

The Journal of the American Pharmaceutical Association

Volume I

APRIL, 1912

No. 4

Office of Publication, 79-89 North Third St., Columbus, Ohio.

Subscription, \$3.00 per annum, within the United States. To Canada, \$3.35. To other foreign countries in Postal Union, \$3.50 per annum. Single copies, twenty-five cents.

Entered at the Postoffice at Columbus, Ohio, as Second-Class matter.

Papers and communications for insertion in the JOURNAL should be sent to the Editor, James H. Beal, Scio, Ohio. Subscriptions should be sent to the Treasurer, H. M. Whelpley, 2342 Albion Place, St. Louis, Mo.

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THE PARCELS-POST.

It is an unfortunate characteristic of human nature that a very considerable number of men can be brought to favor almost any political or economic doctrine if they are persistently bombarded with arguments in its favor.

Even the constant iteration of a given doctrine, without any accompanying arguments or evidence, will at length produce a large number of converts, especially if it be judiciously intimated that the triumph of that doctrine will in some way inure to the profit of the persons appealed to.

If, as commonly happens, some men of more or less public prominence can be induced to lend their names to the movement then many other ordinarily reasonable men at once assume that the movement has a substantial basis of reason, and without further thought or investigation lend it their own sanction and support.

Who are the Special Champions of the Parcels-Post?—A brief investigation will disclose the fact that the demand for parcels-post originated with those who had something to sell, and who for either good or bad reasons were not satisfied with existing methods of transportation. There cannot be the slightest doubt that the mail order houses have been first and foremost in the advocacy of this innovation in the mail service, that they are strenuously urging its adoption, and that they have been and still are expending many thousands of dollars in maintaining an energetic propaganda in its favor.

The movement did *not originate with the consumers or purchasers of these goods*, and these did not join in it until they had been persuaded that their interests would be greatly served if the movement should be successful.

Of course the propaganda has been skillfully framed, like every other piece of political shenanigan, to simulate a movement for the general good, inspired by pure philanthropy and financed by those who claim to hold their fortunes in trust for the welfare of humanity.

One hesitates to impugn the motives of the professed altruist, but the very palpable benefits to accrue to the mail order houses through the inauguration of a parcels-post and their lavish expenditure of money in the effort to secure it is as much calculated to arouse suspicion as is a wobbly wooden leg in a dry township.

How Parcels-Post Sentiment is Manufactured to Order.—In a publication devoted to the interests of the mail order houses—for the business has already developed to a point where it is necessary to have its special organs—it is stated that these establishments regularly keep in the field a corps of traveling representatives to visit the rural districts, and while distributing catalogs and soliciting orders are instructed to take part in local social affairs by helping to organize social and literary societies, farmers' "uplift clubs," etc., etc.

"Every one of these special salesmen is furnished with an outlined campaign for both social and regular work, which he is compelled to carry out in the face of the strongest kind of rural competition."

All of these devices are merely "different links in the same string of sausage," the parading of hearts bursting with affection for the interests of the dear "*common pee-pul*," and the bounteous distribution of that favorite confection of the American voter, buncombe pudding with plenty of flapdoodle sauce.

It is these same agents who throng the farmers' institutes lecturing upon the "social uplift," but whose hoisting efforts are confined mainly to boosting parcels-post in the interests of those who pay their salaries.

Are the Parcels-Posters Frank in Their Statements?—A witness in a court of law swears not only to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, but to tell the whole truth. Constructively it is as much a perjury to suppress a material portion of the truth as to make a positive misstatement of fact.

With this thought in mind consider the following statement of an influential magazine which advocates parcels-post:

"Why can the Englishman send a package weighing 11 pounds from one end of his country to the other, while the American can mail nothing over four pounds, and must pay 64 cents for that?"

