

is in my opinion a most important one. Last year when I asked the hon. Postmaster General what he was doing in regard to rural free delivery, I was surprised to hear the answer he gave to the House, and I think that if he investigates the subject, he will admit that his remarks on that occasion were slightly exaggerated. He made the statement that the representatives of the United States had been dragooned into the present legislation. I do not believe the representatives of the United States are the class of people to be dragooned into any legislation that would be against the best interests of the people of that country. The hon. Postmaster General went so far as to say :—

The unfortunate administration is evidently at its wit's end to know what to do with this monster that has been raised up, and has apparently no way of controlling the thing.

Mr. Speaker, it has been my pleasure and privilege to have visited a number of the districts where rural free delivery has been in operation for a number of years, and were a man to stand up in those districts and make such a statement as that, he would have a very cool reception; because I want to assure you that the people of the rural districts around the large cities of the United States are in hearty accord with the administration in granting to them the delivery system which they have at the present time. The hon. minister made the statement that in a few years it would probably cost the people of Canada \$25,000,000 to test rural free delivery. I would ask the hon. gentleman to take into consideration the following statement made by a congressman in a letter which I received to-day—I am sorry to say that the literature which he has forwarded to me has not arrived :

I have sent you a lot of literature on the subject of the free delivery of mails in our rural territory. You will no doubt find in this material a good bit of information. The plan has worked very well with us. I think it makes a good deal of expense, usually creating a deficit of from four to eight millions of dollars yearly. This year the appropriation will be between twenty-three and twenty-five millions of dollars. You see how enormously it has grown in extent and popularity. As a large majority of our people live in rural districts, you will appreciate how greatly interested the country has become.

Now, Mr. Speaker, taking the population of the United States at 72,000,000, with an average deficit of say \$6,000,000 on the rural free delivery system, and taking the population of Canada at 6,000,000, the deficit here would amount to about \$500,000 per annum.

Sir WILLIAM MULOCK. How does the hon. gentleman prove that ?

Mr. ARMSTRONG.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. I am merely proving it by the figures given in the United States.

Sir WILLIAM MULOCK. How does the hon. gentleman prove that the deficit would be in proportion to the population ?

Mr. ARMSTRONG. If the hon. minister will investigate the subject, he will find that the rural free delivery system, instead of extending over the sparsely settled districts, is confined to districts having a certain population, and there is no reason why the expense should be proportionately greater in Canada than it is in the United States. The hon. member for South Simcoe (Mr. Lennox) stated this afternoon that five-sixths of the territory of the United States had already been covered by this system. If that statement is true, we can readily see that the system is not going to be such an extravagant thing for the people of the United States as the hon. minister would lead us to believe. The hon. minister spoke of the cross roads in this country not being settled. If he had investigated the system of the United States, he would have learned that the boxes are placed along the highway, and that the free delivery man is not compelled to go down the side roads unless he is paid extra by the people he is serving. The hon. Postmaster General said to-day that the appropriation in the United States was large. I can only say that that fact should prove to the hon. minister the popularity of the system. I am very glad indeed that the hon. minister referred to the \$14,000,000 deficit, because I understand that that covers all the postal deficiencies of the United States. All that we are asking the hon. Postmaster General to do at the present time is to make a thorough investigation of this matter. Would it not be wise to spend a few thousand dollars in obtaining all the information that could be gathered on the subject in the United States, and giving it to this House and to the people of this country, so as to enable us to judge whether or not the system could be introduced into this country with profit to our people? The present government seems to be legislating and catering to a large extent to the cities, towns and corporations of our country, and sadly neglecting the rural districts. I wish I could impress upon them the necessity of looking after the interests of the farmers of this country. Millions of dollars are voted away in this House each year for the building of piers and improving harbours, a great deal of which we approve of, no doubt; and \$2,000,000 is to be spent in erecting a mint, for which no minister that I have heard has been able yet to give a reasonable excuse. Under these circumstances, would it be asking too much that a few thousand dollars should be spent each year in making a test of the rural free delivery system in our country? If you investigate