

A Letter from Edgar Gustafson

Who is Now Employed in the New York Office of the American Telegraph & Telephone Co.

As you know I am with the American Telephone & Telegraph Co. The general headquarters of the company occupies one of the most conspicuous sky-scrapers on lower Broadway almost exactly midway between the Singer Building and the Metropolitan tower. From our office windows on the twelfth floor we look out on the vast bulks of the Singer Building and the Equitable Life. Wall Street is a stone's throw to the south and the Manhattan terminus of the Brooklyn bridge is about an equal distance to the north-west.

I am in the office of the Commercial Engineer of the Company and am devoting my time to the study of telephone rates. The whole department of some 60 or 70 people is devoted entirely to a study of the many complex phases of telephone rates, telephone "development," and telephone "traffic." To me and my associates has been assigned the problem of toll telephone rates. Just now we are working on several volumes of statistics of Colorado toll rate information. It is our problem to be able to estimate with tolerable accuracy the number of telephone messages which will "flow" from one town to any other town, or all other towns, knowing the social, commercial, and industrial characteristics of the several towns. After the Colorado study has been made it is expected that valuable principles will have been derived on the strength of which it will be possible to make estimates for the telephone toll "traffic" in any part of the country.

Among other things we have in our office a record of every toll message which originated from every telephone station in the state of North Dakota during an entire month during 1915. In all there is 2,300,000 messages.

After all, New York is pretty much the same as any other city in this country. We hear much of its bustle and life. But I have not been impressed by them. I think westerners accomplish a good deal more in a day than do New Yorkers. Most of the hustle is observed in the crowds rushing to get to the subway or elevated trains. As far as being a speeder at his work goes, I think the New Yorker is far less likely to get pinched for traveling too fast than the western business man.

There are certain things about the city which have appealed to me as being unique, and I shall set them down at random:

1. The absence of homes. Put conversely—the great development of apartment houses. One is no sooner out of the down-town business section but one sees nothing but miles and miles of apartment houses. It is only on the fringes of the boroughs of Brooklyn and the Bronx

that one sees individual living houses. Everywhere on Manhattan island and for miles into the surrounding boroughs, there is the same monotonous sight of 5-6 story "flat" buildings. Naturally, life in an apartment does not develop very strong ties of affection for home as a particular place. On the whole, therefore, home-life is a very small part of the New Yorker's existence. If he is a Jew he gets some chairs and sits down with his family out on the sidewalk or in the street; if he is more "Americanized" he goes to the theatre or a cabaret.

Another evidence of the neglect of the development of a home life by the average New Yorker is the very great number of restaurants and cafes which can be found everywhere. Most families very frequently take their dinners at such places, thus avoiding the trouble of house-keeping. By eliminating this burden, women who do not find diversion in intellectual and cultural attainments are rather at a loss as to what on earth to do. At least I should think they would be. One of the things they do, I shall mention below.

2. Dogs. There are millions of dogs in New York City. But all of them are very nice little dogs. They have wire muzzles on and have a bath every morning. Also each of them has a chain on and at the other end of the chain is the dog's woman. Oh no, it is not only the women of the idle rich who have dogs. It seems that they all have them. And the reason why there are so many dogs is probably because every woman who has one can then at least go out walking with him.

3. Newspapers. Everybody here reads newspapers. Not necessarily any better than newspapers in other cities, but for two main reasons: (a) They cost one cent apiece. (b) Each New Yorker spends about an hour a day or more riding on the subway or the elevated railway and has time on his hands.

4. The helplessness of the automobile. During the lunch hour, and during the morning and evening hours, the hundreds of thousands of men, women, boys and girls, who work in the great office buildings of lower Manhattan pour out onto the sidewalk, the curb and the street in great moving assemblies. Street cars and automobiles are absolutely helpless. They must stand patiently aside or merely crawl along until the great streams of humanity have poured past. In no other large city have I noticed the humble pedestrian so completely to take possession of street traffic. Mere numbers enables him to maintain his right of walking wherever and whenever he pleases.