

## When We Get the Parcels Post.

*How Packages Weighing Eleven Pounds May be Sent Long Distances by Mail at Trifling Cost in Germany, France, England, South Africa, China, and—Some Day—in the United States.*

*Frank Parker Stockridge in World's Work.*

If you happen to live in Phillipstown, U. S. A., and want a dozen fresh-laid eggs every day direct from a farmer, the easiest and cheapest way to get them is to have the farmer send them to you by the newly-established "agricultural parcels post." A dozen eggs weigh about a pound. If the package does not weigh more than an additional quarter-pound, the postage will be six cents, in any kind of postage stamps. Or if you want a couple of pounds of butter, a pot of jam, a jar of honey, a pair of tender young "broilers," or a fat duck, your farmer can wrap them up, put the necessary stamps on them, hand them to the rural carrier the next time that functionary passes, and the parcel will be delivered to you as fast as the mails can carry it. And if your farmer wants tea or tobacco, garden seeds or a cake of yeast, he can telephone or write to the store-keeper at Phillipstown and have the articles mailed at the same rate of postage—six cents for anything up to a pound and a quarter, sixteen cents for a package from three to six pounds in weight, twenty cents if it be more than six and less than nine pounds, and twenty-four cents for any heavier package up to eleven pounds.

That's what you can do if you live in Phillipstown, U. S. A.—Union of South Africa. But if you live in Phillipstown in our U. S. A.—United States of America—you can't do anything of the kind.

To be sure, there are rural carriers traveling once, twice, or three times a day between most of our postoffices and the outlying farms—42,000 of them, covering about a million miles of roads every day, in vehicles perfectly able to take loads of from 100 to 200 pounds over the average road. But they start out from their respective postoffices with average loads of twenty-five pounds and return with practically no loads at all. For in the United States of America we haven't any kind of parcels post at all, except a service that costs so much nobody uses it for anything weighing more than an ounce or two, that limits the weight of parcels carried to a trifling maximum, and that bars from the mails entirely the eggs and butter, honey and jam, and broilers and ducks that the people of Phillipstown, Union of South Africa, can have sent in from the farm, whenever they want them.

For the United States Postoffice charges sixteen cents a pound postage and limits packages to four pounds. So the farmer does not use the mails for his packages. But he does use the rural mail carrier enough to show that a parcels post would be a great service to him; for if he wants packages that are un-mailable or heavier than the four-pound limit delivered to him by rural carrier, he can get them—provided the person who is sending them to him first takes them to the postoffice for the postmaster's inspection, to make sure there is no reasonable excuse for charging postage on them and provided the postmaster then gives his permission for the carrier to take them, and provided the carrier is willing to perform the service and does not charge too heavy a fee for it. But that is the nearest approximation we have to any kind of parcels post. Even under these conditions there were 138,490 packages carried by Rural Free Delivery car-

riers outside the mails, in the month of January, 1910, of a total weight of 914,318 pounds and nine ounces. Nobody knows how much the carriers charged for this service. Whatever profit there was in it went into their pockets. They alone were responsible to the shippers and the consignees, and the Government's only concern was to see that they did not carry anything on which, under the postal laws and regulations, a tax of 16 cents a pound could be levied.

South Africa is a long way off, however, and there are other aspects of the parcels post besides the agricultural one. The shipments of merchandise, gifts, personal effects from city to city is as necessary in modern civilization as is the transportation of commodities to and from the farm. England isn't as far away as South Africa. How do they solve the problem there?

By the general parcels post. Anything and everything, up to eleven pounds in weight and with some reasonable restrictions of the methods of packing and of the bulk of the packages, is carried in the mails—collected from boxes or postal stations and delivered at your house just like letters—at rates that begin at 6 cents for a single pound and end with 22 cents for 11 pounds. But the British Islands are a small country, you may say, and the distances are short. Well, the British Postoffice will carry an 11-pound package 700 miles for 22 cents—as far as from New York to Cincinnati. An American wishing to send the same weight of merchandise 700 miles can ship it by express for from 75 cents up. Or, if it can be divided into two 4-pound packages and one 3-pound package, he can send it by mail for \$1.76, whether it is to go from Boston to San Francisco or from New York to Jersey City. And if you think it is no concern of Americans what the British Postoffice does for the people of the United Kingdom, ponder the fact that the British shipper can address a package to any point in the United States, drop it in the British mails, and have it delivered at its destination in the United States whether that be Sitka or Siasconset, for 61 cents for a 3-pound parcel, 85 cents for a 7-pound parcel, or \$1.09 for an 11-pound parcel. From the port of New York, however, the British parcels post is handled in the United States by the American Express Company, which carries the packages for the foreign Government for 24 cents, while charging American up to \$1.65 for the same service. In sending parcels the other way, however, the charges are entirely different. If an American takes an 11-pound parcel into any American postoffice, he can send it to England for \$1.32 instead of \$1.09, or for 12 cents a pound, but he cannot mail it any price from one American postoffice to another.

