

the thin red edge which holds out attention in the column reaches the hand of the feeder at the end of the table and a scarlet flash marks its passage through the machine.

As we stand fascinated by the insatiable appetite of the nervous little demon of steel and nickel and electric energy, the superintendent of the station chants the praises of invention. "Thirty thousand an hour that little fellow can do. Of course we don't keep it fed up to that speed every minute. But," as he reads a dial and hunts out some figures from a record book, "this machine has eaten up seventy-two thousand since two o'clock, that one over there has gobbled another eighty-two thousand, and the third one there eighty-four thousand. A pretty fair record that for a mere sub-station. In the old days it would have kept at least sixteen men pounding away with the old hand stampers to keep ahead of that bunch of work." We ejaculate a tribute to man's ingenuity, and turn to follow the scarlet thread.

The Separation Case.

The "separation case," the next step on our road, is the nucleus of the postal service. The process of getting mail from sender to addressee is composed of two main parts — transportation and separation. Obviously, if I, in New York, am to send a letter to you, in Kankakee, it must be carried from me to you by various agencies—collector, pneumatic tube, railway, wagon, letter-carrier. But, what is not so obvious till the matter is studied a little, if the transportation is to be done as swiftly as possible, the letter must be "sparated" at almost every step of its journey. For our letter is only one of millions; it is only a drop in a swollen stream flowing steadily from big postal centers to big postal centers, continually fed by tributaries along its course, and continually giving off branches to water the adjacent country. So our single letter must go to the separa-

tion case time and again as it is carried along with the stream. We shall see how this vital process works as we follow the Red Letter trail.

The case, on the ledge of which the Red Letter is waiting among a thousand white ones, is the "primary separation case." It is composed of square pigeonholes, and looks like a section of the wall of letter-boxes in small post-offices, except that the open ends of the boxes are towards us. Each pigeonhole bears a label, or the remnants of one, for the clerks soon become so expert that they know the boxes as a man knows the pockets in his clothes. There is a box for each State and one for each of a dozen big cities, which have so much mail sent from this station that it pays to make up a "direct package." But most of the letters in this primary separation are "made up" by States. The process of primary separation is a simple one, but it requires a quick eye, a good memory, and perfect co-ordination between eye and hand; for speed is indispensable—the United States mail must not be delayed.

The clerk gathers a bunch of letters in his hand, glances at the top one, and without a waver sticks it into its proper pigeonhole, giving it a characteristic little flick at the last instant that sends it to the back of the box. Like a high-speed machine he works—except that that glance of the eye introduces the element which puts the gulf between the machine and man—reeling off forty to the minute with hardly a variation. Soon one box, more popular than the others, is full. He takes out the letters, puts a manila "facing slip," bearing the name of the State, the date, and his own initials, on top.

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