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## THE BRISTOL ROYAL MAIL.

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THE POSTMASTER'S OFFICE, BRISTOL.  
*From a photograph by Mr. Protheroe, Wine St., Bristol.*



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**The  
Bristol Royal Mail.**

**POST, TELEGRAPH, AND  
TELEPHONE.**

BY

**R. C. TOMBS,**

*Postmaster of Bristol,  
Ex-Controller of the London Postal Service.*

**BRISTOL:**  
J. W. ARROWSMITH, 11 QUAY STREET.

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## PREFACE.

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In these days when books on every conceivable subject are written in their thousands annually; when monthly journals are produced by scores, and daily newspapers in hundreds, to supply the public with a record of the world's doings; and when readers are found for them all, it may not be thought unfitting that each large mail centre in the United Kingdom which contributes by its postal and telegraph organisation to the dissemination of much of this literature, should in its turn have some record of its own doings. This present compilation has, therefore, been undertaken with that object in view, as regards the Bristol Post Office, and in the hope that the facts, figures, and incidents contained in it relating to past doings and present days and present ways may prove of interest to the inhabitants of the County and City, and its surrounding districts, and in an unpretentious way commence, or add to, local Post Office history, and demonstrate that though Bristol is not, unfortunately, the leading provincial seaport, as of yore, she has not lagged one step behind her competitors in respect of postal progress.

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The profit which may accrue from the publication of *The Bristol Royal Mail* will be devoted exclusively to the Rowland Hill Memorial and Benevolent Fund, the chief patron of which is Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen-Empress, who is about to show her great interest in works of the kind by visiting our ancient city to open the new Convalescent Home. The object of the fund is the relief of all Post Office servants throughout the United Kingdom, who, through no fault of their own, have fallen into necessitous circumstances. It also affords assistance to their widows and orphans, for whom no provision is made under the Superannuation Acts. The fund is managed by a body of trustees, who are assisted by a committee of recommendation composed of officers of the Post Office. The trustees are well-known gentlemen of high standing and repute in the city of London, to whose benevolent efforts on behalf of the department the fund owes its origin. The Superannuation Acts afford pensions to those who have been in the Post Office not less than ten years. Sometimes a deserving and distressed Post Office servant has not served long enough to qualify for a pension, and sometimes help is needed by persons whose time has been partly spent in the postal service, but who, because they have been permitted to carry on some other occupation, are not entitled by law to any pension at all. A pension, even if it should prove to be sufficient for the pensioner's own support, ceases at death, and the widow and orphans are often left destitute. There are more than eighty-one thousand, and, counting those employed only a portion of their time, nearly one hundred and fifty thousand servants in the Post Office; and in comparison with the number of persons amongst whom cases needing relief may arise, the assured income at the disposal of the trustees of the fund is still inadequate. In the period since 1893 the trustees have granted to necessitous cases in the Bristol district £120, so that any proceeds from the sale of this book will be bestowed where such bestowal is certainly due.

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It is right to state that some of the information in these pages has been derived from *The History of the Post Office*, by the late Mr. Herbert Joyce, C.B.; *Forty Years at the Post Office*, by Mr. F. E. Baines, C.B.; *The Royal Mail*, by Mr. J. Wilson Hyde; and from *St. Martin's-le-Grand Magazine*, also Latimer's *Annals of Bristol*. Thanks are due also to Mr. Norris Mathews, the Bristol City Librarian, for his courtesy in permitting and facilitating access to old records in the Public Library; to Mr. H. J. Spear, Secretary to the Chamber of Commerce; to the proprietors of the *Times and Mirror*, for allowing inspection of their old files; and for illustrations to Mr. A. F. Walbrook, of the *Bath Chronicle*; to the proprietor, *Black and White*, and many others whose kindness is hereby acknowledged.

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## THE BRISTOL ROYAL MAIL.

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# CHAPTER I.

1532-1764.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAIL SERVICES.

RALPH ALLEN.

It appears that before Post Offices were established special messengers were employed to carry letters. It is recorded that such a special messenger was paid the sum of one penny for carrying a letter from Bristol to London in the year 1532, but the record affords no further particulars as to the service, and the assumption is that the special messenger was, in his own person, a rough-and-ready "post." Later on, a post would be suddenly established for a particular purpose, and as soon abandoned when no longer specially required. Thus in the year 1621 a post to Ireland—Irish firms being then considered to require "oftener despatches and more expedition"—was set up by way of Bristol, only to be discontinued in a few years.

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RALPH ALLEN.

*By permission of the Proprietor of "The Bath and County Graphic."*

There was in 1660 a direct but irregular post between London and some of the larger provincial towns, but there were no cross posts between two towns not being on the same post road. Letters could only circulate from one post road to another through London, and such circulation through London involved additional rates of postage. Bristol and Exeter are less than eighty miles apart, but, not being on the same post road, letters from one place to the other passed through London, and were charged, if single, 6d., thus:—one rate of 3d. from Exeter to London, and another rate of 3d. from London to Bristol. This was in conformity with a system established in the reign of Charles II. That system went on until 1696 when a post was established between Bristol and Exeter, that being the first cross post in the kingdom authorised by the Monarch's own personal assent. From Bristol the posts went on Mondays and Fridays, starting at 10.0 in the morning. The posts left Exeter on Wednesdays and Saturdays at 4.0 in the afternoon, and arrived at Bristol at the same hour on the following days. Under this cross post plan, the two towns being less than eighty miles apart, the charge was reduced to 2d. for a single letter. In three or four years the new post produced a profit of £250 a year. In 1678 Provost Campbell established a coach to run from Glasgow to Edinburgh, "drawn by six able horses, to leave Edinboro'

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ilk Monday morning, and return again (God willing) ilk Saturday night." In 1700 the service between Bristol and London became fixed, and on alternate days at irregular hours, depending upon the state of the weather and the roads, the extent of the journey and the caprices of the postboys and the sorry nags that carried them, the mail arrived in Bristol. There were, however, only a mere handful of letters and newspapers. At the end of the same year, the Post Office authorities in London, after being earnestly petitioned by local merchants, counselled the Government to establish a "cross post" from this city to Chester. Up to that time the Bristol letters to Chester, Shrewsbury, Worcester, and Gloucester had been carried round by London under the system already described, involving double postage and great delay. The effect of this system, as on the Bristol and Exeter road, had been to throw nearly all the letters into the hands of public carriers, by whose wagons they were conveyed more quickly than by the postboys through London, and at a cheaper rate. Moved by the success of the new cross posts from Bristol to Exeter, the Treasury consented to the starting of the Chester service. The Post Office reported to the Treasury in March, 1702, that the profit for the first eighteen months of the Chester service had been about £156. The accounts of Henry Pyne, the Bristol postmaster, appended to the report in the State papers, show that so far as this part of the service was concerned, he had received £168 for letters by this post, whilst his expenses had been £60.

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The people of Cirencester and Exeter, hearing of the Chester concession, hastened to complain of shortcomings affecting themselves. The Devon clothiers had a considerable trade with the wool dealers of the district of Cirencester, which town was served by the postboys riding between Gloucester and London, with a branch postboy mail to Wotton-under-Edge. By there being no direct postal service of any kind between Bristol and Wotton-under-Edge, correspondence between Exeter and Cirencester had to be sent *viâ* London, and a fortnight elapsed between the despatch of a letter and the receipt of an answer, the result being that not one letter in twenty was sent through the post. All that was needed to shorten the transit from fourteen days to four was to put Bristol in direct communication with Wotton, the expense being estimated at only £30 a year. The Government declined to comply with this reasonable request, and nothing was done!

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PRIOR PARK, BATH.  
*(Formerly residence of Ralph Allen.)*

*By permission of the Proprietor of "The Bath and County Graphic."*

Soon after this time a Post Office reformer arose in our immediate district in the person of Ralph Allen. He, unlike later reformers, passed all his working days in the Post Office service. Born at the "Duke William Inn," at St. Blazey Highway, in Cornwall in about 1693, he went as a boy to help his grandmother, who was postmistress at St. Columb. In 1710 he was transferred as a clerk to Bath, and on the 26th March, 1712, he became postmaster of that city, in succession to one Mary Collins, and in that year appears to have taken over the management of the Bristol and Exeter Cross Road Post, previously farmed by Joseph Quash, postmaster of Exeter. In 1720 Ralph Allen contracted to farm the cross-country posts throughout the country generally, and to carry the mails by what were subsequently known as "Allen's Postboys," who were supposed to travel on horseback at a pace averaging five miles an hour. A robbery from these postboys carrying the mails between London and Bristol was a common occurrence. Two men were executed in April, 1720, for having twice committed that crime, yet the letter bags were again stolen seven times during the following twelve months. The *London Journal* of August 27th remarked: "It is computed that the traders of Bristol have received £60,000 damages by the late robberies of the mail." In 1722 the postboys were robbed twice in a single week, and for the crimes three men were executed in London. Another incident of the kind worthy of mentioning occurred in September, 1738. The bag then carried off by three highwaymen contained a reprieve for a man lying under sentence of death in Newgate, and a second reprieve despatched after the robbery became known would have arrived too late to save the man's life, had not the magistrates postponed the execution for a day or two in order that it might not clash with the festivities of a new Mayor's inauguration.

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About 1732 the Bristol riding boys were deprived of their perquisite of 1d. a letter for "dropping of letters" at the towns and villages through which they passed. This was done because the postboys not only carried letters which they picked up on the road and did not account for at the next post office of call, but even went to the length of taking out letters from the mail bags when those bags were, as was the case sometimes, not properly chained and sealed. In connection with Ralph Allen's "By-Posts," in the year 1735 arrangements were made so that the mails sent from Manchester, Liverpool, or any other place in Lancashire, to Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Devon, etc., might be answered four days sooner than they could possibly have been answered before. In 1740 a new branch by-post was established from Bristol and Bath to Salisbury, through Bradford, Trowbridge, Devizes, Lavington, Tinhead, Westbury, Warminster, Heytesbury, and Wilton. In 1741 the growth of trade and population encouraged the Bristol citizens to appeal to the Ministry for an improvement in the postal communication with London, which was still limited to three days per week. Yielding to this pressure, Allen converted the tri-weekly posts into six-day posts in June, 1741. The post began to run every day of the week, except Sunday, between London and Bristol, and all intervening towns participated in the benefit. In 1746 a further extension took place, whereby letters were conveyed six days in every week, instead of three days, at Mr. Allen's expense, between London and Wells, Bridgwater, Taunton, Wellington, Tiverton, and Exeter, through Bristol. The mail service is not in further evidence in local history until 1753, when the Bristol merchants again showed themselves tenacious of their rights, and waged a bitter war against the Postmasters-General in respect of the imposition of a double rate of postage on letters which, although under an ounce in weight, contained patterns of silk or cotton or samples of grain. There was a lawsuit, and the Bristol merchants won it.

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A Government notification in the local newspapers of the 4th September, 1752, announced an acceleration of the mails between the Southern Counties and Bristol. In future a postboy was to leave Salisbury on Mondays at six o'clock in the morning, to arrive at Bath (a distance of about thirty-nine miles) at eight or nine at night, and to leave Bath for Bristol at six next morning. On Wednesdays and Fridays the departure from Salisbury was in the evening, the journey occupying about nineteen hours. By this arrangement letters from Portsmouth were received in this city two days earlier than before.

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RALPH ALLEN'S TOWN HOUSE IN BATH.  
*By kind permission of the Proprietor of the  
 "Bath and County Graphic."*

Ralph Allen's improvements had great influence in the Post Office services in this western city. The profits on the contracts enabled Allen to take up his residence at Prior Park, Bath, one of the finest Italian houses in England, in addition to having a grand house in the City. It is said that the profits which accrued to him from his long contracts amounted to about half a million of money.

