



WHILE OTHERS SLEEP

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groan, but did not pause in their hand-flipping movements. The facers-up flapped louder on the facing-up table and sighed "Bill day, oh, the 20th." I asked for a nice, short, succinct definition of Bill Day; but they all held their mouths tightly shut, especially the superintendent.

"Well, what about Christmas?" I asked. Oh Christmas, they all wailed. "You think there's a lot of mail flooding on to that table now — well, you just haven't seen anything. For 10 days before Christmas we worked 13 hours a day every day, and after that we knew what it was to be tired." It was almost a chorus. They had worked from 8 a.m. till 9 p.m. and the next shift had worked from 9 p.m. till 8 a.m. And on Christmas Eve last year the post office handled more mail (local postings) than at any other time in his experience of 38 years, the superintendent said.

In these normal times there is a break of two hours between 10 p.m. when this shift finishes and midnight when the next (midnight to 7 a.m.) comes in. Only men work on the midnight to 7 a.m. shift—dealing with the very heavy mails, including newspapers, going out on the early morning trains.

Some Letters Are Dead

I was appalled by the letter avalanche on the facing-up table; but there were more daunting things in other departments—the zoo, for instance. Here was a beautiful big envelope labelled O.H.M.S. in huge and clear black letters: but the rest of its foot square surface was clean, clear, unmarred by pen or pencil—communication officially presumed dead. Here were puzzle pictures—stamps artistically placed in a heart-shaped pattern, with the address unreadable; a bright green envelope with an address, once written in the top left-hand corner where the stamping marks had obscured it; many more letters gone dead, to any unspecified Mr. Smith, Miss Brown, for a clever post girl to find in some place called OU., PN., DN., WGTN., or CHCH. "We do send them on," said the superintendent, "but all letters addressed to abbreviations should rightly go to the Dead Letter Office. And also we don't send to a *poste restante* address indefinitely—after three months they have to find a house."

"Even in Auckland?"

"Yes. Even in Auckland. Even in Wellington!"

Groans—And Geography

I asked the sorters if the public could do anything to help their work: from the chorus of immediate replies I sorted the following: "If only they'd post early in the day!" "If only they'd write the TOWN in capitals!" "If only they'd put the address in the right place!" (In left lower quarter of envelope face). "If only they'd spell everything and not use initials!" "If only they wouldn't use window envelopes with thick windows!" "If only they'd buy a new typewriter ribbon!" "If only they'd put the stamps at the top where they can be machine-dated!" "If only they'd use their private box numbers!"

"Oh, they're not so bad, really," said a fat man, when the chorus was silent. "We grumble, but we get through it all right. There's lots with worse jobs."

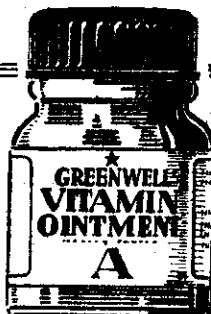
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