Perhaps they order these things better in Germany. In some respects that is true. A person can go shopping in Berlin and have his purchases sent home by parcels post, eleven pounds for six cents, if the distance is ten miles or less; for twelve cents if it is more than ten miles—and there are air-line distances of 850 miles in Germany. But the service of the Imperial German Parcels Post does not stop there. You may add weight to the parcel up to a limit of 110 pounds—actually ship live dogs, goats, bicycles, baby-carriages—any-

thing that will go into a railroad car and does not weigh more than 110 pounds, by mail. The additional postage charges for weights above eleven pounds are arranged on a zone system, beginning with a trifle less than half a cent a pound for 46 miles and running up to about 5½ cents a pound for distances more than 692 miles, for the additional weight. Nor does the Imperial German Parcels Post—a wonderfully efficient institution against which there is no private competition—stop there. For the benefit of the German shipper it carries his parcels to America and delivers them for him to the addresses in New York City, in Brooklyn, Jersey City, or Hoboken with its own wagons, for a maximum charge of 88 cents for an 11-pound parcel from any point in Germany. The blue-painted wagon of the Imperial German Parcels Post may be seen any day in the streets of New York, delivering packages that have been carried possibly 800 miles by rail and certainly 3,000 miles by water, at a total cost of eight cents a pound, though the resident of Hoboken must pay sixteen cents a pound to his own postoffice to send a package across the North River, a scant mile. And if the German package is destined for an interior point, the express company takes it for an additional 24 cents to any part of the United States.

The United States is a big country, and it probably would not be feasible to make a general parcels post rate on the basis of that of Belgium, for instance, where a package of 132 pounds is carried anywhere by post for 22 cents, with an extra charge of only 6 cents for house-to-house collection and delivery and 10 cents more for fast train service. But so is Australia a big country—not so very much smaller than the United States of America—and there one can send parcels of a pound for 12 cents, and 6 cents added for each added pound. European Russia is more than two-thirds as large as the United States and a postage charge of 34 cents carries an 11-pound package by mail to any part of it, and 95 cents will carry the same parcel from St. Petersburg to Saghalien Island, off the eastern coast of Siberia, or to any other point in the Russian Empire. And by paying at approximately the same rate for the additional weight one may post parcels up to 120 pounds in the Russian postoffice and they will be delivered. And if the area covered has any bearing on the question, consider China, half as large again as the United States, with its parcels post rate of a dollar for twenty-two pounds anywhere in the Republic—or Empire—whichever it may happen to be when this is published.

### Why We Haven't Got It.

The question naturally arises. If the parcels post works to the advantage of the public in these countries and the rest of the civilized nations of the world, which all have it, why do we not have it in the United States? Mr. Wanamaker, more than twenty years ago, answered that question. He said, in one of his reports as Postmaster-General, that there were four reasons why we did not have the parcels post—the Adams Express Company, the American Express Company, the United States Express Company, and Wells, Fargo and Company's Express. With ten express companies now doing business, as against four then, there would seem to be a multiplicity of reasons against the parcels post. But two things have happened that had not occurred in Mr. Wanamaker's day in office. Rural free delivery has been established by the postoffice, and the express companies have been placed under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce

Commission. And because of these things, we are going to have the parcels post in the United States—some-time.

Believing in the parcels post, President Taft has recommended it. In a special message to Congress last December he proposed, as a preliminary step, that it should be established on certain selected rural free delivery routes, and that is the way in which it probably will be started. That is the way Postmaster-General Hitchcock wants to try it out. Mr. Hitchcock can hardly be accused of being a parcels post enthusiast. He sees obstacles to the collection and delivery of parcels in the big cities for instance. Likewise, he does not believe in cheap postage, as a general rule. But in his last annual report he advocated the rural free delivery parcels post, and in his testimony before the Senate Committee on Postoffices and Post Roads, on November 13, 1911, he said:

"I favor making a beginning on the rural routes, but that beginning should be followed as rapidly as possible with an extension of the parcels post system to other branches of the postal system. My plan was to start with the rural routes, follow that almost immediately with delivery in the carrier service in cities and towns, and after those two branches of the service were organized, to take over the railway-express business, thus making a general system."

Mr. Hitchcock suggested a rate of twelve cents a pound, with a minimum charge of twelve cents, as a general parcels-post rate, limited to 11-pound parcels.

Congress wants the parcels post, the public want it. Farmers, villagers, city dwellers, business men—excluding certain well-fined classes which will be more specifically identified later—want it—The National Grange and most of the State granges have indorsed it. Labor organizations and woman suffrage associations and consumers' leagues and dozens of other organizations composed of ordinary, average citizens have sent delegations to Washington to demand the parcels post as a matter of right and justice, as a means toward keeping the cost of living down and making it possible for more people to live in the country by establishing better communication between country and city.

### Its Enemies.

Why do we not have the parcels post, then? One of the chief objections to the establishing of it is the argument of "paternalism." Individualists contend that the Government has no right to take over what can be done by private enterprise. This objection, however, is losing much of its force by the mere passage of time. Another potent stock argument is that the express companies are doing the carrying business cheaper than the Government can possibly do it. The first step toward the explosion of this argument was taken when the express companies were placed under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission by the Hepburn Rate Law of 1906. According to their own figures, the entire plants and equipments of the ten express companies doing business in the United States, including all their real estate holdings, could be duplicated for \$29,962,373. That sum represents, however, the investment of earnings and not of original capital, of which it is doubtful if as much as \$1,000,000 was ever invested. The express companies collected among them in the fiscal year ending in 1911, \$141,791,975 gross