

Orange County Observer.

ESTABLISHED IN 1878.

HILLSBORO, N. C., THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 1899.

NEW SERIES-VOL. XVIII, NO. 12.

POSTMISTRESS AT DOWNINGVILLE.

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WHEN you come to think of it, Downingville was a village of magnificent distances, with almost a half-mile from the tannery to the sawmill, and with only scattering houses between. The school-house and the two churches had each failed to establish a centre.

When the postoffice stood alone, at least a hundred yards from the tannery, with a corner of Square Paddy's wood-lot coming up almost to the back door, as if refusing to recognize such a straggling place as a town at all.

Mr. Blodgett was the postmaster, and he ran the village grist-mill—being so far from everything else, of course, seldom visited the office on a day of any great length. So it happened that practically the entire work of the office fell upon his assistant. She was Mabel Leonard, who lived with her mother a quarter of a mile up the road on the uncertain work of the office, although she was hard in one sense, and was actually wearing and exacting, and the hours were long—from six in the morning to seven in the evening, usually. Vacations and "days off" were few, and the salary was meagre, but Mabel never complained, and she did the work to the best of her ability.

It was a beautiful September morning, and she had just finished putting up her twenty-four mail, and the boy who carried it to the station had departed. Only two or three persons had as yet been in, so Mabel was surprised to see Mrs. Allison appear at the general delivery.

"Why, good morning, Mabel!" she said. "You weren't looking for me to-day, were you, now? Well, I'm going to take the train for Proctor's—going up to see Libbie—and I thought I'd drop in. I didn't know but I might have a post or something, but I'm telling you to wait till next week."

"So, there isn't anything for you," returned Mabel.

"Well, I don't know, you know. You may tell. But I suppose this has been only for you."

"Yes, I've been up an hour and a half."

"You don't tell me! Well, I think you have to get up too early, that's what I think. Seems as if Blodgett had left his key and opened the place himself, especially as you have to stay so late at night."

"He comes in at noon, you know, and stays quite a while. Then, the key is turned."

"Well, it may not be hard, but I don't like that its wearing. I'm a little starting over letters and sending them with that thing, and taking out money orders and taking down orders and just so, and fixing the registered letters and selling stamps, and jumping up to this window for this body and that body and the other body that want their letters, and forty other things—I declare I should just pester the life out of me if I don't get it."

"Oh, I don't mind it," returned Mabel, cheerfully.

"Well, I must be getting along," returned Mrs. Allison. "Are you going on the excursion next week?"

"I'm afraid I can't get away," answered the girl.

"The Allison was rummaging in her basket, and her attention seemed attracted."

"Seems as if Blodgett ought to pay you more," she said. "Blodgett is no good man, and his bill says him right about it. What do like, is to see you in a postmaster's uniform, if you've any sense now."

"Oh, thank you," answered Mabel, with a rather sad smile, as Mrs. Allison went out. Then she sat down in her chair by the desk, but the smile was all gone.

"I'm afraid there aren't many excursions for me this summer," she thought, somewhat sadly. "I presume Mr. Blodgett would stay here that day if I asked him, but I know I couldn't afford to go. Besides, I haven't any dress to wear that is suitable. I wish I could earn more."

lack of money much more than this excursion. Mabel's father had died five years before, leaving his family in poor circumstances. Her mother's health was not good, and there two younger sisters and a little brother who were still at school.

It was a little after three o'clock on the afternoon of the same day that a stranger entered the Downingville postoffice. Mabel was alone. She noticed, as the man stepped up to the general delivery, that he was well dressed, and perhaps between twenty-five and thirty years of age. His face was not a pleasant one, although it did not suggest a lack of intelligence. He came close to the window and said:

"Is there a registered letter for M. P. Morgansone here?"

Such a letter had come on the latest mail, and Mabel had placed it in the safe which stood in the corner. She answered him in the affirmative. She continued:

"That is my name—M. P. Morgansone. Please let me have it."

"The rules require identification in the case of registered letters, you know," answered Mabel.

"Oh, yes, I had forgotten. Well, I am a stranger here, but I can show you who I am all right." He searched his pockets, taking out a number of papers and old letters. Two of the latter he pushed through the window.

"There you see, miss—M. P. Morgansone, Watertown. Just give me the letter—it's very important for me to catch the up-train."

