

(continued from previous page)

besides the foolscap, photographic, and bigger envelopes which had to be stamped by hand with the old country post office familiar de-da thump of the stamper from ink pad to envelope, de-da, de-da, de-da, at an eye-popping rate.

Staggered Hours, Erratic Meals

The huge mail room is warm, not draughty. But what comfort other than warmth can you have if you stand in the same place for hours and hours, sorting, sorting, sorting? Even when you're used to it, they told me, the constant shuffle with the left thumb (which wears a rubber thimble, practically unprocurable now), the constant flick with the right wrist, the right elbow, the right shoulder into a low, a level or a high pigeon-hole, makes you tired, makes you muscle-bound, makes your back ache. The 19 girls and 10 men (with an additional five men for rush hours) in this shift work to-day from 1 to 10 p.m. with a tea hour from 4 to 5, a cup of tea, speedily, at 7 o'clock. Tomorrow they begin at 7 a.m. and finish at 1 p.m.; and beginning again the next day at 1 p.m. They say they like this arrangement, because it gives them a consecutive afternoon and morning free. Many of them are married and have one child or two. But they live with their mothers, and so can leave the children to do a war job. By the time they have done their share of the housework and the children's washing and mending there is not much time for idleness, they say, one of them adding, "but of course we all find our own fun, you know; it's no good being drudges."

I asked one girl how she liked the staggered hours.

"Staggered?" she said. "I work from 8 to 6 with two hours off from 12 till 2. Do you call that staggered?"

"No," I said. "Sorry. I'm the one who's staggered."

"Our meal hours are rather erratic," one of the men said, mildly. "For instance, to-morrow morning most of us will have to have our breakfasts before 6 o'clock to be here by 7. Then we have a cup of tea after 9 and nothing more till we go home after 1 o'clock. The next day we'll have lunch at 12 and be here at 1 o'clock. The tea break is from 4 till 5, cup of tea at 7 and nothing more till we get home at 11 o'clock or so." There is a properly fitted meal room and there are also wash rooms (hot and cold showers) and an enviably comfortable lounge for those with a two-hour break to fill in. But even with these amenities I find "rather erratic" a mild description for the meal hours of the people on the various shifts.

"Of course," said a man sorting a bunch of letters from a trading firm, "if the public would only do progressive posting through the day instead of leaving it all till 5 p.m. we'd be able to take a later tea hour and would arrive home at 11 o'clock a bit less empty than we do these nights. The typists are too busy knitting and doing crossword puzzles and the office boys leave all the stamp-licking to do at once, it seems."

Buffalo-Bill-Day

"What is the worst day of the week?" I asked.

"Friday, for city mail. Monday for country mail," the supervisor said. "And the 20th is the worst day of the month, bill day." I assured him that many Listener readers would agree with him there. All the sorters chorused with a

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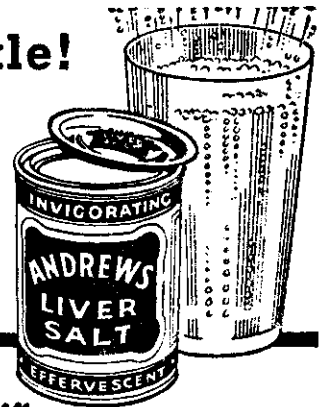
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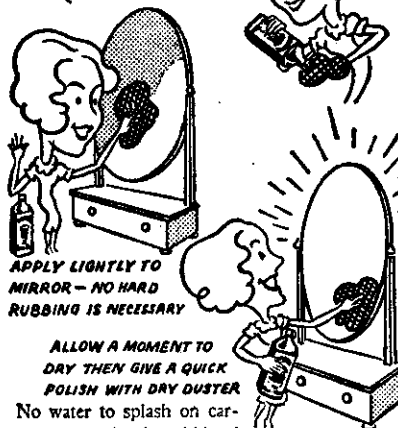
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