Mansions so lordly are not for the hardest and best workers in the Post Office field of present times, for the nation does not reward its great men so liberally as then. Nowadays an introducer of the inland parcel post service, the foreign parcel post service, an improver of the telegraph service, and leader in bringing about vastly accelerated mail services throughout the country,—works of great moment, even if not comparable with Ralph Allen, John Palmer, or Rowland Hill's great achievements,—has, after forty years at the Post Office, to be contented on retirement with no more than the modest pension due to him, which will not even be continued to his nearest and dearest relative.

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Allen benefited the Bristol postal district in another way than by his improved Post Office services when he built the bridge over the Avon at Newton-St.-Loe at a cost of £4,000. He was buried in Claverton Churchyard, near Bath. The inscription on his tomb runs thus:—"Beneath this Monument lieth entombed the Body of Ralph Allen, Esqr., of Prior Park, who departed this life y<sup>e</sup> 29th day of June, 1764, in the 71st year of his Age. In full hope of everlasting happiness in another state thro' the infinite merit and mediation of our blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ."

Ralph Allen did not hoard up his money or spend it on riotous living, but bestowed a considerable portion of his income in works of charity, especially in supporting needy men of letters. He was a great friend and benefactor of Fielding, and in *Tom Jones* the novelist has gratefully drawn Mr. Allen's character in the person of Squire Alworthy. He enjoyed the friendship of Chatham and Pitt; and Pope, Warburton, and other men of literary distinction were his familiar companions. Pope has celebrated one of his principal virtues—unassuming benevolence—in the well-known lines:

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"Let humble Allen, with an awkward shame,  
 Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame."

Derrick has thus described Allen's personal appearance shortly before his death: "He is a very grave, well-looking man, plain in his dress, resembling that of a Quaker, and courteous in his behaviour. I suppose he cannot be much under seventy. His wife is low, with grey hair, and of a very pleasing address." Kilvert says that he was rather above the middle size and stoutly built, and that he was not altogether averse to a little state, as he often used to drive into Bath in a coach and four. His handwriting was very curious; he evidently wrote quickly and fluently, but it was so overloaded with curls and flourishes as to be sometimes scarcely legible.

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The lack of all show about his garb seems to have somewhat annoyed Philip Thicknesse, the well-known author of one of the Bath Guides, for he speaks of Allen's "plain linen shirt-sleeves, with only a chitterling up the slit."





RALPH ALLEN'S TOMB IN CLAVERTON CHURCHYARD, NEAR BATH.  
*By kind permission of the Proprietor of the "Bath and County Graphic."*

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## CHAPTER II.

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1770-1818.

### MAIL COACH ERA.—JOHN PALMER.

Notwithstanding Ralph Allen's innovations, the conveyance of letters between the principal towns was carried on in a more or less desultory fashion. Speaking of the want of improvement in 1770, and the haphazard system under which Post Office business was conducted, a local newspaper gave this instance of unpunctuality: "The London Mail did not arrive so soon by several hours as usual on Monday, owing to the mailman getting a little intoxicated on his way between Newbury and Marlborough, and falling from his horse into a hedge, where he was found asleep, by means of his dog." Mr. Weeks, who entered upon "The Bush," Bristol, in 1772, after ineffectually urging the proprietors to quicken their speed, started a one day coach to Birmingham himself, and carried it on against a bitter opposition, charging the passengers only 10s. 6d. and 8s. 6d. for inside and outside seats respectively, and giving each one of them a dinner and a pint of wine at Gloucester into the bargain. After two years' struggle his opponents gave in, and one day journeys to Birmingham became the established rule.

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JOHN PALMER.  
THE FOUNDER OF THE MAIL COACH SYSTEM.  
*By kind permission of the Proprietor of the "Bath and County Graphic."*

The mail service was carried on chiefly by means of postboys (generally wizened old men), who continued to travel on worn-out horses not able to get along at a speed of more than four miles an hour on the bad roads. On the London and Bristol route, indeed, it had been found necessary to provide the postboys with light carts, but that method of conveyance of the mail bags brought about no acceleration in time of transit,—from thirty to forty hours, according to the state of the roads. A letter despatched from Bristol or Bath on Monday was not delivered in London until Wednesday morning. On the other hand a letter confided to the stage coach of Monday reached its destination on Tuesday morning, and the consequence was that Bristol traders and others sent letters of value or urgency by the stage coach, although the proprietors charged 2s. for each missive.

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At this period John Palmer, of Bath, came on the scene. He had learnt from the merchants of Bristol what a boon it would be if they could get their letters conveyed to London in fourteen or fifteen hours, instead of three days. It is said, however, that it was the sight of Ralph Allen's grand place at Prior Park, and the knowledge of how Allen's money had been made, which first suggested to Palmer the attempt to bring a scheme for a mail coach system to the notice of the postal authorities. John Palmer was lessee and manager of the Bath and Bristol theatres, and went about beating up actors, actresses and companies in postchaises, and he thought letters should be carried at the same pace at which it was possible to travel in a chaise. He devised a scheme, and Pitt, the Prime Minister of the day, who warmly approved the idea, decided that the plan should have a trial and that the first mail coach should run between London and Bristol. On Saturday, the 31st July, 1784, an agreement was signed in connection with Palmer's scheme under which, in consideration of payment of 3d. a mile, five inn-holders—one belonging to London, one to Thatcham, one to Marlborough, and two to Bath—undertook to provide the horses, and on Monday, the 2nd August, 1784, the first "mail coach" started. On its first journey it ran from Bristol,—not from London as generally supposed,—and Palmer was present to see it off. A well-armed mail guard in uniform was in charge of the vehicle, which was timed to perform the journey from Bristol to London in sixteen hours. Only four passengers were at first carried by each "machine," and the fare was £1 8s. The immediate effect was to accelerate the delivery of letters by a day. The coaches were small, light vehicles, drawn by a pair of horses only, but leaders were subsequently added, and four-horse coaches soon became the order of the day, and more passengers were carried. An old painting represents the Bath and Bristol mail trotting along close to a wall, the guard receiving one bag and handing another to the postmaster without the coachman pulling up. One coach left Bristol at 4.0 in the afternoon, reached Bath a couple of hours later, and arrived at the General Post Office, London, before 8.0 the next morning. The down coach started from London at 8.0 in the evening, was at the "Three Tuns," Bath, at a few minutes before 10.0 the next morning, and pulled up at the "Rummer Tavern," Bristol, at noon. Palmer gave up his theatrical enterprises and entered the service of the Post Office as Comptroller at a salary of £1,500 a year, and certain emoluments, which, after a year or two, brought him in an annual sum of more than £3,000. Before Palmer's mail coaches were at work the post left London at all hours of the night, but it was part of his scheme that the mails should all leave at the same time, 8.0; and as the number of mails increased so there was more and more bustle in the vicinity of the General Post Office at that hour. In London the arrival of all the mails was awaited before any one of them was delivered; and this led to the delivery sometimes not taking place until 3.0 or 4.0 in the afternoon, or even later. Palmer, with his regard for the Bristol coach, occasionally had the Bristol mails distributed immediately on reaching St. Martin's-le-Grand, but all other mails if behind were kept waiting as before.

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OLD ENGLISH "FLYING" MAIL COACH.

Upon the beginning of Palmer's system on the Bristol road a marvellous superstructure was raised. Coaches were at once applied for by the municipalities of the largest towns, Liverpool being the first to aim at equality with Bristol, and York claiming what was due to the great highway to the North. Palmer's plan made rapid progress and was attended with complete success. A splendid mail service was eventually set up all over the country. One result was that the "expresses" to Bristol, which before had been as many as two hundred in the year, ceased altogether. In July, 1787, the mails from Bristol to Birmingham and the North, previously three per week, were ordered to be run daily. The London to Bristol coach was stopped by other means than those employed by highwaymen, the service having at one time in 1790 been suspended for several days by Palmer, in defiance of the Postmaster-General.

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In Bonner and Middleton's (weekly) *Journal* for the 11th February, 1792, is an announcement to the effect that the Irish mails arrived in Bristol on the 6th instant instead of on the first of the month. The bare fact was stated, and the assumption is, therefore, that it was not an unusual circumstance. Five days' delay would be thought intolerable now, as, indeed, is the present length of time occupied by the Irish night mails on their journey to Bristol. After being conveyed by fast boat to Holyhead and express train to Birmingham, they come on from that city by a "crawler" and do not reach Bristol until nearly the mid-day hour.

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In the same year (1792) sixteen mail coaches worked in and out of London every day. There were fifteen cross-country mail coaches, as, for instance, the coach between Bristol and Oxford, or, as it was commonly called, Mr. Pickwick's coach. During winter, in frosty weather, at this period, some of the mail coaches did not run at all, but were laid up for the season, like ships during Arctic frosts.

There is a model of an old mail coach at the General Post Office, St. Martin's-le-Grand, London, popularly supposed to be the model of the first mail coach which was built, but such is not the case, for, as already stated, the first mail coach ran between Bristol and London, and the model has upon it the inscription "Royal Mail from London to Liverpool."

The expense of horsing a four-horsed coach running at the speed of from nine to ten miles an hour was reckoned at £3 a double mile. Mails were exempt from turnpike tolls.

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With the introduction of the mail coaches with well-armed, resolute guards, there was a cessation of mail robberies on the main roads. Pilfering, however, was occasionally carried on; for instance, in the early winter of 1794 one Thomas Thomas travelled day after day up and down on the London and Bristol coach. At last his opportunity came when the guard temporarily left his coach with the mailbox unlocked, and then Thomas Thomas looted the mails. On the cross roads the saddle horse and cart posts were frequently stopped and robbed (1796). One of the worst roads in this respect was that between Bristol and Portsmouth. Proposals for the postboys to be furnished with pistols, cutlasses, and caps lined with metal, like hunting caps, for the defence of the head, fell through on account of the expense which their supply would have entailed.

There exists a popular belief that the mail coaches were driven up and down the steep Queen Street in Bristol now known as Christmas Steps. The belief is erroneous, for an inscription over the recessed seats at the top of the passage tells us that—

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"This STREETE WAS STEPPERED DONE  
& Finished, September, 1669.  
The Right Worpfl Thomas Stevens,  
Esqr. Mayor.

Named QVEENE STREETE."

Probably, however, the postboys who carried the mails in earlier days rode up the steep incline.

A gentleman now writing in the *Bristol Times and Mirror* under the *nom-de-plume* of "Old File," delving in the historical garden of *Felix Farley's Journal*, has unearthed the following very interesting announcements and advertisements, which throw light on the mail services of the time:—

"MILFORD AND BRECKNOCK MAIL COACH.

"A coach sets out from the 'White Hart,' Broad Street, Bristol, over the Old Passage (Aust), every Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday, at noon, and joins the above coach at Ragland the same day; and a corresponding coach returns from Milford on certain days." The chief point in the advertisement was in the paragraph: "N.B.—This road is nineteen miles nearer to Carmarthen and Milford than the lower one," that is, by the New Passage.

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This was replied to by another advertisement, as follows:

"A CAUTION.—The public will please to observe that no other mail coach whatever does now, or ever has, run from Bristol to Milford Haven, excepting the Royal London, Bath, Bristol, and Milford Haven mail coach, which sets out from the 'Bush Inn and Tavern,' Corn Street, every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, and the mail coach to Swansea every day from the same inn, notwithstanding the flaming advertisement of a certain set of men to deceive and mislead the public, by their asserting that the road over the Old Passage is nineteen miles nearer than that over the New Passage, which is so far from being a fact that the road of the New Passage is seven and three-quarters nearer, as was proved by admeasurement by orders of the office, making a difference of twenty-six miles and three-quarters nearer the lower (that is, the New Passage) than the upper road."