"But I can't give out a registered letter on such identification. Mr. Blodgett, the postmaster, has instructed me not to do so."

Mabel's suspicions were beginning to be slightly aroused by one thing about the man. Twice since coming up to the window he had glanced over his shoulder at the door. She knew, of course, that it was her duty to deliver the letter if he could fully convince her that it belonged to him; but she determined to insist on identification of the strictest kind, as a matter of protection to herself and her employer.

"I have registered letters on less identification than this, and at larger offices," the man said. "You're going beyond the rules."

"No, I don't think I am. A postmaster is responsible for registered letters. If he delivers one to the wrong person the rightful owner can hold him accountable. Mr. Blodgett is very particular. He has told me to deliver no such letters to strangers except on identification such as would be satisfactory at a bank. You must know that these you would have to be vouched for by some one known personally to the bank people."

"I can describe the letter," went on the man, ignoring what she had said. "Large, oblong envelope. From J. H. Smith, Riverside. Mailed this morning. Isn't that right?"

"Yes, but I can't let you have it without proper identification." Mabel was becoming more suspicious of the man every moment. His disappointment and worry over the situation seemed to be bringing his true character to the surface, and his face and manner were rapidly growing less gentlemanly.

"Why, I never saw anything like this. Do you know I can make trouble for you with the department for holding back my letter? You know I am telling you the truth about who I am, and you have no right to delay my mail."

Mabel made no reply at all, but held her ground at the window.

"Now see here, miss, no foolishness. I'm a business man and my time is worth money. I'm a contractor, and that letter contains papers valuable to me, but of no value to anyone else. Here are specifications of a new factory I'm bidding for over at Watertown. Give it to me and let me catch my train. It's a matter of dollars and cents to me."

"I cannot do it," was all that Mabel said.

The man by this time was growing very red in the face, and was glancing more nervously than ever over his shoulder. He hesitated a moment, and then, with a little forced laugh, went on in a quieter tone:

"Of course, you're right according to the strict rule. I don't want you to see into my trouble on any account. I'll show you in any other way that I'm telling the truth. I'm going to be in town again in about a week. I'll just deposit ten dollars with you—you can give me a receipt and the letter, and if you don't let it all right, as you will by that time, you can give me back the money."

"No, there is no rate authorizing any such thing."

"I'll leave you fifty dollars. Don't you see I wouldn't do that if I didn't think it would be all right, and I'd get my money back?"

from his pocket, and laid it down in the window. "I'll make it a hundred dollars, yes, two hundred," and he pushed in four fifty-dollar bills. "I'll miss a big contract if I don't get that letter instantly. Give it to me! Never mind about writing a receipt for the money—I'll trust you, even if you don't want to trust me."

"I can't do it."

"Here, take a ten for yourself and give me the letter."

"No."

"Take a fifty, then. Keep it—do what you please with it. I'll lose thousands of dollars if I miss that contract."

Mabel only shook her head.

"Take the whole two hundred dollars! You can use it. Nobody will ever know. I'll never come back to bother you. Give me the letter!" and he pushed the money in so that it almost fell to the floor.

Mabel pushed it back, saying, "I will do you no good to make me any such offers. You cannot have the letter till you are properly identified."

"I will have it," he fairly shouted, snatching back the money and hurrying around to the side toward the door through which access was had to the interior, and which had been left ajar by the boy who had taken the mail-sack. But Mabel was too quick for him, and pushed it shut in his face.

The spring lock clicked, and she caught her breath with a feeling of relief; but he threw himself against the door heavily, shattering the catch and sending the door back on its hinges with a crash. The edge just struck her forehead, and everything began to turn black before her eyes; but there stood the safe door open. She sprang toward it, knowing as she did so that she just missed the man's grasp.

The heavy door went shut with a dull bang. With one hand she turned the handle which threw the bolts, and with the other span round the combination knob. Then the darkness became complete, and she remembered no more.

The next thing she heard was a confused murmur of voices. Then she opened her eyes and saw that she was still in the postoffice, lying on the distributing table. Doctor Roberts, the village physician was bending over her, and assuring her mother, who stood pale and frightened, that the patient was not in danger. Mr. Blodgett and two or three neighbors were crowded in the office.

"There," said the doctor, "you can go home in my carriage. I'll go along."

"Did—did he get the letter?" asked Mabel, feebly.

