicately tinted and sweetly perfumed epistles, written to friends and loved ones on the Sabbath.

There are few people indeed who do not enjoy getting a letter, and the fewer they receive the better they seemed to appreciate them. A sealed letter is a sacred thing, and so regarded by all faithful employes of the department. When an individual gets a letter they usually know in some manner who it is from or what it is about, but a package of letters in the hands of a stranger is an unfathomable mystery. Of course it is safe to presume that the majority of them are ordinary business letters, but who knows how much of joy, sorrow, pleasure or pain an innocent looking letter may contain. It may be a message of love or hate, of hope or despair. It may be a pathetic appeal from some devoted father or mother to a wayward son or daughter, imploring them to turn from the error of their way into the paths of righteousness; but who knows but the next one to it may be a part of some scheme or plot against the property, possibly the life, or that which is above all, the character of some human being, for the fate of many a man, many a woman, has been sealed by the sealing of a letter.

Though I always enjoyed giving any one a letter, that which filled my soul with the keenest delight was to handle and hand out the long, familiar white envelopes which came in unusual numbers every three months, and which I knew to contain the quarterly stipend bestowed by a none too grateful government upon that grand, but alas too rapidly diminishing army of battle scarred veterans, to in a measure even up the unequal burdens of life, made unequal by reason of having left

the peaceful avocations of life in the days of their youth and early manhood to face death, disease and decrepitude, upon the long and weary marches, in the damp and dismal camp, and upon the fierce fields of battle, during the dark days of the rebellion, for the preservation of this, the grandest union beneath the skies, and the upholding of the most magnificent flag that e'er unfurled its graceful folds upon the breath of God and to the sun-light of the glory world.

Ah, the glory of the soldier
Is indeed a priceless gem,
But this nation can never pay
The debt it owes to them.

It would be useless for me to attempt to encompass, even in a four hours talk, the half of the facts and facies suggested by four years observation of that kind, and I will therefore not detain you much longer.

Though the duties of a country postmaster became quite irksome at times, I must confess that I, in common with about seventy thousand other fellows in similar positions, felt very much **put out**, by the election of 1892; so much so, indeed, that I lost no time in getting out, by sending in my resignation March 2d, 1893, just four years from the date of my application, and then I discovered to my dismay that it is sometimes as difficult to let go as it is to get hold of a position of that kind, for while I was appointed in just one month from the date of my application, it was ten weeks from the date of my resignation until I was relieved, notwithstanding five or six tariff reformers were just dying for the job, as anxious to get in as I was to get out.

In conclusion, while I cannot advise any one to enter the uncertain field of politics or the public service, either for pleasure or profit, I shall always remember with the highest degree of satisfaction the many valuable experiences gained, and sincerely hope that you have not been seriously disappointed in the story of **FOUR YEARS IN A COUNTRY POST OFFICE**.

GOOD NIGHT

A PAIR OF IMPROMPTU ADDRESS

In July, 1904, the author of the foregoing lecture, being then Postmaster at Effingham, and President of the National Association of Postmasters of the Second and Third Class, was invited to attend a Convention of the Postmasters of the State of Utah, at Provo, to deliver an address upon the subject: "The Postal Service as a Profession," which he promptly accepted, though it entailed a journey for himself and wife of near four thousand miles.

On the evening of the first day a complimentary "trout dinner" in honor of the stamp merchants of the State, to which all journeyed via a free special train for about ten miles up into the mountains, was given in Provo Canyon, by United States Senator Reed Smoot, where a feast fit for the God's was served.

Hon. A. L. Thomas, a former Governor, then Postmaster at Salt Lake City, presided as toastmaster, whose pleasure it was to call a speaker, and when he arose, be given the subject to which he should talk. When the guest of honor on that occasion was called he was given the toast: "Illinois," to which he responded:

“ILLINOIS”

Mr. Toastmaster, Friends and Fellow Postmasters: After partaking of this splendid specimen of Utah hospitality, of which I have heard much and am now convinced "the half has never been told," one would naturally seem almost "too full for utterance," so to speak, but I sincerely hope the time may never come during my natural life when I shall be either too full or too feeble to stand up when called, to say something in behalf of the land of my nativity, the Grand Old State of Illinois.