On August 4th the proprietors of the New Passage coach came out with a larger announcement, and produced figures to prove their assertion—

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"N.B.—This road is nineteen miles nearer to Milford than the lower one, viz:—

UPPER ROAD.		LOWER ROAD.	
	Miles.		Miles.
Old Passage	11	New Passage	10
Across the Water	1	Across the Water	3

Ragland	14	Newport	15
Abergavenny	9	Cardiff	12
Brecknock	19	Cowbridge	12
Trecastle	10	Pill	12
Llandoverly	9	Neath	13
Llandilo	12	Ponterdilas	10
Carmarthen	15	Kidwelly	14
St. Clare's	9	Carmarthen	9
Narberth	13	St. Clare's	9
Haverford-West	10	Narberth	13
Milford	10	Haverford-West	10
		Milford	10
	---		---
Total	142	Total	161

In favour of the Upper Road, 19 miles."

"BRISTOL, *4th January, 1799.*

"Lost, on Monday morning, small letter-bag, marked on it 'Worcester and Bristol.' Whoever has found the same shall, on delivering it at the Post Office, receive five guineas reward; and whoever detains it after this notice will be prosecuted."

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"GENERAL POST OFFICE,  
*Friday, 15th February, 1799.*

"George Evans, of Steep Street, St. Michael's, in the City of Bristol, Grocer, having been committed to the Gaol of Newgate, in the said City, charged with feloniously negotiating two Bills of Exchange contained in the bag of letters from Worcester for Bristol of the 30th December last, which was lost or stolen, and there being great reason to believe that one or more person or persons is or are privy to or concerned with him in the said felony: Whoever will give information at the Council Chamber in Bristol within one month from the date hereof, so that the said George Evans may be convicted of the offence with which he is charged, shall be entitled to a reward of fifty pounds. And if an accomplice shall make discovery he will also receive His Majesty's most gracious pardon.

"By command of the Postmaster-General.

"FRANCIS FREELING, Secretary."

*June 29th, 1799.*

"We understand that a bill for £50, drawn by the Worcester Bank on Messrs. Harfords, Davis and Co., of this City, and which was one of the bills contained in the Worcester bag lost on the 31st December last, has been presented within these few days for payment—a circumstance which may probably lead to the discovery of the party who found the said bag."

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*August 10th.*

"Last week George Evans, who was tried at the Old Bailey in June last on a charge of forging endorsements on two bills (which, with many others, were contained in the Worcester bag destined for this City that was lost on the 21st December last, and of which intelligence has since been obtained), but who was acquitted for want of sufficient evidence, was again apprehended, and was committed to gaol on a charge of having stolen a promissory note, drawn by Messrs. Harfords, Davis and Co., of this City, value fifty pounds, which note was likewise sent by the same conveyance from Worcester, and being attempted to be negotiated, was stopped and traced back into the hands of the said Evans, against whom a detainer was lodged on account of a similar charge for another bill of the same value, and precisely under all the circumstances attending the former."

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"GENERAL POST OFFICE,  
*"October 11th, 1798.*

"The postboy carrying the mail from Bristol to Salisbury on the 9th instant was stopped between the hours of eleven and twelve o'clock at night by two men on foot within six miles of Salisbury, who robbed him of seven shillings in money, but did not offer to take the mail. Whoever shall apprehend the convict, or cause to be apprehended and convicted both or either of the persons who committed this robbery, will be entitled to a reward of fifty pounds over and above the reward given by Act of Parliament for apprehending highwaymen. If either party will surrender himself and discover his accomplice he will be admitted as evidence for the Crown, receive His Majesty's most gracious pardon, and be entitled to the said reward.

"By command of the Postmaster-General.

"FRANCIS FREELING, Secretary."

There is no record that anyone claimed the reward.

This, so far, is the end of "Old File's" researches.

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As the Bristol mail coach was going through Reading on the night of Thursday, the 18th January, 1799, the coachman was shook off the box, and, through his hands having been so benumbed by

the cold, was unable to save himself. The guard jumped down and endeavoured to stop the horses, but without effect. They ran as far as Hare Hatch (four miles), where the coach changed horses, and then stopped, having met with no accident whatever, though they passed two wagons. The passengers in the coach did not know anything of it at the time.

According to the *Bristol Directory* for 1811, the "Bush Tavern" office in Corn Street, conducted by John Townsend, played an important part in the mail coach system of the country. Its announcement ran thus: "Royal mail coach to London at 4.0 every afternoon; comes in at half-past 11 every morning. 'Loyal Volunteer' to London at 12.0 every day. Royal mail coach to Newport, Cardiff, Cowbridge, Neath, Swansea, and Carmarthen every day on the arrival of the London mail. Royal mail coach through Newport, Cardiff, Cowbridge, Swansea, Carmarthen, to Haverfordwest and Milford Haven every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday on the arrival of the London mail. The 'Cambrian,' a light post coach, the same route as the mail, to Swansea every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning at 6 o'clock; returns every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday evenings.

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"Royal mail coach to Birmingham through Gloster, Tewkesbury, Worcester and Bromsgrove every evening at 7.0; comes in every morning at 6.0. A post coach to Birmingham every day. Royal mail coach through Bath to Tetbury, Cirencester, and Oxford, every morning at quarter-past 7, comes in at 6.0 every evening. Royal mail coach through Bath, Warminster, and Salisbury to Southampton and Portsmouth at 3.0 every day; comes in at 10.0 in the morning. Coach to Salisbury, Romsey, Southampton, and Gosport every day at 5.0 (Saturdays excepted), comes in at half-past 10.0 at night. Exeter, *Original* 'Duke of York' coach, through Bridgwater, Taunton, Wellington, and Cullompton every Tuesday, Thursday."

In 1813 the London to Bristol mail coach was robbed of the Bankers' parcel, value £2,000 or upwards. This was made known in the form of a warning to the mail guards who travelled in charge of the Post Office bags. When in 1813-14 the great frost occurred, the Bristol mail coaches were obstructed by the heavy snowdrifts on the roads, and they came in day after day drawn by six horses each when they could struggle into the City.

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The literature of the period yields nothing of interest again for some time.

The "Bristol Guide" in 1815 stated that—"Bristow is the richest city of almost all the cities of this country, receiving merchandize from neighbouring and foreign places with the ships under sail." And again, "Bristow is full of ships from Ireland, Norway and every part of Europe, which brought hither great commerce and large foreign wealth." There was no mention of their carrying mails.

The year 1818 is memorable in postal annals as that in which John Palmer died. His decease took place at Brighton, but not before he had lived long enough to see mail coaches splendidly turned out. Palmer, on the conclusion of his connection with the Post Office, was awarded a pension of £3,000 a year, equal to his full salary, which sum he declared did not represent the amount of his salary and emoluments. Further difficulties ensued, and his son, Colonel Palmer, fought his father's battles right manfully in the House, and eventually, in 1813, the Government gave John Palmer a sum of £50,000.

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In recognition of Palmer's great invention, the Chamber of Commerce of Glasgow not only made him an honorary member, but voted him fifty guineas for a piece of plate. The fifty guineas was spent on a silver cup, which bore the following inscription:—

TO  
JOHN PALMER, Esq.,  
SURVEYOR AND COMPTROLLER-GENERAL  
OF THE POSTS OF GREAT BRITAIN,  
FROM  
THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE  
AND MANUFACTURERS  
IN THE CITY OF GLASGOW,  
AS AN ACKNOWLEDGMENT  
OF THE BENEFITS  
RESULTING FROM HIS PLAN  
TO THE  
TRADE AND COMMERCE  
OF THIS KINGDOM,  
1789.



TO JOHN PALMER, ESQ., SURVEYOR AND COMPTROLLER-GENERAL  
OF THE POST OFFICE THIS PLATE OF THE MAIL COACH IS  
RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED BY HIS OBEDIENT HUMBLE SERVANT, JAMES  
FITTLER.

## CHAPTER III.

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### 1819 ONWARDS.

#### CHAMBER OF COMMERCE INTERVENES IN MAIL AFFAIRS. OLD MAIL GUARDS.

A new coach, from "The Bush Hotel" to Exeter, was put on the road on the 6th of April, 1819, the time allowed for the journey—74¾ miles—being fourteen hours—less than 5½ miles an hour. In June, 1820 a new coach started for Manchester, performing the journey in two days, the intervening night being spent at Birmingham. To accomplish the first half of the task, the vehicle left Bristol at half-past 8 in the morning and reached Birmingham—85½ miles—in thirteen hours. An advertisement, published in December, 1821, headed "Speed Increased," informed the public that the "Regulator" coach left London daily at 5 a.m. and arrived at the "White Hart," Bristol, at five minutes before 9 at night, the speed being barely seven miles an hour.

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No fewer than twenty-two coaches were by this time utilised daily between this city and London. The start of the West Country mail coaches from Piccadilly at this period was an interesting sight. The continued wretched condition of the highways was not conducive to quick travelling; but in about 1825 matters were improved in that respect in our district by Mr. John Loudon MacAdam, who studied and practised road-making. Mr. MacAdam was general surveyor of Bristol turnpike roads, and although he found the trustees' funds only one remove from bankruptcy and their roads almost impassable, he succeeded so well that the finances flourished, and his highways became an object lesson to the world. Mr. Latimer, the Bristol historian, mentions that although MacAdam was shabbily treated by members of the old unreformed Corporation, and had many opponents, Bristol deserves the credit of being the first to appreciate the value of his labours, which were recognised later by a Parliamentary grant. He left Bristol for London, and died in 1836; but his son became surveyor of the Bristol roads, and continued to hold the appointment till his death in 1857.



THE WEST COUNTRY MAIL COACHES ABOUT TO LEAVE PICCADILLY WITH  
"GO CART," BRINGING UP LATE MAILS FROM THE G.P.O.

The *Gentlemen's Magazine*, November, 1827, announced: "A Steam Coach Company are now [Pg 37]

making arrangements for stopping places on the line of road, between London, Bath and Bristol, which will occur every six or seven miles, where fresh fuel and water are to be supplied. There are fifteen coaches built." The Turnpike Trustees, who imposed extraordinary tolls on steam carriages, frustrated this scheme; but the threatened competition stirred up the coach proprietors, who increased the speed of their vehicles from the jog-trot of six or seven miles an hour, although not to such an extent as desired by the Bristol Chamber of Commerce, which in this year made a suggestion to the Post Office for bringing the London mail to the city in twelve hours. The Postmaster-General was also memorialised to accelerate the arrival of the West mail, so as to effect its delivery before the departure of the London mail,—a convenience of no little moment to the West India trade of the port, since it was thought that it would save one day in the conduct of business with the metropolis. At a general meeting in January, 1828, it was announced that the president had a conference on the subject with the leading officer of the Post Office Department, with the result that the latter proposed alterations which were carried out, and were held to be proofs of the Postmaster-General's disposition to consult the accommodation of the Bristol public. The former proposal was not adopted at the time, for at the Accession of his late Majesty King William IV. (1830) the London mail coach took 13 hours 37 minutes on its journey *viâ* Reading. It departed at 8 p.m., reached Bath 8.11 a.m., and arrived in Bristol at 9.37 a.m., leaving again at 5.50 p.m. for the G.P.O. The Bristol and Brighton coach (138 miles) was bound to a speed of 10.4 miles per hour.