"No," answered Mr. Blodgett. "Never mind about the letter," said the doctor. "We'll tell you about that to-morrow. We'll just take you home now."

They carried her outside to the easy carriage which was waiting. As she drove away she heard half the population of the village, gathered at the office in full force, set up a cry of "Three cheers for Mabel!" and they were given with a will.

The next afternoon she was able to sit up at home. Mr. Blodgett came and congratulated her on what she had done. He told her that after she had become unconscious the man had escaped by running across the field to the nearby woods, and that it now appeared he had good reason for running away, since he was the accomplice of some burglars at Riverside who had sent him a large sum of money, stolen the night before, in the letter, bearing immediate arrest themselves. This had been established by Riverside officers who had arrested all the men, including the one who had come to the office, that morning, and by a postoffice inspector who had taken possession of the letter.

A week later Mabel was back in the office. Mr. Blodgett said to her the first morning:

"The folks here have been talking the matter over, and have decided on giving you a slight reward in the shape of a purse of money in recognition of what you did the other day. Some of them are coming in after a while, and I thought I'd tell you so you wouldn't be too much surprised."

"They're very kind," said Mabel, instantly, "but I couldn't take anything. You please tell them so, and stop their coming. I didn't do anything more than that day than my duty, and I couldn't take any reward for that, but you can thank them for me, please."

Mr. Blodgett went out, and she took up the old work. She heard no more about the reward.

But three weeks later a big official envelope, addressed to her own name. It was a letter, and the commission from the Postoffice Department, appointing Mabel Leonard Postmistress at Downingville, vice J. P. Blodgett, resigned.—Youth's Companion.

HORTICULTURE



Planting the Orchard.

This spring will be the time to set out some trees if you have no orchard or if the one you have is beginning to fail. If in a section where commercial orcharding is carried on it is well to put out a planting each year or two; if only a few trees are necessary to supply the family wants a tree or two should be set out each year—at least enough to keep the number of bearing trees full.

Apple trees are planted thirty by thirty feet apart each way. This will give forty-eight trees to the acre. They should begin to bear in three years from setting and give a good crop in ten years. With high culture they should live from twenty-five to forty years, and when from twenty to thirty years old should bear twenty-five to forty bushels each, every other year.

Pears may be set twenty by twenty-four feet, using ninety to the acre; they should come into bearing the third or fourth year and give good crops in twelve and ought to live and do well fifty to seventy-five years.

Peach trees may be set eighteen by eighteen feet, which will give 131 to the acre; they should bear in two years and give good crops in four years. When in full bearing ought to give five to ten bushels to each tree and live from eight to twelve years with high cultivation. Cherries may be set the same distance apart as peaches.

Plums should get to bearing in three years from planting and give good crops in from five to six years and continue to bear, with high culture, till the tree is twenty to twenty-five years old. Five to eight bushels is an average crop for an average tree.—Farm, Field and Fireside.

Getting Rid of Root Galls.

One section of the greenhouse at the Massachusetts Experiment Station is at present devoted to cucumbers grown in long boxes about eighteen inches deep, with steam pipes imbedded in the soil. Here Professor Swingle has caused and cured of root galls, a well-known disease which causes swellings on the roots of cucumbers, and of some other plants, always sapping their vitality and sometimes killing them outright. The trouble, it seems, is caused by a species of nematode, a tiny worm no larger than a pinhead, which forces its way into the tissues of the root.

"After trying all sorts of chemicals, likewise freezing and drying, the experimenters have settled down to the conclusion that the most effectual, complete and practical method at the present time of exterminating nematodes in greenhouses is by heating the soil before planting by means of steam. A bulletin is in preparation which gives details of the method of applying the steam. Pipes or tiles with holes in them extend through the benches and steam at a pressure of fifty pounds or more is forced through until the soil is thoroughly heated."

"How much heat is needed?"

"We heat for several hours until the soil reaches 180 degrees," replied Assistant Sharpe. "The worms are killed at 160, and we wish to make sure of eggs, which resist a higher temperature."

"Are they all killed by the process?"

"Yes, we note no signs of the root knots where the soil has been treated."

"What is being tested with the vines now that nematodes have been killed?"

"We are trying whether we can add manure to the soil after it has been heated, without introducing the worms again in the manure. The experiment is not yet complete, but we have seen no signs of the worms and no root galls in manured benches. Incidentally the cucumber vines show how the temperature is lower near the glass sides of the greenhouse; note how the two or three other rows are less thrifty than those nearer the center. It is not worth while to try growing vigorous plants very close to the glass."