When a very young man it was my fate and good fortune to spend a portion of one summer among the so-called "Noble Red Men" and beautiful maidens of the Cherokee Indian Territory, now included in the State of Oklahoma, where I met and soon became a sort of a favorite of a very old cross-eyed Indian Chief, who, by reason of his eyes being "cut bias," as it were, was looked upon by his fellow braves and tribesmen, as being the possessor of some superior vision, and for that peculiarity, was made the repository of all the traditions known to his tribe for many generations, and from him I heard much lore never before nor since encountered in the school books or newspapers. He told me, among many other queer and interesting things: "Your people do not even know how to spell or pronounce the name of your own

The evening of the first recital, the above very unique "sketch," on the back of an 8x10 catalogue envelope, was handed the lecturer by Mr. O. N. Tyner, the gentleman for whom I did my first job of printing as an apprentice more than 40 years ago. His praise of my first effort was an inspiration to persevere in the art, which has since been my life work. Mr. Tyner, still my friend, is now enjoying the evening of a well spent life, in "the old home town," among friends of long ago.

State." When the "Paleface" first came to that territory they gave it the name of "Ill-in-wa," and so pronounced it, signifying "Tribes-at-War," probably having reference to that beautiful legend in Indian Folk-lore of "Starved-Rock," where one tribe is alleged to have so far outgeneraled another, through superior strategy, that they were bottled up in a wonderful canyon in what is now LaSalle county, where they were exterminated by being literally "starved to death."

Ill-in-wa—tribes-at-war, and incidentally, politically speaking, I may say, their white successors have been at it pretty much ever since, though never to the point of extinction by starvation.

"Illinois, Illinois; Not without thy wondrous story, can we write the Nation's glory, Illinois. In the record of thy years, Abra'm Lincoln's name appears; Grant and Logan and our cheers, Illinois."

"Illinois," a mighty Empire within a glorious Republic; the fairest sylph among the sisterhood of States, who daily bathes her great wealth of auburn tresses in the wonderful waters of the Great Lakes; across the wide prairies of whose beautiful and succulent bosom immense herds of contented cattle graze in peace and tranquility, producing milk and butter in abundance for a mighty multitude of people; a sylph whose famous wheat and corn belts are marvels of fertility and productiveness; and whose shapely extremities stretch forth through the immense orchards, the timber tracts and coal fields, to where the Great Father and Magnificent Mother of Waters, the Mississippi and the Ohio Rivers, meet in harmony and journey as one from Cairo to New Orleans, through the Gulf of Mexico to the Sea.

Illinois, the happy home of the Big Red Apple, and the always luscious Strawberry; the natural habitation of lovely and intelligent ladies; the nursery and play ground for sagacious Statesmen and clever Politicians, the greatest of which was our own and only universally beloved Abraham Lincoln.

What e'er befall, what e'er betide, it shall always be my greatest pride, likewise my everlasting joy, to sing the praise of ILLINOIS.

On the afternoon of the second day, Hon. Edward Luce, a State Senator and partner of United Senator, Smoot in the ownership of the Grand Central gold mine, two men with hearts as large as the universe and as mellow as those of two maids in their teens, gave a complimentary "trout dinner" to the convention at Lake Provo, The Postmaster at Ogden, Utah, presided, and followed the tactics of the evening before — naming the speakers and announcing the "toast" to which they should respond. When the gentleman from Illinois was called he was given and responded to the toast

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Mr. Toastmaster, Ladies and Gentlemen of this occasion:

After listening to the levity and mirth of the brilliant array of previous speakers, to be assigned a subject of such solemnity is certainly a reversal of a world old adage, in that it is a short step from the ridiculous to the sublime.

That dear old mother of mine always taught me that when playing the game of Life I should never renege when hearts are trumps, and I shall not do so now.

Four score and fifteen years ago there was born to frugal parents in an humble home in the State of Kentucky, a male child, destined through the wisdom and purposes of God to become second only to the Christ-Child, born in the manger at Bethlehem more than eighteen hundred years before, and it is no sacrilege for me to say that the pages of history through the intervening centuries reveal no such similarity of character, from the hour of their birth in obscurity, to the day of their tragic death, as is found in the lives, teachings and transition of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and that of the beloved Emancipator of a race in bondage, Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois, and the strange doctrine of the reincarnation or transmigration of souls, has no better illustration than is found in the fact that Abraham Lincoln was possessed of the spirit of the Son of God to a degree manifest in no other human being, from the time when Christ died upon the cross, that future generations might live in the eternal light of a blessed Christianity, to that awful hour when Abraham Lincoln yielded up his life, upon the cross and altar of his country, a victim of malice and sectional hate, in order that America, chosen of God to become the guiding star of civilization for all time to come, might be forever free.

