

"On the Trail of the Red Letter."

A continuation of the article begun in last issue which traces a letter across the continent.

The Railway Mail Clerk Emerges.

The Red Letter, securely tied in its Wisconsin package with a score of other letters and locked with other packages into its red-tagged pouch, is for the present one of a stack of pouches all alike labeled "N. Y. and Chi. No. 2—Train 35," in one of the letter cars. While it waits there the pleasure of the mail clerks let us look over the train and see how this caravan in which we are to live — and incidentally travel eight hundred miles—during the next twenty-four hours is made up. We climb into overalls and jumper, for mail sacks and pouches are dirty traveling companions, and proceed to a better acquaintance with our surroundings and the Railway Mail Service. Seven cars we have on No. 35, a solid mail train which leaves the Grand Central Station every night in the year at half-past nine and makes a practice of rolling into the La Salle Street Station in Chicago each next night anywhere from five to twenty minutes inside the twenty-four hours.

As we walk through the train, storage cars, dimly lighted tunnels between heaped-up stacks of bulging mail-sacks, alternate with brilliantly illuminated "working cars," condensed post-offices on wheels. There are three storage cars. One is known as the Chicago storage; in it are stacked all the Chicago letter and paper mail originating at New York, the "working" letter mails which are to be distributed on the Middle and West divisions; and paper mails for Detroit, Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, and Buffalo. A second is known as the Minneapolis storage; before the train reaches Chi-

cago all the mails for the Chicago and Minneapolis R. P. O. are assembled in it, and the car is switched by devious ways over to the Union Station, where the mails are transferred and sent out over the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railway. This obviates unloading of the mails at Chicago and sending them across the city in wagons. The third is the Burlington storage, which is treated in the same way as the Minneapolis storage; all the mails which are to go by way of Omaha and San Francisco are assembled in it, the car is sent over to the Union Station and goes out over the Chicago and Council Bluffs R. P. O. The storage cars are deserted, except for conductor and trainmen chatting on a comfortable pile of sacks, an occasional mail clerk culling out pouches for immediate distribution, or a railway porter shifting and piling sacks and pouches. In the working cars, however, is no lack of life. No. 35 carries on the Eastern division a crew of a couple of dozen clerks. Their task is separation, separation, separation—inconstant application to the process which, as we learned on an earlier stage of our journey, is the vital process of the postal service. The Railway Post-Office is the wholly admirable invention which makes it possible for the processes of separation and transportation to go on simultaneously, and saves hours of time by putting the separation case on wheels and sending it careering over the country at forty miles an hour.

An Initiation.

In the fourth car of the train a young man of athletic build and frank, engaging manners is distrib-