

# Little Things in a Railway Office.

By Charles Dorian, Sudbury, Ont.

A bank manager, spick and span in neatness, and happy with the reflection that things were running as smoothly as a well oiled dynamo, stepped into a railway office where papers were scattered chaotically and the typewriters jarred raucously. He intended to interview the superintendent but felt instinctively that he would be sworn at.

He was agreeably surprised, of course, to find that the superintendent was the most urbane of men. The appearance of the office had undoubtedly given him the opposite impression. The unit system was in the throes of birth there. The office had just been enlarged, to take in the staffs of the superintendent, assistant superintendent, chief dispatcher, trainmaster, bridge and building master, resident engineer and roadmasters. The movement had been rigidly opposed. Each officer had grown conservative under the old system, and the habits of himself and the staff clung like barnacles. The unit system brought them into the sunlight, where the dust motes were glaringly prominent. Reductions were not made at first, because the system would automatically weed out the ones not fitted to take up the new order of things efficiently and cheerfully.

The first of the many little things to be taught them was order. One clerk had not a square inch of his desk top clear of correspondence, invoices, partly used writing paper, soiled blotters, etc. He had a ruler with a rough edge and a calendar out of date. Somehow he managed to push aside enough of the miscellany to place a dust covered typewriter into position for operation. In his erstwhile cubicle some of this litter often overflowed, but since the private offices were given over to the use of officers only, and the clerical work all done in one big office, a literal clean sweep was imminent. All papers were to be taken off desks at closing time and typewriters put away in a cabinet. The move was taken apathetically at first and it was some time before the desks were absolutely clear at closing time.

In one desk an important file was found beneath a heap of crushed papers, which brought about a further sweep. In the drawers of that desk were stowed each day's stack of unfinished work, in such a state of disorder as to require ten times the work to straighten it out. Mixed in with it were mussy carbon papers, ink stained letter heads, rubbers, pins, pencils, pens, an old cap, a pair of hair brushes—and some pills. It all reflected the state of mind of the man who sat at that desk as plainly as a littered back yard reveals the habits of the tenant. That clerk had his desk publicly cleaned out for him, papers put in order, ink stains removed from the wood, etc. But he had the wrong habits. Instinct prompted him to poke papers into the handiest receptacle, and no amount of drilling would get him to keep his surroundings clean. He had to make room for one who would.

The truly clean will not only bathe frequently, and wear neat clothes, but will contribute to the freshening of their environments. They will not leave it to the office boy to clean the ink wells, or the janitor to wipe the spots off their desks, and the floor and wall in their vicinity. They will, rather, prevent the ink spots from appearing. Cleanliness, then, was

another thing to be taught that staff. The junior clerk, when running off a mimeograph, usually daubed on more ink than was necessary and spilled some on the floor. When he was compelled to clean it up once, he became more careful. It saved work for the janitor. He did not respect the janitor, but he was taught to do so. He was taught the golden rule. Another clerk had a habit of knocking his pipe against a radiator, emptying the tobacco on the floor, and after lighting up, throwing the burnt match in the same direction. This was usually in a vacant private office. Now and then a burning butt of a cigarette would be found on the edge of a desk, the resultant pyrography marring an otherwise handsome piece of furniture.

The care of office equipment was another detail, then, to be taught this errant staff. When a clerk, with a number nine boot, puts it into a waste basket, to press down the contents, the result is a requisition for a new basket. Waste baskets were, however, finally done away with. There are enough drawers in the average desk to reserve one for waste paper. Energy in an office employee is much to be desired but when it slops over it means breakages. Clumsiness in handling typewriters, telephones, filing cabinets and chairs, brings around a big repair bill. When the chief is absent there is likely to be horse play, with the usual toll of broken glass, walls and furniture.