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In January, 1830, there were further Post Office matters on the agenda of the Chamber of Commerce, for it was resolved—"That this meeting recommends to the Board the instituting an enquiry into the exact distance between the Post Office of London and Bristol, with a view to ascertain whether the rate of postage at present demanded is correct." The enquiry was prosecuted with vigour, for at the January annual meeting in the following year reference was made to the Turnpike Commissioners for the several districts on the line of road between London and Bristol having supplied a statement of the precise extent of ground over which the mail coach travelled, comprised in their respective trusts. In several instances measurements were expressly made. In the result it appeared that the route exceeded in distance 120 miles, and the Post Office Department was therefore entitled legally to obtain the rate of 10d. per letter as the amount fixed by the provisions of the Act of Parliament. It was thought by taking the route from Chippenham through Marshfield instead of Bath the distance would be considerably shorter, and consequently bring about a reduced rate of postage. It was reported in the next year (January, 1832) that the requisition for changing the route had been pursued, and the president held a conference with Sir F. Freeling on the subject; but though every due consideration was promised, the alteration had not yet been acceded to. There was the significant addition that the application would nevertheless be renewed. A new royal mail direct from Bristol to Liverpool was established in 1831, leaving the "White Lion," Broad Street, Bristol, at 5.0 p.m., reaching Liverpool at twenty minutes past 12 a.m. The new service was notified to Mr. Samuel Harford, the President of the Commerce Chamber, by Sir Francis Freeling, in the following terms:—

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"G.P.O., 27th August, 1831.

"SIR,—Having brought under consideration the memorial from the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce of Bristol, and from the bankers, merchants, and other inhabitants of Liverpool, transmitted in your letter of the 2nd May last, I have the satisfaction to acquaint you that His Grace the Postmaster General (Duke of Richmond) has consented to try the experiment of a mail coach between those towns, through Chepstow, Hereford, and Monmouth, and I flatter myself that it may commence about the middle of next month.

"I have the honour to be, Sir,  
Your most obedient Servant,  
F. FREELING, Secretary.

"Samuel Harford, Esq."

In the next year the Chamber learnt with satisfaction that the direct Liverpool mail through Chepstow, Monmouth, Hereford, Shrewsbury and Chester, which was started as an experiment, had been continued, to the decided advantage of the public, particularly to all connected with the line of country through which it passed. As compared with the former route, the saving of time was equal to one day; the rate of postage was likewise reduced. The starting and arriving were at the most convenient hours the distance and circumstances, with reference to the passage of the two rivers, Severn and Medway, would permit. The coach had to run over the flat parts of the ground at a great pace, to make up for time lost at the hills. The contract time was 9 miles 2 furlongs in the hour.

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One of the chief mail coaches in the kingdom in 1837 was the Bristol, Carmarthen and Milford (150 miles *viâ* Passage, one hour allowed for ferry), Cardiff and Swansea. Its down journey occupied 19 hours 38 minutes, and its up journey 20 hours.

The Liverpool and Milford mails were conveyed across the Severn at Aust Passage, where the ferry had been located since the Lord Protector's time. A moderate expenditure on the piers at Aust Passage, though little regarded by the citizens at the time the work was in progress, with the introduction there of a steam vessel, was one of the principal means of bringing about the establishment of the additional communication with the districts over the Severn, the uncertainty and inconvenience of crossing its estuary being then to a large extent removed.

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Mr. Oliver Norris, now nearly 80 years of age, and who has lived in the district adjoining the Severn Tunnel from his boyhood, can call to mind the time when the Liverpool and Milford coaches were running. They had to make their way from Pilning through Northwick, up to the Old Passage at Aust, and in rough weather the passengers must have had a cold ride on the bleak river banks over which they had to journey. When the Bristol and South Wales Railway was opened in 1863, the Aust Passage was abandoned, and the ferry steamers commenced to cross from the revived New (or Pilning) Passage, to connect with the new train services at Portskewet. When the penny post was introduced, Mr. Morris says that as the coaches passed through the villages the inhabitants in his district adopted a primitive way of posting their letters, which was to place the letter and penny in a cleft stick, and so hand up to the mail guard as the coach was driven by, and who, if the penny was not forthcoming, promptly threw the letter to the ground.

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The mail coach system was attended with many adventures. Mr. Moses James Nobbs, the last of the mail coach guards, recounted in the history of his career how, in the winter of 1836, when guard of the Bristol to Portsmouth coach, there were terrible snow-storms towards Christmas time, and many parts of the country were completely blocked. After leaving Bristol one night at 7 p.m. all went well until the coach was nearing Salisbury, at about midnight. Snow had been falling gently for some time before, but after leaving Salisbury it came down so thick and lay so deep that the coach had to be brought to a standstill, and could proceed no further. Consequently Nobbs had to leave the coach and go on horseback to the next changing place, where he took a fresh horse and started for Southampton. There he procured a chaise and pair, and continued his journey to Portsmouth, arriving there about 6 p.m. the next day. He was then ordered to go back to Bristol. On reaching Southampton on his return journey the snow had got much deeper, and at Salisbury he found that the London mails had arrived, but could not go any further, the snow being so very deep. Not to be beaten, he took a horse out of the stable, slung the mail bags over his back, and pushed on for Bristol, where he arrived next day, after much wandering through fields, up and down lanes, and across country—all one dreary expanse of snow. By this time he was about ready for a rest. But there was no rest for him in Bristol, for he was ordered by the mail inspector to take the mails on to Birmingham, as there was no other mail guard available. At last he arrived at Birmingham, having been on duty for two nights and days continuously without taking his clothes off. For his exertions and perseverance in getting the mails through Mr. Nobbs received a special commendation from the Postmaster-General.

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MOSES NOBBS.  
THE LAST OF THE MAIL GUARDS.

Mr. Nobbs tells that one night when the Bristol coach was between Bath and Warminster, two men jumped out of the hedge; one caught hold of the leaders, and the other the wheelers, and tried to stop the coach. The coachman, immediately whipped up the horses, and called out, "Look out! we are going to be robbed!" Mr. Nobbs took the blunderbuss out of the arms case (which was a box just in front of the guard's seat); but, just as he did so, he saw the fellows making towards the hedge, and then lost sight of them altogether. To let them know that he was prepared, he fired off into the hedge. He didn't know whether he hit anything, but he heard no cries or groans. The recoil of the blunderbuss, however, nearly knocked him off his seat. The blunderbuss, he said, kicked like a mule. It had no doubt been loaded to the muzzle, as was usual with those weapons. In the memorable storm of Christmas, 1836, alluded to by Mr. Nobbs, the Bath and Bristol mail coach, due in London on Tuesday morning, was abandoned eighty miles from the metropolis, and the mails taken up in a post-chaise and four by the two guards, who reached St. Martin's-le-Grand at 6.0 on the Wednesday morning. For seventeen miles of the distance the guards had from time to time to go across the fields to get past the deep snowdrifts.

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In the annual procession of mail coaches round London, at the head thereof was "the oldest established mail,"—the Bristol mail, probably with

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Guard Nobbs in charge. Some twenty-seven to thirty coaches took part in the procession thus headed. The old mail guards had a literature of their own. As an example, one report on a guard's way-bill ran as follows (it was a note to account for loss of time on North Road):—"As we was comin' over Brumsgroove Lickey won of the leaders fell, and wen we com to him he was ded."

One old fellow used to laugh, as the men said, down in his boots, or like a pump losing its water. Another used facetiously to say that he had better than a dozen children. "Oh, Mr. —," said a barmaid to him one day, "what can you do with so many?" "Well, my dear," he replied, "you see I've got but two, and they be, you must confess, a good deal better than a dozen."

It is said that, with the exception of a single instance, no guard was ever convicted of a breach of trust while performing his duties.

In the year of Her Majesty's accession (1837) there were no fewer than twenty-seven coaches



running daily between Bristol and London, and twenty-seven others passed between this city and Bath every twenty-four hours. The times of the London coach were as follow: London depart 8.0 p.m., Bath 7.21 a.m., Bristol arrive 8.43 a.m., depart 6.15 p.m., arrive G.P.O. 6.58 a.m.,—a slight acceleration over 1830.

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Where now is the fashionable roadside "Ostrich Inn" on Durdham Down of a century ago, approached by a rough and winding track from Black Boy Hill? At this inn the coaches called on their way to the Passage. Where now are the old four-horsed coaches rattling up to "The Bush," "White Hart," and "White Lion" hostelries, and the old jolly dozen-caped coachmen and scarlet-liveried mail guards, with blunderbuss and horn? Where now the Bath and Bristol mail pulling up at the roadside "King's Head Inn"? The inns are gone, the coaches gone, the jolly guards all gone too. What happiness their smiling faces brought to many who watched for their arrival by the mail coach from the West of England, and how gladdening the sight of their colonial mail bags to the merchants of the city and to the sailors' wives looking out anxiously for the monthly mail of those days! Though single-sheet letters cost 2s. 1d. each, what of that? Did they not contain accounts of sugar and rum cargoes, and of good news from absent ones. Letters were letters in those days, and not the notes and cards and "flimsies" of to-day.

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ARRIVAL OF THE BATH AND BRISTOL MAIL COACH AT A ROADSIDE INN.

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## CHAPTER IV.

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VICTORIAN ERA, 1837-1899.

MAIL TRANSPORT BY RAILWAY.—TRAVELLING POST OFFICES.

Although the world's railway system was inaugurated by the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Railway in 1825, it was not until 1838 that any attempt was made by a great railway to open up the traffic to the West from the Metropolis. It was in that year that the Great Western Company made a line between Paddington and Maidenhead, and mails were sent by it. The section from Bristol to Bath was opened in the same year. *Woolmer's Gazette* of January, 1840, speaks of the 9.0 a.m. "Exquisite" coach for Bristol, Cheltenham, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool, with part of the service by rail. Intermediate sections of the railway were completed from time to time, and, finally, on the 30th January, 1841, the Western line was opened throughout, and the coaches which had formed so striking a feature both of town and country life generally disappeared. One coach, however, obstinately held its ground in spite of the railway, and continued to carry passengers from and to London and Bristol at the rate of 1d. per mile until October, 1843.

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In consequence of the completion of the Great Western Railway to Bristol, extensive mail alterations had to be made, and they were commenced on the 30th July, 1841, affecting the whole district right through Somersetshire and Devonshire into Cornwall. Some towns were made post towns and others were reduced from the rank of post towns to that of sub-post offices. To meet the altered circumstances, revised sacking of bags had to be resorted to. The instructions given by the President to the staff in St. Martin's-le-Grand ended thus:

".... Any bags in addition to the ordinary number must be reported to the road officers by the clerks of the divisions, that they may be entered under the head of 'extra,' also any agents or portmanteaus for Falmouth; and they must instruct the men carrying out the sacks and bags first to report them to the check clerk, and then take them through the letter carriers' office to the Devonport or Gloucester omnibus, as the case may be, as the guards will not for the future come into the office."

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It was at this time that the villages of Hallatrow, High Littleton, Paulton, Harptree (East and West), Farrington Gurney, Temple Cloud, Cameley, and Hinton Blewett were transferred from the postal control of Bath to that of Bristol, under which they still remain.

For several years the only trains carrying third-class passengers from Bristol started at 4.0 o'clock in the morning and 9.0 o'clock at night, offering the travellers, who were wholly unprotected from the weather, an alternative of miseries, and at first travellers were not much better off in point of speed when travelling by railway, as third-class passengers were 9½ hours on the railway between Bristol and London. The coach at the time of its being taken off performed the journey under 12 hours.

The "Bush" coach office was closed in March, 1844.

The Bristol and Gloucester Railway was opened to the public on the 8th July, 1844. Of the seven coaches which had been running between the two cities six were immediately withdrawn, and on the 22nd July the time-honoured "North Mail" left Bristol for the last time, the horses' heads surmounted with funereal plumes and the coachman and guard in equally lugubrious array.

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As late as 1845 Her Majesty's mails were conveyed between Bristol and Southampton in a closed covered cart, "proper for the purpose," as set forth in an advertisement inviting tenders for a new contract. The whole journey had to be performed at the rate of eight miles within the hour, stoppages included. The hours of despatch were: From Bristol at about 6.0 p.m., and from Southampton about 9.0 p.m.



"THE OLD BUSH HOTEL," CORN STREET, BRISTOL.

