

### Western States Rural Free Delivery.

Only a few years ago it would have been necessary to explain, even to a gathering of postmasters, what rural free delivery is. To-day the words, "Rural Free Delivery," and even the letters, "R. F. D.," are as familiar to the mass of the people as the word "Post-office."

For the fiscal year 1897 the total appropriation for rural free delivery was only \$40,000, and the number of routes only 44. As late as 1900 the total appropriation was only \$450,000, and the number of routes only 1,276. Within four years the total appropriation had grown in round numbers to \$13,000,000, and the number of routes to 24,000. For the ensuing fiscal year there will be expended for farmers' free delivery alone the sum of about \$25,000,000.

It is marvellous and astounding development, practically all of it within the space of only ten years, and most of it within four or five years. The farmers of no States in the Union have shared more liberally than those of Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and the west in the blessings of this service. In 1896 the first rural free delivery route in Nebraska was established at Tecumseh, the carrier then receiving \$300 per annum. On May 1st, 1905, there were in operation in this one State 874 routes, with a monthly carrier pay roll of \$50,500, or over \$600,000 annually; the carriers receiving pay at the rate of \$720 a year, and distributing mail to a number of families estimated at 65,000. In Iowa there were 2,076 rural routes, and in Kansas 1,446.

When we remember that, including cities and all non-farming population, there are only 250,000 families in Nebraska, and that large portions of the State are still sparsely settled, we have the astonishing fact that the great majority of those engaged in agricultural industry receive their letters, newspapers and other mail delivered at their very doors at the farm every day.

#### IN DAILY TOUCH WITH EVENTS.

Every day the farmers of this section are in direct touch through the newspapers and their mail with all the happenings of the world, with the market reports and weather forecasts, and with everything that could be of value or interest to them. Not only so, but the rural service enables them to communicate with great rapidity among themselves. The influence of such a system is enormous. It has revolutionized farm life, doing away with its isolation and loneliness. Still less can we set bounds to it as an educational influence.

A system of such manifold blessings, maintained at such cost by the Government, ought to be appreciated. It is new yet and is yet to be completed, and its service developed and improved. The point I want to emphasize is the responsibility of the postmasters for the efficiency of this marvellous system. A vast and complicated machine is required, but, after all, the essential part of the work rests upon the postmasters. The carriers who daily distribute the mails along their routes are under the control of the postmaster from whose office the route emanates. They start from his office, where the mail is prepared, and return to it with their collections. Their conduct, their reports, their relations to the public; in short, the whole service in the first instance falls within their jurisdiction. Under their intelligence, zeal and faithfulness the efficiency of the service depends.

Nothing is more important for the service than good country roads. The farmer can do much by seeing the road authorities, stirring them up, or interesting enterprising patrons in this work.

The farmer likewise can help in securing approved mail boxes. After the department spends millions of dollars to bring the mail home to them, there are not a few farmers who are so neglectful as to have only old broken boxes or wooden boxes that are not waterproof as receptacles for the mail. Surely if this is pressed it can be cured and the boxes placed where they will be convenient, so that the carrier will not have to cross a ditch or lose time, or if it be at a cross-roads, several boxes should be placed at the same corner.

#### COLLISIONS WITH HUMAN NATURE.

In this service we collide with a good deal of human nature. In the original establishment of routes and in their rearrangement, which is often required in laying out county service, nearly every patron is anxious to have the service located so that the mail will be delivered at a box at his front gate. He can show the Government just how the route should run, the main point, in his view, being his own house. But it is, of course, impossible to do this. When a number of persons ride a horse somebody has to ride behind. The rural service has so worked the miracle that the majority may ride in front, that they may get their mail by stepping out of their front door. Yet it is impossible to fix it so that a few will not have to go a quarter or a half of a mile to receive their mail. The rule is, "The greatest good to the greatest number." It is out of the application of this rule, conscientiously and carefully enforced, that a vast mass of protests and complaints, many of them very strenuous, arise.

These difficulties are very perplexing in county service—that is, where a whole county is laid out so that hardly any patron will be more than half a mile distant. There are twenty such counties in Nebraska. There are twenty-one such counties in Iowa.

If a patron has had a box in front of his door and it has to be moved a quarter or a half mile in the rearrangement in order to serve the people of a whole county to best advantage, then Rome is likely to howl!

The planning of a county service is too often a

thankless task for the rural agent who does the work. The many to whom service is extended under the new plan are never heard from, but the few who are discommoded in order that the many may be afforded service often, seemingly without regard for the rights or welfare of their neighbors, send in long protests against the changes. More than half of these protests are signed by many people who are not actually affected, and it is not infrequently the case that such protests—sometimes maliciously, but more often because of a lack of knowledge of the lines of the service under the new arrangement—grossly misrepresent the facts, and in a few cases the agent is villified because of his failure to recommend as close a service as everyone desired, when under the rules of the department he could not do so.

#### NONE PURPOSELY DISCOMMODED.

No one is purposely discommoded in laying out county service or in the location of any route, and this fact cannot be too carefully impressed upon the public mind.

It would be impossible to emphasize in a detailed way all the points that are essential in the daily round of duties to enforce, to maintain the efficiency of the service.