Born in obscurity, each came up through great privation to become the greatest benefactors the human race will ever know, and never, from the delivery of the sermon on the mount, have such words or sentiments fallen from the lips of man as were uttered by Abraham Lincoln upon the occasion of the dedication of battlefield at Gettysburg, in the summer of 1863.

I am proud of the fact that I was born at a spot across which the setting sun casts the lengthening shadow of the old State Capitol at Vandalia, Illinois, where Abraham Lincoln entered upon his legislative career as a member of the Illinois legislature, and it is one of the joys of my life for me to know that my father was the personal friend and political supporter of Abraham Lincoln while they lived, and that Lincoln's has been the life I have feebly tried to follow since old enough to read and comprehend the grandeur of his name.

Abraham Lincoln is said to have been highly instrumental in bringing about the removal of the State capitol from Vandalia to Springfield, Illinois, where the mortal remains of this truly marvelous man now sweetly sleep beneath the peaceful shades of the most magnificent monument that adorns the face of the western world; a monument erected to his precious memory by a grateful people; a monument most colossal in design and dimensions, which must be seen to be appreciated, without seeing which a visit to Illinois by any American citizen will be sadly incomplete.

It has been my good fortune to go to Springfield frequently in recent years, but I never neglect to go, if but for a short time, to the tomb, I should say the shrine, which holds this Nation's greatest heritage, and standing there upon the scene hallowed by his sacred dust, I realize as no where else on earth, how vain is every effort of architect or artist to fittingly portray in marble or bronze, and how pitifully feeble the splendid vocabulary of the English language, to adequately express our love, admiration and adoration for this grandest, most sublime character of all the ages, Abraham Lincoln of America.

The little chap shown in the group picture on page five of this work, following in the footsteps of his ancestors for three known generations—his grandmothers' father, Abraham VanCamp, his grandfather, John Lawson, both veterans of the Mexican war, who responded to the first call for volunteers by President Lincoln in 1861, and his father, who, though then in a federal position that would exempt him from military duty, voluntarily offered his services in the Spanish-American war in 1898, twenty-three years after the first picture was taken, then in a position that would have put him in class five, under the draft, did not wait to be drafted, but volunteered in the Regular Army under President Wilson's first call for troops, June 21, 1917, hoping to be assigned to the aviation corps, his preference, but was sent to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and assigned to E Battery of the 8th Field Artillery, and upon reaching France was transferred—just for luck—to the 13th Field Artillery, of the Fourth Division—The Fighting Fourth; the last six months of his more than two years' service being spent in the Army of Occupation, keeping a "Watch on the Rhine," at Coblenz, Germany.

That "God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform" was repeatedly shown in this lad's army experience.

While at Fort Sill, manfully doing his duty as a gunner in intensive training, on September first he was unexpectedly called from the ranks by his Commanding officer, after a brief interview, assigned to "special duty" that eventually took him into twenty-eight States and the District of Columbia, before going overseas, and on September eighth, one week from the time he was assigned to special duty, Private Lawrence, of Cincinnati, the young man made gunner in his stead, was instantly killed and eleven other artillery men badly crippled by a wild stampede of sixty artillery horses that became frightened at the heavy cannonading. But for his call to special duty upon his apparent merits he might have met the fate of Private Lawrence.

A SOLDIER'S LETTER TO HIS MOTHER

November 20, 1917, the young Mr. Lawson was granted a 15 days furlough that he might come home to see his parents before sailing for France. At the end of his leave of absence, while enroute from Chicago to Fort Sill to rejoin his command, he wrote the following letter to his parents, which they have since treasured:



19TH AND MARKET STREETS
OPPOSITE UNION STATION
L. V. MOORE, PROPRIETOR

ST. LOUIS, Dec. 3, '17.

My Dear Mother and Father:

Thus far in comfort and safety, and I am feeling fine. Having a couple of hours to wait for the train that shall carry me back to the Fort, I will spend a part of that time writing to thank you for being the brave little mother that you were at the final parting, in sending me away with a smile that I shall never forget. Somehow I had dreaded the last hour, fearing that you might give way to your inner feelings and weep, as I saw so many others doing, sending their boys away in sadness. But you did not, and it was the happiest hour of my unusually happy two weeks.