*From a picture in the possession of E. G. Clarke, Esq.*

In 1849 a great mail robbery took place, which was committed with very much daring. The robbers, who booked from Starcross station on the 1st January, left a compartment of the up night mail train (which left Bridgwater at 10.30 p.m. and reached Bristol at midnight); they crept along the ledge, only 1½ inch wide, to the mail-brake at the rear of the post office sorting carriage, and effected an entrance, having previously possessed themselves of a key of the lock. After having rifled the mail bags they crept back to their compartment, and alighted from the train at the Bristol station, giving up their tickets to the Great Western Railway policeman. Not contented with robbing the up mail, they got into the night mail train from London to the West, which left Bristol at 1.15 a.m., and actually had the daring to pursue the same tactics with regard to the mail bags in the locked brake. This further audacity brought about their capture, for the news of the robbery of the up mail reached the ears of the officers at Bristol who were in the down mail, and so they were on the alert. On arrival, therefore, at Bridgwater the second robbery was at once detected, all exit from the station was stopped, and the train searched. Two men were discovered in a first-class compartment near the travelling post office, and registered letters and money letters were found upon them. In addition to the letters, masks, and false moustache found, a woolstapler's hook, which it is supposed was used by the thieves to hang on to the tender when leaving the first-class carriage, was also discovered. One of the registered letters stolen, it was stated, contained £4,000, and the loss, as far as it was known, unquestionably amounted to *fifty times* that sum. The robbers turned out to be Henry Poole, a discharged Great Western guard, and Edward Nightingale, a London horse dealer. The case excited a great deal of interest in the West of England, and when the trial took place at Exeter the court was crowded to excess, and the avenues and approaches thereto were very inconveniently crowded. Mr. Rogers, Q.C., and Mr. Poulden appeared for the prosecution, and Mr. Slade, Mr. Cockburn, Q.C., and Mr. Stone defended.

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Evidence was given by clerks in the Lombard Street Post Office, messengers and letter-carriers in the G.P.O., "register" clerks, clerk at Charing Cross Post Office, the clerk of the Devonport Road, guard of the mail from St. Martin's-le-Grand to Paddington, and by letter-sorters in the travelling Post Office. Jane Crabbe, barmaid at the "Talbot Inn," Bath Street, Bristol, recollected the two men entering the bar and calling for two small glasses of brandy-and-water. They were shown to an adjoining room, where they remained until 1 o'clock, and then went to the bar to pay. They appeared impatient, and looked at the clock. It was suspected that all the property which, had been abstracted from the up mail was secreted somewhere in Bristol, and a most rigid search was instituted, but without success. Mr. Cockburn's speech to the jury for the defence

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occupied over two hours. Lord Justice Denman, the Judge of the Spring Assize, sentenced the culprits to fifteen years' transportation.

A Select Committee was appointed in 1854 to inquire into the causes of irregularity in the conveyance of mails by railways, and to consider the best means of securing speed and punctuality; also to consider the best mode of fixing the remuneration of the various Railway Companies for their services. The local witnesses, Mr. James Creswell Wall and Mr. J. B. Badham, Secretary and Superintendent respectively of the late Bristol and Exeter Railway Company, and Bristol residents, gave evidence before the Committee, composed of Mr. Wilson Patten (chairman), Mr. James MacGregor, Mr. H. G. Liddell, Mr. H. Herbert, Mr. C. Fortescue, Mr. Cowan, Mr. Thompson, Mr. Philipps, and Mr. Milner.

Replying to questions, witnesses considered two hours forty minutes, as fixed by the Post Office Department, insufficient time for the down night mail to travel from Bristol to Exeter, including six stoppages. The delivery of mail bags at certain stations by apparatus without stopping the train was suggested, but witnesses considered the plan dangerous and that it could not with safety be adopted.

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The Secretary of the South Wales Railway Company, Mr. F. G. Saunders, gave evidence as to the frequent loss of time sustained by the South Wales night mail through the late receipt of the Bristol and West of England mails at Chepstow. At that time the bags for South Wales were still conveyed from Bristol to the Aust Passage, thence by ferry to the opposite bank of the Severn and on to Chepstow. The conveyance of mails for South Wales *viâ* Gloucester was subsequently adopted.

All the witnesses complained of the reduction of railway parcel traffic through the then recent establishment of book postage and consequent falling off of receipts, also that the remuneration awarded for the carriage of mails was insufficient, although decided by mutually-appointed umpires.



THE OLD PASSAGE, AUST.

For many years the night mails were conveyed between Paddington and Bristol by a special train, which did not carry passengers. It was the only train of its kind in the kingdom, but so useful was it held to be in securing a regular delivery of letters that the Government introduced a clause in a Postal Bill in 1857 rendering it compulsory for all railways to provide similar trains. On the 1st June, 1869, the Post Office special Great Western train commenced to be a mail train limited to carry a certain number of passengers, so that opinion had by that time become altered as regards the value in relation to cost of a train exclusively for Post Office purposes.

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The travelling Post Office service assists greatly in the speedy distribution of letters, and by its agency remote places are put on an equality with the country generally in respect of deliveries and despatches. Two of the most important travelling Post Office systems in the kingdom are conducted through, or to, Bristol—the gate to the Western country—viz.: The Great Western Railway, with a travelling Post Office annual mileage of 500,000; and the Midland and North-Eastern lines from Newcastle, with a mileage of 220,000. Travelling Post Offices, with a combined coach length of from 48 feet on the day mails to 158 feet on the night mails, are attached to the Great Western down trains which arrive at Bristol at 12.13 a.m. and 8.48 a.m.; to the up trains, at 12.45 a.m. and 3.0 p.m.; to the trains leaving Bristol for the West at 6.15 a.m. and 12.9 p.m., and for the North at 7.40 p.m. The Midland travelling Post Office carriages are attached to the 5.40 a.m. inward train and to the 7.0 p.m. outward train.

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There is living at Midford, about fifteen miles distant from Bristol, a gentleman (Mr. Coulcher) who—now pensioned from the Post Office—was the clerk in charge of the Midland Travelling Post Office on its first run from Bristol to Derby in 1857. He well recollects the night, and what impressed it upon his memory more than anything else was the fact that on reaching Bristol, after he and his two subordinate clerks and his mail-guard (Samuel Bennett) had made almost superhuman efforts to get the work completed, he had to send 13,000 letters unsorted into the Bristol Post Office, there to await despatch by day mails to towns in the West of England, instead of going at once in direct travelling Post Office bags by the connecting early morning train.

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Samuel Bennett, the old mail guard mentioned, and contemporary of Moses Nobbs, was

frequently injured on road and rail. In 1847 he was much shaken when a Birmingham-to-Bath train by which he was travelling ran off the line. A few years later he nearly came to an untimely end, having been regarded as dead after being much knocked about when two trains between Bristol and Birmingham collided. On that occasion, after he recovered consciousness, he got together some of his mail bags and carried them on to Bristol.

The *Gloucester Journal* said of the occurrence:—"Samuel Bennett, the guard of the mail bags, appeared dead when found, and was dreadfully cut; but on recovering, he manifested great anxiety for the bags. When the special train arrived in which the wounded passengers were conveyed onward, Bennett, with great courage, determined to take the bags by this train, which was done."

And the *Bristol Mercury* wrote of him as follows:—"The mail guard, Samuel Bennett, was very much cut over the face and head, and bled profusely. Happily, he was not rendered long unconscious or disabled, and with a conscientious and self-denying attention to duty not often met with, he refused any attention to his hurts until he had gathered up the mutilated letter bags and their contents, and made provision for bringing them on to this city."

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In the Bristol district there is a railway Post Office apparatus station at Fishponds, on the Midland Railway, bags being deposited thereat by the train due at Bristol at 5.40 a.m., and taken up by the train ex Bristol at 7.0 p.m. On the Great Western Railway, the apparatus arrangement is in operation at Flax Bourton, Nailsea, Yatton, and Hewish, chiefly in connection with the 6.15 a.m. train ex Bristol. It rarely happens that any failures occur at Fishponds or Hewish, but vagaries of the apparatus are more frequent at Yatton. About once a year something or other goes wrong, the pouch usually being dropped and carried along by the train, with mutilation of the mail bags and a general scattering of the letters. On the last occasion, after the line had been searched up and down, the embankment closely looked over, and the ground on the other side of the hedge on the down side closely scrutinized, all unavailingly, some two or three days after the accident a bundle of letters was picked up which, such was the force of the impact, had been "skied" into a field over two hedges of an intervening lane.

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On another similar mishap, a Post Office remittance letter containing £20 in gold was burst open and the coins scattered over the line. After diligent search in every direction, £18 10s. was recovered. One half sovereign, bent in an extraordinary manner, was found between the metals three-quarters of a mile from the apparatus standard. The apparatus has to be adjusted with mathematical nicety, and if not so arranged failures are liable to occur. It is well that the public should bear in mind that packets sent by mails which are exchanged by apparatus are in more or less danger, and any article of a fragile or costly nature should, if possible, be forwarded by mails carried by stopping-trains. The places so affected in this neighbourhood are:—Alveston, Bitton, Blagdon, Burrington, Clevedon, Congresbury, Downend, Fishponds, Flax Bourton, Frampton Cotterell, Frenchay, Glastonbury, Hambrook, Hewish, Iron Acton, Langford, Mangotsfield, Nailsea, Oldlands Common, Portishead, Pucklechurch, Rudgeway, Sandford, Staple Hill, Thornbury, Tockington, Warmley, West Town, Willsbridge, Winterbourne, Wrington, and Yatton.

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Until lately mails for Bristol were forwarded by the midnight train from Euston (L. & N. W. R.) and reached this city by way of Birmingham in time for the North mail delivery. It was on that railway that in 1890 a sad occurrence happened at Watford, when a young man whilst in the discharge of his duties as fireman lost his life. The deceased was leaning over the side of his engine, which was stationary, watching for the signals to be turned, when the day mail train from London dashed by. The travelling Post Office apparatus net which had picked up a pouch at a point a few score yards away was still extended and it struck the unfortunate young man on the head, completely severing it from the body. The poor fellow's cap was torn from his head by the apparatus net and fell into the travelling Post Office carriages with the mail pouches much to the consternation of the travelling sorters, who found evidence of the mutilation on the apparatus framework. The net was only down for the short space of ten seconds. The travelling officials first heard full details of the accident on their arrival at Tring, where the train next stopped.

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"Once upon a time," writes Mr. A. W. Blake in the *St. Martin's-le-Grand Magazine*, "the London afternoon mail was made up at a provincial office down West (Chippenham), and despatched to be taken off by apparatus. All proceeded as usual up to the actual point of transfer, when a strange thing happened. Instead of falling soberly into the net, the man in charge was astonished to see the pouch leap high into the air and descend he knew not whither. Search was carefully made along the track of the departed train, but not a vestige of the missing pouch could be seen, and a local inspector who was travelling up the line promised to keep a look-out for it. Just at this time an 'S.G.' was received from the officer in charge of the sorting tender notifying the non-receipt of the pouch. As the mystery seemed to deepen, word was received that a signalman at a level crossing two miles away had noticed the missing article on the top of the train. Quoth the worthy apparatus man: 'If it'll ride two miles, it'll ride two hundred'; and accordingly a wire was sent to the sorting-tender people asking them to search the top of the train, and soon came the reply that the pouch had been found on the roof of the guard's van at Didcot. The train had stopped the regulation time at that hub of the Great Way Round, Swindon, and proceeded on its way without the extraordinary position of Her Majesty's mails being discovered."

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The occurrence was attributed to the swaying of the carriage, and to the apparatus-net not working quite steadily in consequence.

At a later period than the mishap narrated by Mr. Blake, the bags for Oxford and Abingdon, due to be picked up at Wantage by the up night mail travelling Post Office apparatus, and to have

been delivered by the same process at Steventon, were not found when the net was drawn in, and it was thought they had been missed; but at Didcot it was discovered they had been thrown over the end of the net and were hanging outside it.