The cost of heating the soil to kill nematode worms is hard to estimate, for varying conditions, but Professor Stone says 100 cubic feet of soil can, under favorable conditions, be heated in an hour's time. The process kills all kinds of spores, eggs and worms. Experiments are now under way to determine whether leaf spot of greenhouse vetches is not brought on by the weakening of the plant caused by root galls. So far the tests indicate that the two diseases go together.—New England Homestead.

Women as Barbers.

Women barbers are not a product of the nineteenth century. In Gay's "Journey to Exeter," published in England in 1715, he relates that after passing Mercombe Lake travelers reach Arxminster, where they rest for the night. The next morning the post tells how they were shaved by a "lady barber."

HOUSEHOLD AFFAIRS.

Planning For Sunday Meals.

Arranging the Sunday meals on Saturday is very essential, especially where the housewife must do all the work without the aid of servants. A salad is a great standby for a Sunday-evening supper, and the fish, meat, or eggs can be prepared the day before, and the dress, celery, or lettuce washed and left in cold water ready for instant use. Meat loaf is another standard and palatable cold dish for Sunday night. The chafing-dish can be called into use for a hot Sunday tea. Omelets, hash, or other simple dishes cooked on the chafing-dish, with buttered toast and tea, make a desirable Sunday-evening tea. For breakfast there is nothing better than coldfish cakes and stewed potatoes. The coldfish balls can also be prepared overnight, and it requires little work to cook them up for an early breakfast. This leaves only the dinner to prepare for Sunday.

A delicate dessert for Sunday dinner is made by boiling a pint of cream with a quarter of a pound of sugar, and a little lemon flavoring. Mix this with a paste made of two teaspoonsful of corn-flour, and let them boil a few minutes, stirring thoroughly. Pour this over a plate or bowl of mixed fancy cakes, macaroons, and strips of citron, raisins, and dried fruits. Make successive layers of the cream and cake until the dish is full.

Inventory Books.

An "inventory book" is the latest convenience for the housekeeper. This is a printed list, with columns for date of entry, value and description. It is systematically arranged and makes the list complete in case of fire, theft or death. It is next to impossible to remember all that was in a room before a fire, and the insurance companies always require a sworn list before settling. This housekeeper's inventory will settle the matter quickly.

Articles likely to be found in any room of the house are arranged in alphabetical order, with the name and location of the room heading the page. Two pages are given over to each room, beginning with albums, andirons, brackets, bric-a-brac, bookshelves, bureaus, bedsteads, etc., and running through to wardrobes and window seats. Special lists are also arranged for bric-a-brac, books, clothing, cutlery, glassware, kitchen utensils, bedding and linen, while a miscellaneous list and recapitulation of the value of the whole finishes the book.

Every room in the house has its place in the book—chambers, parlors, reception hall, other halls, dining room, library, kitchen and pantries, laundry and cellar, attic or store room, and even the closets. Trunks, boxes and barrels have their places and space for lists of their contents. Nothing is left out.

Recipes.

Marrow Toast.—Buy a large shin bone and have the butcher spit it so the marrow can be taken out. Boil the bone for stock and use the meat to make potted beef. Mix in a hot dish a teaspoon each chopped parsley and lemon juice, half teaspoon salt, a grain of cayenne and several drops of lemon juice. Keep hot, but do not cook away. Have toast prepared and hot. Now prepare the marrow. Cut in slices and boil in one quart salted water just ninety seconds. Mix with the seasoning, spread on the toast and serve at once. All must be hot to be good.

Broiled Vienna Steak.—Have two pounds of round steak cut medium thick. Mix together four table-spoonsful of salad oil and one table-spoonful of minced parsley and a minced slice each of onion and a half table-spoonful of yellow lemon peel. Rub both sides of the meat with this mixture and let stand over night. In the morning drain, but do not wipe, and broil. Dress a half table-spoonful of salt and a pinch of pepper. Drizzle over the broiled steak, dot over with a half table-spoonful of butter broken into bits, and serve on a hot platter. The flavor of meat treated in this way is delicious, and it makes tough steak juicy and tender.

