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Post Office

Work of One Department for the Year 1916.

The snapshot philosophers who treasure the picture of a well-dressed young man lolling in an office chair and reading the leisurely newspaper as being a true representative of the Civil Service ought to look at the facts as they are presented in any government report. An instance is the report of the Postmaster General for the current fiscal year. This is chosen, not because it is more typical of the Service than any other, but because it deals with matters which come more closely and more intimately into the experience of the average man or woman than any other. To cite the report of Marine and Fisheries, or Interior, or almost any other, might lead to a discussion of many matters with which only experts are familiar. But everybody buys postage stamps, everybody sends and receives letters, and almost everybody has a more or less direct interest in some post office savings bank account or some government annuity contract.

The average man is not aware, for instance, that he posted an average of almost twenty letters every working day during the year 1915—the number for 1916 is not yet given. Yet that is the fact—685,000,000 letters posted in the year, or an average of 5.067 per head of the population, which, at 300 working days to the year, would be an average of over sixteen a day. In 1916 no less a sum than \$20,618,000 was paid for postage stamps. Cut this up into ones and twos and threes and consider how many transactions it makes. The

amount was much larger than in former years, which is to be accounted for, no doubt, by the war tax. While we are at it, let it be stated that the total post office receipts for the year were \$18,858,000, which was enough to pay all expenses and leave a balance on the right side of \$2,850,000. All this money had to be handled in and out in an almost unthinkable number of small transactions. But this was only a small part of the money that post office employees had to account for. They were entrusted with over \$105,000,000 to be paid on account of post office orders and postal notes. The post office savings banks took in \$8,540,000 and paid out within a fraction of \$9,000,000, and it holds to-day over \$40,000,000 for no less than 134,000 people. The Annuities Branch took in \$442,000 in the course of the year and paid out in annuities \$165,000. This Branch now holds \$2,315,000, which is accumulating to meet future demands under the 3,920 contracts already made.

The idea that business of this nature, involving these amounts, and covering half a continent, is to be transacted by any number of young men who spend their time in reading newspapers seems quite a joke.

But to make the joke more perfect, just consider the losses that have taken place. Every last cent of every loss that has been incurred anywhere in the system during the year is set forth in the report with a wealth of detail which the snapshot philosopher can hardly regard as less than meticu-