Since the opening of the Severn Tunnel in 1883 it has not often been found an absolute necessity to make use of it for the conveyance of mails diverted from the route from South Wales through Gloucester to London; but such was the case in February of the present year (1899), when a tidal wave of forty feet was experienced in the Bristol Channel, which caused serious damage by displacing the railway line between Lydney and Wollaston. The effects of the high tide were disastrous. A wave dashed on to the Great Western Railway with huge force, and so disintegrated the ballasting of the permanent way that the lines were twisted into all manner of shapes. The mails to and from Paddington to South Wales were circulated *viâ* Bristol and the Tunnel for some time.

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Bristol is at a disadvantage as compared with London in respect of its Continental correspondence, but is far better situated than many other provincial towns. The letters from the Continent by night mails reach Bristol by the train leaving London at 9.0 a.m. and, arriving at Temple Meads at 11.57 a.m., are on delivery in the private box renters' office at about 12.30 p.m. The postmen start out with the letters at 1.10 p.m. As the hour of posting for the outward Continental night mails is 2.10 p.m., it is only the private box renters who have time, brief though it be, to reply to their correspondence on the day of receiving it.

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An appeal to the Hon. Member for Bristol East was made by the writer at a Chamber of Commerce dinner to exercise his influence as a director of the Great Western Railway in the direction of obtaining the use of a goods train for the conveyance to Bristol of a midnight mail from London. In the end the Railway Company afforded the Post Office the means of bringing down a midnight mail, not by goods train as was originally contemplated, but by new and fast passenger train, with the result that half a million letters a year now fall into the first delivery throughout the town, instead of into the second delivery as heretofore. The letters posted in London up to 9.0 p.m. reach the head office in Small Street in time to be delivered throughout the city and suburbs by the postmen on their first round. Under the old system, when "routed" *viâ* Birmingham, the arrival was often so late and irregular that the letters missed even the second delivery. The letters for the rural districts having no day mail deliveries had to lie at Bristol for twenty-four hours, while now they are delivered on the morning of receipt from London. The advantages of the new system apply to parcels as well as letters, and the acceleration in delivery is particularly serviceable as regards parcels containing perishable articles.

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The Railway Company recently gave the Department another opportunity of improving the mail services by establishing a merchandise train from Cornwall and the West to London, reaching the Metropolis in time for the letters sent by it to be delivered some three or four hours earlier than when conveyed by the first passenger train in the morning. Strangely enough, the establishment of this new mail service was the means of enabling the hon. baronet (Sir W. H. Wills), the Member for Bristol East, to take his seat in the House of Commons on the day of his last election, for the writ and return were sent by that mail to London in time to reach the Crown Office for all formalities to be gone through in connection with the seat being taken at once.

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## CHAPTER V.

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1678-1899.

### BRISTOL POSTMASTERS.

Official records at St. Martin's-le-Grand show that postmasters of Bristol were appointed as follows; viz., Thomas Gale, 1678; Wm. Dickinson, 1690; Daniel Parker, 1693; Henry Pine, September, 1694; Thomas Pine, senior, 1740; Thomas Pine, junior, 16th January, 1760; William Fenn, 1778; Mrs. Fenn, 1788; Mr. Fry managed the office for Mrs. Penn from 1797 to December, 1805, when he died, and Mrs. Fenn retired on an allowance in 1806; Mr. Cole, March, 1806, died whilst holding office; John Gardiner, 9th June, 1825; Thomas Todd Walton, senior, 21st February, 1832; Thomas Todd Walton, junior, 23rd May, 1842, succeeded his father; Edward Chaddock Sampson, 21st June, 1871; Robert Charles Tombs, 19th April, 1892, after having been invalided from Controllorship of the London postal service.

In his history of the Post Office, Mr. Joyce tells us that in 1686 the Postmaster-General himself settled applications for salary. Thus when Thomas Gale, postmaster of Bristol, applies for an increase of salary, Frowde the governor satisfies the Earl of Rochester, the Postmaster-General, that the increase will be proper. Forthwith issues a document, of which the operative part is as follows:—

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"You are therefore of opinion that the said salary (£50) is very small considering the expense the petitioner is at, and his extraordinary trouble, Bristoll being a greate City, but you say that you doe not think all the things he setts downe in the aforesaid accompt ought to be allowed him, the example being of very ill consequence, for (as you informe me) you doe not allow either candles,

pack-thread, wax, ink, pens or paper to any of the postmasters, nor office-rent, nor returns of mony, you are therefore of opinion that tenn pounnds per annum to his former salary of £50 will be a reasonable allowance, and the petitioner will be therewith satisfied, these are therefore to pray and require you 'to raise his salary from £50 to £60 accordingly.'

"ROCHESTER.  
Whitehall Treasury Chambers,  
December 13th, 1686."

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The office of postmaster was in the hands of the Pine family, grandfather, father, and son, from 1694 till 1778. In an old manuscript in the public library it is stated that there was a portrait in the possession of a descendant of the family, then residing on Kingsdown, representing the older Pine in the midst of his official duties, a bracket supporting a bust of Mercury, and in his hand a letter thus addressed:—"On His Majesty's Service. To Mr. Pine, Postmaster of Bristol," and in the corner, "P. Express. T. Strickland." Endeavours to trace the descendants and the portrait have proved fruitless.



MR. JOHN GARDINER.  
Postmaster of  
Bristol, 1827-1832.

There is little history obtainable of the postmasters until the time of Mr. John Gardiner, of whom it is related that, born October 15th, 1777, he held the office of postmaster of Bristol from 1825 till his death in 1832. It is believed that he obtained his appointment in a great measure through friendship with Mr. Francis Freeling. Mr. Gardiner had to bear the brunt of the Bristol Riots (1831), in so far as they affected the Post Office administration of the city. In order to save the mails and belongings which were portable, such as the books, post dating stamps, etc., he set off with them in a coach and four for Bath Post Office. He got safely through the mob and reached Bath, where the Bristol Post Office business was carried on until the riots had been quelled. Mr. Gardiner, in addition to being postmaster, was also an exporter of woollen and Manchester goods, chiefly to the West Indies until the slave trade was abolished. He then traded with Newfoundland. He was High Sheriff of the city in the year 1820, residing at that time in Berkeley Square. Later, however, he was enabled to live quietly at the Old Manor House, Easton-in-Gordano. He was buried at St. Peter's Church, Bristol.

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Mr. Anthony Todd, the Secretary to the Post Office, 1762-65 and 1768-98, seems to have been attracted to Todd Walton, of Cheshunt, Herts, either by relationship or from his name, and took him in hand. Born in 1772, Mr. Todd Walton entered the Post Office in 1786 (fourteen years old). He had the long spell of service of forty-six years in the foreign Post Office and ten years as postmaster of Bristol. He was five times selected for foreign missions, which compelled his residence in Holland, Sweden, Spain, and Portugal during the most disturbed state of those countries. Mr. Walton is described as having been a fine old English gentleman, one of the olden time, who wore hair powder, blue coat with gilt buttons, and shoes and gaiters; one who used to express his meaning distinctly, and mean what he said too. This description is borne out by his appearance in his portrait. He used to visit the Bristol Post Office after his retirement, especially to have a morning glass of water from the old well on the premises. He died in July, 1857, at his residence, King's Parade, Clifton, in his eighty-fifth year, and was buried in the adjacent church of St. John's. On his tombstone is this inscription: "Here rests the body of Thomas Todd Walton, late of Cheshunt, Herts, and of the foreign post, London, Esquire. A quarter of a century an inhabitant of this parish, and for some years head postmaster of the Bristol district. Deceased 13th July, 1857. Aged 85. Also of Catherine Elizabeth, his wife, elder daughter of Thomas Todd, of Durham, Esquire. She died April 11th, 1860, aged 77 years."



MR. THOMAS TODD  
WALTON.  
Postmaster of  
Bristol, 1832-1842.

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On Mr. Walton's retirement, in 1842, in view of his services, Lord Viscount Lowther, the Postmaster-General of the day, conferred the appointment of postmaster of Bristol on his son, Thomas Todd Walton, who had been employed as chief clerk in the Bristol Post Office for ten years. Mr. Todd Walton, it seems, was properly initiated into the mysteries of the Post Office art by his father, who decreed that he should commence at the bottom of the ladder and work his way up thence, so that young Todd Walton was in his day to be found at mail-bag opening, letter sorting and other routine work of the kind, which will account for the thorough knowledge of his business which he is said to have possessed when called upon to take the reins of office handed over to him by his popular parent.

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In connection with the recent selection of the port of Bristol as a mail station, alluded to in later pages, it may be mentioned that Mrs. Todd Walton well remembers how, when the *Great Western* steamship, which carried the American mails between Bristol and New York for several years, was first due (1838) to reach this port, her husband organised his small staff for a night encounter with the pressure of work which the heavy mail would inevitably occasion, and obtained auxiliary aid. The little staff was at "attention" for two or three days, and when the news came by means of the runner from Pill that the ship was coming up the Avon, Mr. Walton turned out at 2 a.m., rallied his little band, and went manfully to the work, which lasted for many hours before the letters were fully sorted and sent off to their respective

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MR. THOMAS TODD  
WALTON (JUNIOR).  
Postmaster of  
Bristol, 1842-1871.

destinations or delivered through the streets and lanes of the old city. In the autumn of 1841 the *Great Western* happened to arrive on the same day that a large ship mail from Australia by the *Ruby* was received, and the whole staff available—then only ten men for all duties—had to work night and day continuously to get off the letters by the mails to other towns. As many as 20,000 letters and newspapers were brought by these two vessels on that occasion. It is recorded that every available space in the premises was filled with letters piled as high as they could be got to stand, and great was the joy of the sorters when the flood of letters subsided.

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Mr. Todd Walton had many other night reminders of the mail services besides those respecting the arrival of direct mails from America, as the rattling of the horses' hoofs, the clang of the pole-chains and the twang of the mail guard's horn as the coaches dashed past his house on their way to the passages must have frequently reminded him of his responsibilities as "mail master" of Bristol. He would have blessed Bristol's very able General Manager of the Tramways Company had he been to the fore in those days to procure the benefit of freedom from the noise of traffic by the use of wood paving in our principal thoroughfares.

Mr. Todd Walton had the interests of the staff of the Post Office at heart, and, as an exemplification of his sympathy with them, it may be mentioned that when a promising officer in the heyday of youth met with an accident which eventually necessitated the amputation of his right leg, Mr. Walton did not allow the misfortune to stand in the way of the young man's continuing in remunerative employment in the Post Office, but found for him a suitable sedentary duty which he performed for fourteen years.

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Mr. Todd Walton the second counted amongst his contemporaries and personal friends those Post Office literary stars, Anthony Trollope and Edmund Yates.

Mr. Walton retired from the Post Office in 1871. His death occurred at the Clifton Down Hotel on the morning of Christmas day, 1885. He was in the act of dressing to attend the early morning service at All Saints' Church, when he fell into a fit of apoplexy, from which he did not rally. The *Times and Mirror* of January 2nd, 1886, gives the following memoir of him:—"The death of this estimable gentleman calls for more particular notice than the necessarily brief one given in last Saturday's impression; for although Mr. Walton had for some time past ceased to be a citizen of Bristol, he continued to feel an interest in the old city and its surroundings, and was remembered by many Bristolians as one who had obtained, as he deserved, their affectionate esteem. Succeeding his father—a gentleman of the 'old school'—as postmaster of Bristol, Mr. Todd Walton, through the long series of years in which he occupied that public position, evinced unwearied industry, keen intelligence, and singular courtesy in discharging the multifarious duties connected with it, and when on his retirement (carrying with him into private life the respect of his fellow-citizens) he was called upon to fulfil the duties of High Sheriff of Bristol, those duties were discharged by him for two years successively in a manner distinguished by great public spirit and generous hospitality. He was a man of considerable culture and taste, an extensive reader, and a reader who, happily, remembered what he had read. He possessed also a sense of humour and a ready wit which made him an agreeable and intelligent companion; whilst to those who enjoyed his friendship he was ever a friend, courteous and kind. Blessed with abundant means, he helped without ostentation the poor and needy, many of whom in our own city will share in the general regret his loss has occasioned."