Though physically frail, spiritually "There were none more brave than you," my mother dear, and I love you all the more for your true courage on that occasion.

As the train left the depot and you waved me that dear Motherly kiss with the sweetest smile I ever saw, the tears in my own eyes seemed to serve as a fluoroscope to the x-ray that enabled me to see the very depths of a mother's heart and her great love for her only begotten son, as he leaves for a war the end of which none can foresee; but with the blessing and benediction of your parting smile and your constant prayers which I know will be mine, I feel sure I shall remain safe within the hollow of God's merciful hand, and He will bring me back to you, unharmed in body or soul.

If, however, it is God's Will that I should perish upon the battlefields of France, in this seemingly needless strife, I want you to know now and always remember that my last moments were spent in loving thoughts of you and Dad, and your many kindnesses to me, and in sweet memory of the fact that you had the courage to send me away with a smile.

Your Loving Soldier Son,

Eugene S. Lawson



SERGT. EUGENE S. LAWSON, 13th Field Artillery, A. E. F.

Being then chief spokesman for the LaSalle Extension University, the author was invited to address the members of the Chicago Advertising Association at their noonday luncheon on Washington's Birthday, February 22, 1916. He spoke for 45 minutes, the following being the opening and closing paragraphs of the subject assigned:

What Would Washington Do With the Problems of Today?

Mr. Chairman and Fellow Advertisers:

In the language of the late President Cleveland, "It is not a **theory**, but a **condition** that confronts us." What Washington would do with the problems of today can only be conjectured from a historical knowledge of the Father of his Country and the methods he once pursued, but it is safe to presume that he **would not say** there ever was or ever will be an American citizen worthy of the name who is "too proud to fight" on justifiable occasion, for the honor of America. Though he might be justified in saying that "America is too Wise and too Courageous to Fight in this enlightened age, when the spirit of Arbitration would settle international differences among men.

Washington was the author of that famous slogan: "In time of Peace Prepare for War," but it is my humble opinion that if Washington were alive today to view the situation in the light of one hundred and seventeen additional years of civilization, he would probably revise and reverse that famous slogan to read and to mean "In time of War Prepare for Peace," for I believe that the world is sick of war as it never was before. Furthermore, it is my firm belief that had that peerless citizen, soldier and statesman, that matchless man among men, Theodore Roosevelt, been restored to the Presidency, (as he should have been) in 1912, there would have been no war in Europe in 1914, if ever, in which it now seems inevitable that we as a self-respecting Nation must soon be involved, for instead of that senseless "watchful waiting" policy, the gentleman of the pugnacious teeth and judicious wielder of "the big stick" would have said it to the belligerent Kaiser, in substance: "Bill, behave yourself, or the United States will join an alliance of European Powers that will whip the everlasting whey out of you and your haughty Empire," and Bill would have ceased his criminal aggression, Belgium would not have been devastated, and the United States would not now be on the very verge of becoming involved the worst war the world has ever seen. * * * * *

President Wilson has lately well said, but alas, I fear eternally too late: "If need be, the color of Our Flag will be renewed in the blood of the Nation, and the color will be purified and glorified."

My earnest prayer is that it may never come to that, but it now seems inevitable that we must soon go to the rescue of humanity, in the interest of right and justice, as well as a matter of expediency to protect our own shores and our own flag from an assault by this arch enemy of law and order, the Kaiser, who is so grossly intoxicated with the egotism of his imaginary greatness that he knows no other law, and must soon be subdued, as a menace to human liberty throughout the world.

Speaking of our Flag, its Color and the renewal thereof. My friends, have you ever paused to contemplate the magnificence of that Starry Banner of Beauty, The American Flag? God be praised that the United States of America is the only country upon the face of the earth that ever went to Heaven for a national Emblem, gathering as she has from the realms above a bouquet of the most brilliant stars that ever "sang together in the morning," bringing them down to be clustered together in one grand galaxy of glory, in the upper left hand corner of the American Flag, there to remain, each star a priceless diadem, in ever growing grandeur to the end of time? Count the cost, if you will, of the almost half an hundred bright stars thereon, measured by the standard of the thousand upon thousands of precious human lives, and the multiplied millions of the treasures of gold, and then recall that to the valor of such warriors as Washington, Lincoln, Logan, McKinley and the courageous Roosevelt, we owe it all.