The facts suppressed are that the combined area of the British Isles is about equal to the area of three average American states, and that the British post serves a population which averages approximately 350 inhabitants to the square mile, while the U. S. post serves a population which averages about 25 inhabitants to the square mile. The obvious intent of the statement quoted is to convey the impression that the American citizen is paying more for the same service than the British citizen, whereas in proportion to the average length of haul the U. S. post is now as cheap if not cheaper than the British post.

The Express-Company Argument.—It is asserted, with almost damnable iteration, that the country is driven to the expedient of parcels-post to protect itself against the extortion of the express companies and other transportation agencies.

That the express companies and railroads have more than once been guilty of

extortion will be admitted by most of their patrons, and hence this assertion at first looks like an argument. But let us see:

By its authority to regulate interstate commerce, the Federal Congress has absolute power to prevent extortion on the part of the transportation companies. Why are the parcels-post advocates not in the ranks of those who are demanding that the government shall exercise this power? Why should the government enter upon the dangerous and costly experiment of parcels-post as a corrective of a condition that Congress can correct by the simple expedient of saying to the express companies and railroads, "Thou shalt not"?

The sarcasm of the argument that the change will punish the railroads becomes apparent when we consider that the change means the transferring of merchandise from the freight train which pays the lowest rate per ton mile, and from the express train, the next lowest, to the mail train which pays the highest rate per ton mile; and that the railroad company will be saved the expense of handling, and have the advantage of dealing only with the Federal Government, always a liberal paymaster, instead of dealing with tens of thousands of individual shippers who are constantly clamoring for better service and lower rates.

Effect on the Small Tradesman.—One effect of a parcels-post stands out with such distinction that only those who are infatuated can fail to see it, namely, that the introduction of this system means certain and irreparable injury to the small tradesmen of the small community, to those dependent upon him, and consequently to the community itself.

Some are persuaded, or say they are, that parcels-post will not really injure the local dealer to any appreciable extent, because the increased trade of the mail order houses will be largely due to the stimulation of the farmer's commercial instinct, and to the creation of a demand for articles which the retail dealer does not carry in stock.

Upon this point the statements of the mail order people certainly ought to be of some weight as evidence. Speaking of the methods to secure business a mail order house publication says:

"The mail order houses are going after business with more determination and a stronger selling force than ever before. They have reached the point where they find it necessary to meet rural competition by resorting to personal work in each community."

If this declaration does not breathe the spirit of competition with local dealers, then we are at fault in its interpretation.

That dealers located in the villages and small towns should take their chance in the race for trade with those who have abundant capital and are located in the large centers of population is conceded, but it should be a fair race and no favors, i. e., the dealers in the large centers should not be aided by government subvention, as parcels-post would be in effect.

It may be asked, if the small merchant cannot meet the competition of the mail order houses under the parcels-post, how can he meet it when express and freight rates are reduced to reasonable figures?

The two cases are not at all parallel. Freight and express rates will never be reduced below the actual cost of carriage plus a reasonable margin of profit to the carrier.

The small tradesman is not asking for any exercise of governmental authority to protect him in his business, he is only protesting against its exercise to crush him by giving his large competitor certain decided advantages in the way of transportation.

Can the Local Dealer Extract Profit from Parcels-Post?—But the local dealer is to have the same privilege of sending and receiving goods through the mails. Is this not giving him the same chance as the great mail order concern? In form, yes; in substance, no.

The opportunity offered to all is one which, in the nature of things, can be utilized only by the few who are located at centers of population, and can command the capital necessary to establish an extensive business organization, to employ high priced business experts, and to do the various other things that big business can do, but which little business cannot.

It would be just as reasonable to say that the exemption of railroads from taxation would be fair to all, because any man might build a railroad if he wanted to, and thus have an investment free from tax.

The claim that parcels-post will benefit the local retailer is at best but graveyard whistling to keep up courage. If it were true then the mail order people who are spending thousands of dollars in a propaganda for something which will only help their competitors, are greatly in need of enlightenment.

Even the advocates of the system admit its possible dangers, by their concession to limit it to "rural free delivery routes."