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In the centre of the church garden at All Saints', Clifton, stands a cross, which Mrs. Walton erected in 1888 to the memory of her husband. It was designed by Mr. J. L. Pearson, R.A. It is of granite, and stands on three steps. In the centre of the shaft is a figure of the Good Shepherd, and at the top are four sculptures, beautifully executed, of the Annunciation, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension. Over these rises a crocketed finial, and the whole is surmounted by a cross. At the base are inscribed the words: "In loving memory of Thomas Todd Walton, sometime churchwarden of the Church of All Saints, and a most generous benefactor to that church."

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By the death of Edward Chadwick Sampson, the next postmaster, which occurred at Clevedon, December 7th, 1895, the Post Office lost one of its most gentlemanly and genial pensioners.



EDWARD CHADDOCK

For many years postmaster of Bristol, Mr. Sampson was well known throughout the city, and held in high esteem by all with whom he was brought into contact. He had a long service in the postal department, dating, as it did, from 1837 to the last day of 1891. In 1837 he began his connection with the Bristol Post Office. He went to Manchester as chief clerk in 1865, but was away only six years, and returned in 1871 to assume the postmastership of his native city. It is interesting, as showing the enormous increase in the postal traffic, to recall the fact that when Mr. Sampson joined the Corn Street office in 1837 the premises were only twenty feet square, there were only fifteen clerks and postmen all told, and no one was allowed to have his letters from the boxes whilst a mail was being sorted.

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For his wide experience, his ability, and high integrity his work was

SAMPSON.  
*Postmaster of Bristol,  
1871-1891.*

*From a photograph by Mr.  
Abel Lewis, Bristol.*

greatly valued by leading officials in the postal service; whilst his sincerity and kindness of disposition endeared him to employes of every grade over whom he had control.

As the postman came to Mr. Sampson's door one morning, it was seen that the man was too ill to discharge his duties. Mr. Sampson thereupon begged the man to come into his house and rest, and he himself, with the aid of his son, delivered every one of the letters at its destination, afterwards seeing the poor man safely home. That kind act was indicative of Mr. Sampson's general consideration for those over whom he ruled.

On the resignation of Mr. Sampson, it was generally felt that he should not be allowed to retire into private life without taking with him tangible evidence of the goodwill and respect of those with whom he had been associated. This feeling found expression in a gratifying manner, and the services he had rendered the commercial community during his postmastership were gracefully recognised by the Chamber of Commerce presenting him with an address illuminated and engrossed on vellum.

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Exactly at midnight on the last night of 1891 he was invited, as his last official act, to seal what is known to Post Office employes as the "London and Exeter T.P.O., going west"—that is, the mail bag of the travelling Post Office bound for Exeter. Mr. Sampson discharged the slight duty devolving upon him, and received the new year greetings of his former colleagues, "Auld Lang Syne" being afterwards sung.

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## CHAPTER VI.

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### NOTABLE POST OFFICE SERVANTS OF BRISTOL ORIGIN.

Probably the most illustrious man of the Post Office service who had Bristol for a birthplace was Sir Francis Freeling. Sir Francis was born in Redcliffe parish, Bristol, in 1764, and was educated partly at Colston School and in part by the Master of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School. In an ancient city record it is stated that he commenced his official career as "an apprentice" at the Bristol Post Office, where the combined results of his education, probity, and talents were soon discovered. On the establishment of the new system of mail coaches in 1784, he was appointed to aid the inventor, Palmer, in carrying his improvements into effect. Two years later he was transferred to the General Post Office, London, where, in course of time, he successively filled the offices of Surveyor, Principal and Resident Surveyor, Joint-Secretary, and Secretary from 1798-1836. In a debate in the House of Lords, in 1836, the Duke of Wellington stated that the English Post Office under Freeling's management had been better administered than any Post Office in Europe, or in any other part of the world. He possessed "a clear and vigorous understanding ... and the power of expressing his thoughts and opinions, both verbally and in writing, with force and precision." For his public services a baronetcy was conferred upon him on March 11th, 1828, a meet reward for his long, arduous, and valuable services. He was a warm supporter of Pitt, but he suffered no political partisanship to affect his administration of the Post Office. Freeling's leisure was devoted to the formation of a curious and valuable library. He was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1801, and was one of the original members of the Roxburgh Club, founded in 1812. He died while still at his post on the business of the country which he had so faithfully served, and was buried in the church of St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol.

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SIR FRANCIS FREELING, BART.



The inscription on the memorial tablet runs thus: "To the memory of Sir Francis Freeling, Baronet, who was born in this parish the 25th August, 1764, and who died in Bryanston Square, in the county of Middlesex, the 10th July, 1836. For more than half a century his life was devoted to the public service in the General Post Office, in which for thirty-eight years he discharged the arduous duties of Secretary. By unwearied industry in the employment of great talents, and by unblemished integrity, grounded upon Christian principles, he acquired and retained the favour of three successive Sovereigns, and the approbation of the public. He has left a name which will be remembered with honour in his birthplace, and which is cherished with affection and veneration by his children, who have raised this monument."

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Sir Francis Freeling was thrice married. By his first wife, Jane, daughter of John Christian Kurstadt, he had two sons. He was succeeded in the baronetcy by the elder, Sir George Henry Freeling, born in 1789, who matriculated at New College, Oxford, 17th March, 1807, and was for some time Assistant-Secretary at the Post Office, and subsequently Commissioner of Customs (1836-1841). There is a descendant of Sir Francis in the service, and the name may again be read of in Post Office history.

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The editor of *Felix Farley's Journal* (Mr. J. M. Gutch), of 15 Small Street, Bristol, wrote many letters on "the impediments which obstruct the trade and commerce of the city and port of Bristol," under the signature of "Cosmo," in the years 1822-3. The letters were afterwards published in book form, and the dedication was—"To Francis Freeling, Esq., Secretary to the General Post Office, F.A.S., etc., a native of Bristol, than whom, whenever opportunity has occurred, no citizen has exerted himself more in the promotion of the public and private welfare of this city, the following letters are dedicated, and this humble opportunity gladly embraced of testifying the obligations and sincere respect of his obedient servant, THE AUTHOR."

A Postmaster-General has not emanated from our western city, but Mr. Arnold Morley, late General-in-Chief, is the son of one who worthily represented Bristol in Parliament for many years, the late highly-respected Mr. Samuel Morley, the legend on whose statue near Bristol Bridge tells us—"Samuel Morley, Member of Parliament for this city from 1868 to 1885. To preserve for their children the memory of the face and form of one who was an example of justice, generosity, and public spirit, this statue was given by more than 5,000 citizens of Bristol."—"I believe that the power of England is to be reckoned not by her wealth or armies, but by the purity and virtue of the great men of her population."—S. MORLEY.

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Although Sir Francis stands out pre-eminently, there is a long list of Bristol officers who have gone forth and gained Post Office laurels. First on that honourable roll may be mentioned J. D. Rich, who, over half a century ago, first hung up his hat in the Bristol Post Office, a "furry" hat of the old stovepipe kind, as he tells the story. Mr. Rich showed so much ability in meeting the requirements of the times at Bristol that he rose to the position of president clerk. In 1848, on the recommendation of the Surveyor General, he was removed to Bath, as peculiarly fitted to assist Mr. Musgrave, who from his advanced age was unequal to the duties, and the result was apparent in a great improvement of the local service. That Mr. Rich won golden opinions was proved by a memorial for his appointment to succeed Mr. Musgrave, addressed to the Postmaster-General, and signed in a short time by more than a thousand citizens. The memorial was, however, unavailing. Mr. Rich, after performing various services under five other provincial postmasters, found himself at last in the enviable position of lord of postal matters in Liverpool, and Surveyor of the Isle of Man. On retiring from the Service recently, he was made a Justice of the Peace in recognition of his distinguished services to the city. Mr. Kerry, telegraph superintendent, became postmaster of Warrington, Mr. Harwood of Southport, Mr. Carter (chief clerk) of Southampton, Mr. Brown (telegraph assistant-superintendent) of King's Lynn, Mr. Rogers (postal assistant-superintendent) of Newton Abbot, Mr. Walton of Teignmouth, Mr. Righton of Penzance, and Mr. Barnett (chief clerk for twenty years) of Swansea.

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Several officers of the Bristol Post Office have entered telegraph services abroad. Mr. J. Wilcox is in the service of the Western Australian Government at Perth, and Mr. W. A. Devine in that of the British South Africa Chartered Company at Fort Salisbury. Mr. C. Harrison is employed at Pretoria, and was carrying on his vocation of telegraph operator at that town at the time of the Jameson raid. Mr. Keyte has become assistant storekeeper under the British Government in Chinde, on the East Coast of Africa.

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## CHAPTER VII.

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### POST OFFICE BUILDINGS.

There is record of a Post Office having been established in Bristol by the Convention Parliament in 1670, but the site is unknown, and probably the postmaster had post horses—not letters—to attend to. In the year 1700 Mr. Henry Pine, the postmaster of the day, was one of the parties to an agreement for leasing a piece of land "with liberty to build upon the same for the conveniency of a Post Office." The wording of the said agreement shows that the old-fashioned form of

building was not in every instance (as it now seems to us to have been) so grotesquely shaped from fancy, or, perhaps, from a desire to economise ground space, for it is therein expressly stated that the building to be used for a Post Office was to have the second storey extended to a truss of eighteen inches over the lane, for the purpose of enabling people to stand in the dry; for there was no indoor accommodation for the public provided in those days. "Let the imaginative reader," wrote an imaginative writer years ago, "picture to himself our great-great-grandfathers in doublet and ruff, standing in a row under the eighteen-inch truss, while the worthy postmaster, Pine himself, with perhaps one assistant, was sorting the contents of the mail bag. Doubtless," wrote he, "they grumbled when it rained that the said truss was not half a dozen inches wider, and many a person as he became saturated in his time of waiting for his letters growled out his intention of doing something very desperate to the powers that were."

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In the "Bargain" books of the Corporation is the following memorandum relating to the foregoing:

"22nd June, 1700. Then agreed by the Surveyors of the city lands with Henry Pine, deputy postmaster, that he, the said Henry Pine, shall have, hold, and enjoy the ground whereon now stands a shedd having therein four severall shopp seituete in All Saints' Lane, and as much more ground at the lower end of the same shedd as that the whole ground shall contain in length twenty-seven foot, and to contain in breadth from the outside to the churchyard wall five foot and a half outward into the lane, with liberty to build upon the same for conveniency of a Post Office (namely) The first storey to go forth into the said lane to the extent of that ground and no farther, and the second storey to have a truss of eighteen inches over the lane or more as the said Surveyors shall think fitt that persons coming to the Post Office may have shelter from the rain and stand in the dry. To hold the same from Michaelmas next for fifty years absolute in the yearly rent of 30s. clear of taxes...."

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This agreement must have been afterwards modified. For some reason or other, Pine paid no rent until Michaelmas, 1705, when a sum of 25s. was received by the Chamberlain, and "The post house produced the same yearly sum until 1742 when the rent was raised to £3."

The site of the little Post Office alluded to was required in 1742 in connection with the building of the Exchange, and the Post Office was transferred to a house in Small Street, in later days occupied as the printing office of the *Times and Mirror* newspaper.