There are innumerable annoyances, it is true, but so there are in any business. It must be remembered that the extension of rural mail delivery into a community does not debar its patrons from receiving at the post office, if called for during the regular office hours, any mail matter that may have arrived after the rural carrier's departure to serve his route. It is not required that a rural patron rent a box in the post office for such local delivery.

Nebraska, Iowa and Kansas have fared well in the rural mail service—no State in the Union has fared better. These people were quick to see its advantages and to demand a share in them. This service puts them in direct communication with the great business, commercial and social world, and they are eager to

roads. It is impossible to put too much stress upon it. In my opinion the department in the future will have to be steadily more strict and severe in the requirements regarding the roads. I do not see how it can take any other course if this service is to be what it ought to be.—[Chas. E. Llewellyn, in Twentieth Century Farmer.]

### Sunny Alberta.

Nineteen hundred and five is Alberta year in the Dominion's history. It's a birthday for us, the dawn of our natural existence, and borne along on a tide of aroused interest, Alberta is keeping pace with these great events and moving with that tide. The population continues to grow at a rate that is astonishing. It's a never-ending story—this drift of settlement, these wagon-tracks across what hitherto was a calm, unbroken plain, these houses and schools, and, finally, a blacksmith shop and a store, the nucleus of a future village, or, who knows, perhaps a city, when the section gang with pick and shovel has prepared the way and led the construction train of some great railway to our doors.

This year, the North, long suffering from a lack of railway facilities, rejoices in the C. N. R., and plans for great things when three railways—the C. N. R., C. P. R., and G. T. P.—all are within their reach. And well may they plan! But their dreams of the present will be outclassed by the realities of the future, when the heritage of the vast, unbroken North comes more fully into our possession. From the banks of the Saskatchewan you may kick with your foot the coal to cook the dinner, and from that fertile valley grows as splendid crops as ever laughed from the golden harvest fields of the world. Fall wheat, spring grains and small fruits are easily grown, and possibly apples, for I have seen them tried experimentally, and certainly they appeared to be a success.

Steadily the Peace River Valley is coming into prominence. Not yet has it caught the drift of settlement; not yet is it advisable that it should, for communications are slow, and the man who enters that domain must pioneer, and pioneer in the truest sense of the term; but the country is there, and some day it will be heard from, and when it does will talk wheat—No. 1 hard—and cattle and horses, and prosperous, happy farmers and added national wealth. Some are sceptical regarding its possibilities as a wheat-growing section, but the Hudson's Bay Company—a concern as conservative as the ages; a company that never makes a move until sure of the ground—has built mills up there, and built them at big expense. These mills are for work. Some wheat is grown there now; more will be grown, and time will prove this statement true.

In the South the sugar beet is a promising crop. The land seems to be particularly adapted to the beet. Strawberries and small fruits do remarkably well. Dairying is also practiced. What more could we want? Strawberries and cream? Yes, and sugar, too—everything you need in Sunny Alberta. The Raymond sugar factory gives every promise of proving a success. The acreage this year under beets has increased, and the prospects are good for a crop.

The fall-wheat harvest is approaching. It's only fifteen years since we first heard of fall wheat in Alberta. To-day the C. P. R. is bringing in seed, and the people talk of thirty and thirty-five and even forty bushels to the acre, and a total yield of — well, this is merely speculative; let the threshing returns speak for themselves. The clovers are making headway; alfalfa is to be seen here and there, and, where the grower knows his business, it looks well, and gives promise of something good for the dairyman and mixed farmer of the future. Dairying is gaining ground, for this is the dairy Province of the West. The work is under Government supervision. A cold-storage plant is in operation at Calgary, and a market for the product is found over the mountains, in British Columbia, in the Yukon, and in Japan. We are looking to the West as well as to the East. There is a great development coming in Japan at the close of this war. The markets of our coast towns and the Yukon belong to us; we stand to profit by our proximity to these places. We have the land, the climate, the people; we can raise the



Alfalfa, Grown near Okotoks, Alta.

use it. They want the daily and weekly newspapers, and they are alert to employ such a powerful agency for business and practical ends.

The demand for rural free delivery service comes from many quarters where as yet it is impossible to meet it. For the good of the service it is necessary for the department in establishing routes to draw the line somewhere. It is absolutely necessary to limit the establishment of the service to sections where the population is sufficiently dense to justify the expense. If there were no requirements with regard to the number of people to be served, the expense of the service would soon reach such proportions as to endanger the popularity of the entire system.

We have in Nebraska, for example, a territory of more than 70,000 square miles, but of very unequal density of population; the heaviest population, of course, being in the eastern and central portions of the state. But our population is rapidly increasing, especially in the western counties. With this increase of population will come an increased demand for rural free delivery service. The department is all the time putting in new routes; it is steadily laying out more county service. The department is under the direction of progressive men, and I am sure it is in sympathy with the purposes of the rural mail service, and has its interest at heart.

With special reference to the service, too much attention cannot be given to the public roads. Much remains to improve the public highways. There is hardly a case but more people could be better accommodated in the installation of service, or fewer people discommoded in the establishment of county service, if our system of public roads were perfected. Complaints of being seriously discommoded because of the arrangement of county service would be lessened by one-half if promises to open and repair roads and bridges were kept. It is too often the case that the department does its part, while those who receive the benefits of the service forget their promises.

I put great stress upon the matter of improving the