Bath Chaps.—Bath chaps is the fanciful name given a pig's cheek cured and smoked, though there is nothing to prove that the title was gained by the dish having been particularly associated with the City of Bath. They are an exceedingly favorite cold breakfast dish, and can be prepared ready for boiling from most good stores and provision merchants. They should be soaked in cold water for a couple of hours before cooking. Put them on to boil in tepid water, and boil quickly from one to one and one-half hours, according to their size. Allow them to get cold in the liquor. Then lift them out, remove the skin and sprinkle all over with bread rasping. Garnish with parsley.

Earnings of the Railroads.

Fourteen of the sixteen leading railroads in this country show increased net earnings for 1898 over those of 1897.

Parrots cost only fourteen cents each in South America.

SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL.

The rapid displacement of steam by electricity for running small machines is illustrated by a report that comes from Philadelphia. Out of a total of 3573 boilers under inspection in that city, 625 are temporarily out of use, most of them because small electric motors have been substituted, current for the same being furnished by the electric light companies.

A new eradicator is designed to crush gold quartz and other mineral stone on the rolling principle. It is claimed that the new machine is superior to the stamping process, is much cheaper, amalgamates the gold on copper plates behind each roller, and crushes the stone more uniform in size than is done by the stamps. The new machine has heavy rollers, which are allowed to sway freely, and in their rolling crush the quartz. It takes care of half a ton of quartz per hour.

In the use of compressed air for motive purposes it has been customary hitherto to remove the heat of compression before storing the air by passing the air through a coil immersed in water. Thus a certain amount of energy is wasted. Merrill E. Clark, of Worcester, has been lecturing on a new system of using compressed air, and suggests that this cooling operation be omitted. He would use the air immediately after compression. Such a plan would seem to make necessary the conveyance of the compressor (and steam engine that drives it) on the vehicle to be operated by the air motor. In other words, the power station plant would be carried about with the car or wagon—a rather impracticable scheme.

An important discovery has been announced in the French Academy of Medicine by George Jaubert, who has been experimenting on how to supply air or renew oxygen in air for a man in a hermetically enclosed space like a diving-bell. The discoverer's hypothesis was that seventy-nine per cent. of the nitrogen contained in respirable air remains intact after twenty-one per cent. of the oxygen has been consumed, and the same nitrogen, mixed with a new supply of oxygen, becomes respirable air when the carbonic acid and the vapor produced by breathing are removed. He found that his hypothesis was correct, and then discovered that the atmosphere produced by respiration and refreshes automatically the requisite quantity of oxygen. He states that six or eight pounds of this substance will enable a man to live for twenty-four hours in a diving-bell.

The inspection of milk and its sources of supply is of even more importance from a public health point of view than the inspection of meat, since milk is so largely used as the food of infants. Milk, immediately it is taken from the healthy cow, contains no microbes. Bacteria which milk itself is so abundant as 10,000 in one-quarter cubic inch having been detected. The question which naturally presents itself is, "Where do they come from?" From the soiled teats, from the soiled hands of the workers, from the atmosphere of the milking shed, and from the milk themselves. They possess the property of propagating very rapidly. M. de Frensdorich, of the Borne Laboratory, asserts that milk just drawn, containing in one-quarter cubic inch 3000 microbes, seven hours later was found to contain 60,000. After a period of twenty-five hours had elapsed 5,000,000 microbes were present in the same quantity of milk; and if the temperature be raised to ninety-five degrees Fahrenheit the microbial population of the same milk during the same time would reach the enormous total of 82,500,000. Children appear particularly prone to contract consumption through the agency of milk containing tubercle bacilli.

Why He Was Angry.

She had not been married so long that she had broken herself of the habit of occasionally leaning for companionship, and she liked above all things to hear him say how he prized her. But this time he was taken off guard and spoke thoughtlessly.

"It was a twenty-dollar gold piece you gave the minister who married us, wasn't it?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, without looking up from his paper.

"That's a good deal of money, George," she suggested, and then waited for him to throw down his paper and say, "Not for such a treasure," or something like that, but he didn't. Instead he replied with a depth of feeling that was unusual.

"Well, you can just overlastingly bet that it is."

One Man's Food.

According to the Medical Record, a healthy man, with a normal appetite and thirst, living to the age of seventy will have consumed 192,000 pounds of nourishing solid food and liquids. Taking 150 pounds as the average weight of a man he would, by this calculation, masticate and digest the weight of his own body 1250 times.