I say the color of such a flag is forever imperishable and needs no renewal. Instead I say again, let us have an immediate preparedness in America, upon land and sea, in the air above and the waters beneath the sea, so complete with men, measures and munitions, that we shall soon be in a position to command and compel universal and perpetual peace and eventual **disarmament** throughout the world, to the end that the blood of no more American boys need be shed to renew its crimson hue; that the hearts of no more American mothers need be broken to restore the royal blue, and that no more its snowy whiteness shall e'er be sullied by the insolence of any foreign foe



TREASURY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF
AUDITOR FOR POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT

North St Paul Minn
~~Washington, D.C.~~

Dear Mr Lawson
Since you are, as I told
you in Washington, the only com-
mentator on postal affairs I
have ever found who exhibited an
appreciation of the importance
of its accounting system, I
take the liberty to mail you
today that part of my final
report as Auditor, which deals
with its defects.

I hope you will preserve
it for reference, and as op-
portunity offers, help correct
some of the evils which, if
allowed to run on, will ruin
the service, in spite of all efforts
at administrative efficiency.

Very Truly Yours
Henry A. Castle

Reproduction of a letter received from a retiring auditor of the
Post Office Department, written soon after attending a meeting of the
National Association of Postmasters, whose President made an earnest
appeal for a more efficient and economical accounting system for the
Post Office Department.

CONDENSED TESTIMONIALS

Mr. Lawson proved himself a poet, humorist and an orator of merit.
—Carondelet Progress

The brilliant young editor won the hearts of our people and made
many friends while here.—Cedar Rapids, Ia., Daily Gazette.

One of the purest minded of men, a fluent talker, handling his
subjects with the skill and ingenuity of a master, and none can hear
him without being the better therefor.—Wayne County Press.

One of the very best lectures ever delivered in our city. Mr. Lawson
has a good stage appearance, a good delivery and the happy faculty
of keeping his audience in a good humor throughout his discourse. We
hope to some day see him occupy a commanding position among the
most noted lecturers of the land.—Effingham Democrat.

Mr. Lawson was for four years postmaster at Kimmunity and is the
present postmaster at Effingham. He has a keen sense of humor and
his lecture abounds in witty and original sayings that delight the audi-
ence. He is a skilled word painter, and his lecture is couched in the best
of English, is delivered in an easy, graceful manner, and has proven a
great hit wherever given.—Tuscola Review.

AS SEEN BY A COUNTRY POSTMASTER

Mr. R. F. Lawson, postmaster at Effingham, Ill., in his address at the
banquet of postoffice officials at the Auditorium Tuesday evening, empha-
sized the need of postal savings banks, especially in rural communities.
The country postmaster, said Mr. Lawson, could render valuable service
if he were permitted to become the receiver of the surplus earnings of
the people as the agent of a well-regulated postal savings system. "And
it is my humble opinion," continued Mr. Lawson, "that if the present
progressive administration succeeds in establishing the postal savings
system in the United States it will have accomplished more for the
common good of the masses of the American people than any that have
gone before."

The country postmasters, who come in close contact with the people
of their neighborhoods, are well qualified to judge of the needs of their
communities for improved facilities for the depositing of small savings.
The opinion of country postmasters like Mr. Lawson of Effingham should
have weight with members of congress who desire to serve the people
to the best of their ability. Chicago Record, Nov. 11, 1899.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The oration of Richard F. Lawson at the Lincoln banquet Tuesday
night, was fully up to the high standard established by the excellent ora-
tors who have delighted the guests at the three previous banquets held in
Lebanon. Colonel Lawson, while a man not yet stepping into that period
of life which separates the old from the young has some characteristics
in his style and in his looks and manners which may be said to give
his efforts a tinge of that old style of American oratory of which Webster
and Clay are historical examples. On the other hand, his speech con-
tained many features after the manner of the modern lecturer, of which
Colonel Lawson, himself, is a fair example.

His speech, which is printed in full below, is well worth the time
spent in reading it. Lincoln's life has been discussed for many years
by all manner of orators, yet the subject never loses interest and es-
pecially is this true when the new ideas are produced in such excellent
style as that used by Colonel Lawson. — New Lebanon, Indiana, Patriot,
Feb. 12, 1900.