The success of parcels-post with this limitation we fear would only once more illustrate the story of the camel which being permitted to put his head into his master's tent, ended by thrusting his whole body under the canvas.

The idea that the small retailer will be able to extract any material benefit from parcels-post is a mirage that will disappear in vapor as it is approached.

The Farmer's Part in Parcels-Post.—That the farmer has been enlisted in the movement by an appeal to his self interest, and by persuading him that he has everything to gain and nothing to lose from parcels-post is evident to any one who has taken the pains to study the history of the movement.

But if the farmer is persuaded that the villages and towns of his neighborhood can be destroyed without increasing his taxes, decreasing the value of his lands and injuriously affecting his interests generally—if he believes that a local market for his products can be preserved when he is to do all of the selling and none of the buying therein, then the honest agriculturist is destined to experience one of the shocks that always come to those who collide with the logic of circumstance.

The Milk in the Mail Order Cocoon.—While there may be other reasons as well, there is strong ground for the opinion that the mail order interests desire parcels-post because it will enable them to ship their goods long distances for less than the cost of carriage, instead of paying in proportion to the length of haul as they would have to do with an express company.

The fact that the Postal Department depends upon the profit made on short haul matter to cover the deficit on long haul mail matter may not be greatly objectionable when the mails are confined to letters and to legitimate newspapers and magazines, but it is fundamentally unjust to apply the same rule to freight. Either the short haul people will pay more than the service is worth, or the long haul people will have their goods freighted for less than the service is worth.

The government pays the railroads on the basis of the ton mile for matter transported in its mail cars. Why should not those who ship merchandise by mail be made to pay upon the same basis?

Such a modification of the parcels-post—i. e., to make the charge proportional to the character of the merchandise, its weight and distance carried—would be strictly just, but this would destroy the very thing for which the parcels-posters are striving, namely, *to have their long haul merchandise carried for less than the cost of carriage, and consequently for less than any private corporation would carry it for.*

This is the milk in the parcels-post cocoon, and any amendment of the plan which would prevent the "beating" of the government by the mail order concerns and compel them to pay for the actual cost of the service rendered, would, so far as these pure and undefiled patriots are concerned, kill the parcels-post project too dead for decortication.

J. H. BEAL.



LORD LISTER.

A FEW short weeks ago, England's famous church, Westminster Abbey, received within its historic and venerable walls the mortal remains of perhaps the greatest hero, if heroism may be construed in the light of the greatest service, that England had ever known. "Peace hath her victories no less renowned than war." Such victories for the benefit of mankind Joseph, Baron Lister had won, and won for himself undying fame. Greater honors from a grateful king and country were conferred upon him than upon any medical man in the history of the country. He was made a Lord and given the right to sit amongst England's greatest noblemen in London's famous Parliament House.

Born in 1827, in the comparative infancy of modern science, especially of the healing art, he was spared to a ripe old age that he might with his own eyes see the benefits he had conferred upon suffering humanity. Born in the village of Upton, in the county of Essex, near London, he was an illustration of the fact that great men spring from the ranks of the moderately well-to-do and intelligent. His father was an optician of some note and was able to give his son an education which terminated in graduation in Medicine and Surgery at the London University. At thirty-five he was a teacher of surgery at the Glasgow University and began his investigations leading to his promulgating, about 1869, his antiseptic treatment of wounds and surgical operations. Due chiefly to his methods, the cavities of the body, especially of the abdomen, have been invaded by the surgeon's knife with such triumphant results as to revolutionize surgical practice.

Pharmacists are chiefly interested in the great number of antiseptic dressings which the methods of Lister brought into use, and of which they became the only purveyors and in many instances the manufacturers.

Lister's example of spotless cleanliness has pervaded all our daily lives, military, business and domestic. Every hospital is as a temple to his memory, every soldier's knapsack contains a package of his dressing.

Millions of lives have been saved because he lived. "Peace to his ashes."

THOS. LATHAM.