Silence was another of the little things to inculcate. Loud talking was condemned. It disturbed those who were calculating. Whistling and humming were likewise under ban. There was one clerk who invariably started off his day with a loud sneeze, and repeated it occasionally, purposely prolonging the sound. Such things as scraping a chair along the floor, when rising or sitting down, shuffling of feet, opening cabinet drawers loudly, tapping with a pencil, slapping books down hard, stamping letters on a bare desk, instead of using some kind of padding to deaden the sound, were all prominent under the old regime.

Economy had to be preached frequently. Using company's paper and envelopes for private purposes ran away with more stock than one might imagine. Pencils were made to last longer, by a system of exchange. Red carbon paper was made the standard for copies of telegrams. The long sheets were cut in two as the supplies came in, and these half sheets distributed to the clerks who were to use them. A too lavish use of carbon paper invariably resulted in much of it becoming wrinkled. As much as \$2 worth of carbon paper thus spoiled was taken out of one desk. When the distribution was curtailed a saving of 75% on this item alone was noted. In taking stationery from the cabinet where it was kept, it was noticed that some clerks would turn over several packages to get something choice, leaving behind bruised and torn paper. It was the habit of stenographers to throw into the waste basket letterheads and the two accompanying sheets which made up the office record, if they happened to make a typographical error. This was changed. The two under sheets when reversed could be used again and the letterhead saved to be used for memorandum paper. Forms that had served their purpose, or grown obsolete, were used for scribbling paper. Thus the sta-

tionery bill was cut 50%.

Economy in other things came in due course. An electric light was found burning at 8 a.m., had been burning all night, was passed between dark and daylight by at least a dozen employees—and only the last one thought of turning it out. Wasting time is something that only the very conscientious will not do, but when it comes to placing a magazine in the centre drawer of one's desk and snatching surreptitious glances at it, the payroll is due for another trimming. A number of little things that marked improvement would be done by some clerks instinctively, while others learned only by example.

A fountain pen should never be filled until a blotter has been placed under it to catch the possible overflow.

If papers are pinned together, the pin should be put in perpendicularly with the long side of the sheet on the left top side, so that when it is placed in the cabinet for filing it will not tear papers placed beside it. The file number should be placed in the top right corner. It can there be seen at a glance when thumbing the files.

A clerk loses time tearing sheet after sheet off a pad of paper when preparing for typing, it takes so much less time to roll the pad from the loose end back to the gummed edge, the process forcing off the gum and releasing the whole pad for instant use. Stenographers were taught to have their pencils sharpened at both ends and always to have notebook ready and dated, and to spend two minutes in the morning cleaning their typewriters. That two minutes would save two hours some day—the day of a certain big rush.

When all these details were brought out and acted upon the staff was a hundred per cent. smaller and a hundred per cent. more efficient. The bank manager dropped in one morning, six months after his first visit, just before the day's work had commenced and saw rows of shining desks, drawers closed and locked and a general air of freshness about the place. His appraisal of railway offices from that date was more complimentary.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The writer of the foregoing was formerly the C.P.R. Superintendent's chief clerk at Sudbury and is now in the Canadian Copper Co.'s transportation department.]

**Locomotive Manufacturing at Montreal.** — The American Locomotive Co.'s annual report for the year ended June 30 contains the following paragraph: "The munitions work at Richmond, Va., and Montreal, Que., will be completed in Aug. 1917. The work of restoring these plants to locomotive production uses has already been started and when completed the entire capacity of all of the company's plants will be devoted exclusively to the manufacture of locomotives, which are urgently needed abroad as a war necessity, and also by the railways of this country."

The Avon Coal Co. has been incorporated under the New Brunswick Companies Act, with a capital of \$150,000, and offices in Queen's County, to carry on a coal and general mining business, and in connection therewith to construct or acquire tramways, sidings, switches, spur tracks and telegraph lines, and to own and operate steam and other vessels. The provisional directors are: S. M. Jones, Bangor, Me.; Miss A. F. Coughlan, and G. L. Dodge, St. John, N.B.