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There seems to have been some informal understanding that when the Exchange was finished a suitable site would be provided by the Corporation for postal business, and in August, 1746, a Committee reported to the Council that they had contracted for the erection of "a house intended to be made use of as a Post Office, certain workmen having agreed to build and find all the materials at the rate of £60 per square (*sic*); while Mr. Thomas Pine (nephew to Henry, the former postmaster) had offered to become the tenant at £40 a year, which he alleged is the highest rent he is able at present to pay." The Council approved of the proposal, recommending the Committee to get as much rent as was practicable. The house, which was of scanty dimensions, cost £700 exclusive of a ground rent of £15 a year given for the site. Only the ground floor was set apart for postal business, Mr. Pine residing on the premises. The first year's rent (£43) was paid in 1750. Between 1750 and 1815 the building must have been considerably enlarged, for in the latter year the Post Office is spoken of as a handsome and convenient building of freestone, near to the western end of the Exchange, to which it has a wing projecting forward into the street; and there is another building, exactly similar to it, at the eastern end, which is occupied for a stamp office. In 1827 there was a contemplated removal of the Post Office, and it was deemed proper by the Chamber of Commerce to come on the scene by presenting a memorial to the Postmaster-General; it is stated that the timely remonstrance no doubt contributed to relieve the public of the inconvenience of such removal. Colonel Maberly, the Secretary to the Post Office, advised Lord Lichfield in 1838 that as the ground-floor portion of the Post Office premises occupied by the solicitors was necessary for the extension and improved accommodation of the office, no time should be lost in giving the several sub-tenants notice to quit, and Mr. Hall or the postmaster should be instructed to communicate with the Corporation as to the means of effecting such alterations as might be requisite. His lordship gave authority to that effect. In 1839 the Corporation granted the Government a new lease of the premises and of additional ground behind for the purpose of having the Post Office enlarged. The annual rent previous to this new arrangement had risen to £100.

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The building alluded to is that now rented by Messrs. Corner and Co. as a tea warehouse. Few indeed, even of the oldest citizens will remember the Bristol Post Office as located there, and the old square open public lobby where the letters were given out through barred windows. Only the ground floor was utilised, and the area, of the site was but 21 ft. by 20 ft. A door opened from the passage by the Exchange into a very small public lobby. In this lobby was the letter-box, and here all business with the public—viz., giving out private letters, taking in letters prepaid in money, and the issuing and paying of money orders—was transacted by clerks standing in the office behind a glass partition. The prepayment of letters by means of postage stamps was not introduced till some months after penny postage was established. There was not at the time a continuous attendance of clerks at the glass partition. At two of the slides in the partition there were small brass door-knockers, and on the public knocking a clerk appeared; from the inside office and attended to the wants of the applicants. When letters for the private box renters were being sorted a blind was drawn down. When the mail was ready the blind was drawn up, and three clerks attended to disperse the crowd which had gathered during the half-hour or so while the office was closed. The small space behind the public lobby sufficed for the stamping, sorting,

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and other necessary duties. One man, history saith, amongst the crowd generally got to the front without difficulty; he was a flour-dusted messenger from the Welsh Back!

In 1847 the Money Order Department had grown amazingly, and a separate room had to be provided for its accommodation. This caused the removal of certain solicitors from the first floor to make room for the postmaster's office, the one formerly held by him on the ground floor being converted into a money order office. In 1855 the shop on the north side of the entrance to Albion Chambers from Small Street was taken by the Post Office and converted into a money order office, it being found that the department devoted to this purpose at the general office in Exchange Buildings was not sufficiently commodious or convenient.

It is on record that in 1863 the Post Office authorities offered £10,000 towards erecting a new Post Office if the citizens would consent to contribute £2,000 more. A meeting of some gentlemen took place in the committee-room of the Council House to take the proposition into consideration, but owing to the small number of persons that attended further deliberation was postponed to a day not named. Some of the leading citizens were of opinion that it would be wise to defer any decision on the subject until the intention of the Government as to granting a criminal assize for Bristol was known; for should the answer from head-quarters be in the affirmative, it would be necessary to build a new court somewhere, in which case the Guildhall would perhaps suit as a Post Office. Nothing appears to have come of the negotiations, and the business of the Post Office was removed on the 25th of March, 1868, to the new office erected in Small Street on the site where it is now carried on. This original portion of the structure covers 11,000 square feet. The purchase of the site was completed on the 21st December, 1865. It is stated in a legal document that the bricks, stones, and material on part of the site belonged to the Bristol Chambers Co. Limited. Where the sorting office stands there formerly flourished a fine mulberry tree. There appears to have been no ceremonial in the way of laying a foundation stone, and the antiquarian of the distant future may be disappointed in not discovering the usual coins deposited on such occasions.

In fifteen years the need arose for more space, and that then the Bristol public manifested a keen interest in the position of the Bristol Post Office was indicated by an animated debate which took place in our Council Chamber; and as this book affects to be in part a history as well as a narrative, it is thought well to give the report of the proceedings a full record herein, under permission from the proprietors of the *Bristol Times and Mirror*:—

*Friday, January 2nd, 1885.*

"THE SITE FOR THE POST OFFICE.

"The TOWN CLERK said that as the next part of the report referred to the site for the Post Office, he would read a letter he had received from Mr. Lewis Fry, M. P., which was as under:—

"Goldney House, Clifton Hill,  
30th December, 1884.

"My dear Sir,—As I observe that the question of the site of the new Post Office will come before the Council on Thursday, I think it best, in order to avoid any misunderstanding, to ask you to state to the Council that the matter is not to be considered as a proposal made by the Postmaster-General or the first Commissioner of Works. The exact position of the matter is this, that Mr. Shaw-Lefevre, soon after his visit to Bristol, requested me to intimate to the Corporation that in case they desire the change of situation to Baldwin Street, he is ready to entertain any proposal which they may make to him with that object, provided it be upon the basis of an exchange of properties as mentioned in the report of the Finance Committee.

"I am, yours truly,

LEWIS FRY.

The Town Clerk of Bristol.'

"Mr. ROBINSON said he would like to say a word or two on the subject of a new Post Office, as the wording in Mr. Fry's letter referred to the subject of the proposed change in the position of the Post Office. They did not want change for change's sake (applause), and if they could do without it they would be glad to do so, but sometimes change became a necessity (applause). He would wish to say a word or two with reference to the provisions for the postal arrangements in Bristol, as to the inconvenience that the officials and the public were subject to, and a word as to the great increase in postal matters in the city and in the country generally. He wished to convey to them the magnitude of the question and the very growing character of the communications by letters, parcels, and newspapers, which were being circulated through the medium of the Government and through the Post Office. He the previous day called upon Mr. Sampson, the head official of the Bristol Post Office, and he might say that his ability was only exceeded by his courtesy (applause). He gave him all the information he had asked for, and he showed him over a considerable part of the building. In the course of the interview he gave him no opinion as to the site, and he did not think it wise to ask him. All he asked him, was as to facts—as to the present accommodation. He described the condition of the office as being one of congestion, and that they were put to all kinds of shifts, and that the sorting and minor offices were inadequate for their respective purposes (hear, hear). He saw a room where eighty postmen were engaged in partial sorting. It was upstairs and was approached by winding stairs with only a 21-inch tread, and the room was utterly inadequate for the purpose. Letters had to be sent to Clifton to be

sorted because of the want of space in the Post Office. Mr. Sampson said more particularly that a large hall was necessary on the ground floor for an entrance, from which the various subsidiary offices should be entered. Then he said that a good frontage was desirable. Some people had suggested tunnelling and going to the other side of the street, and others had suggested a viaduct. Offers of property had come from different people, so that the want of further accommodation seemed to be recognised not only by the Post Office itself, but outside. The present office was erected in 1868, and had the officials been sanguine, or known that the business would have increased as it had, they probably would not have selected the present site. The work of the office had perfectly outgrown the capacity of the place. Since 1868 new departments had been opened, and new duties had been created, and they wanted more room. The telegraph work was added in February, 1870, and the sale of revenue stamps and payment of stamps as money had also been added. The parcel post came into operation in 1883. They did not desire an extravagant outlay. The increase of the population was 1 per cent., and the letters increased 3 per cent. They were not asked to buy a whole street. He felt it would be admitted that the telegraphic despatches formed the essential, if not the primary, part of the arrangements of the Post Office. He was informed that the site in Baldwin Street was more convenient and closer to the warehouses and offices which greatly used the present telegraphic advantages than the present site in Small Street (a voice: 'No'). Well, he gave his word for what he had heard. He maintained that the Council had a supreme moment at the present time. They had a gentleman at the head of the Post Office who had viewed the new site, and now they found that the Post Office authorities were in the humour to make the outlay they had better embrace the opportunity. His resolution was: 'That, considering the want of adequate space in Small Street for postal and telegraphic arrangements, it is desirable that a new Post Office be erected in Baldwin Street, on the site recently viewed by the Postmaster-General, if equitable arrangements can be made with the Government for the transfer of the property.' If the Government were not prepared to lay out money for the site, they could let them have the property on a ground-rent, without an outlay being made. It would not cost less than £20,000 to £25,000 to enlarge and improve the present Post Office, and he maintained that that sum would go a great way towards erecting a new Post Office in Baldwin Street. They would not always be able to get sites; and they could not always buy sites as they could oranges and nuts (laughter). In America people ran after him and asked him to buy land. Not so here. He repeated that they had Mr. Shaw-Lefevre looking favourably upon the new site, and he thought it desirable that they should take a bold step—such a step as indicated in the resolution—and put up a building which not alone should be noble, but commodious (applause).

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"Mr. Alderman EDWARDS seconded the resolution. He was glad that the matter had been laid before the Postmaster-General. A great deal had been said about the present site being more useful and convenient than the proposed, but he felt that the difference was very small indeed. The sites were within a minute or two of each other. In Baldwin Street they had a road 60 ft. wide, and if Small Street were altered, however much, they would not widen it half as much as that. As to the positions of the banks, some of the important ones were nearer Baldwin Street than the other street. At any rate, the Old Bank, Stuckey's, and the National Provincial Banks were nearer Baldwin Street than Small Street. The speaker then named several large warehouses which were, he urged, closer to the proposed site than Small Street. At Baldwin Street they had an acre of ground for the present or future. He would not give the land to the Post Office authorities, but he suggested that they should be liberal towards them in their offer. If the Post Office authorities wished to give them the old office in exchange for the site, it might be utilised by the Corporation.

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"Mr. C. WILLS supported the resolution. He would advance one or two reasons why they should make the best terms they could with the Postmaster-General. That the present Post Office was inconveniently small was generally admitted, and he maintained that if the proposed additions were made to the existing building, the extra facilities would not meet the ever-increasing demands on the Post Office for more than six or eight years. The various departments of the present building were too small for development and carrying on the important work of a Post Office. Personally, he would as soon for the Post Office to be in one street as the other, but he felt it would redound to the credit of the city to see a fine building erected in Baldwin Street. If they had the Post Office there it would enhance the value of the other sites in the thoroughfare. Very shortly they would have the sixpenny telegrams, and then the increase in telegraphic communication would be very great indeed, and the present building would soon become inadequate to the demand. Then, again, they saw that the present Postmaster-General did not intend to give up the parcels post, and the development of this branch of the Post Office work would be very great indeed. Then, again, there would be increased vehicular traffic to the Post Office; and could this, he asked, be carried out to the comfort of the citizens in Small Street? The turning point arose from Mr. Shaw-Lefevre visiting the Chamber of Commerce recently. That gentleman visited the site in Baldwin Street, and he, no doubt, saw that the site would be better and superior to the one in Small Street.

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"Mr. PETHICK said that they had come to a turning point in the history of the city of Bristol. The question was whether they should continue the system of compression that they had suffered from for so many years. Small Street was a narrow thoroughfare; it was only a back lane to Broad Street. ('Oh! oh!') It was called Small Street and had a carriage way of only 9 ft. ('No, no.') He must repeat that at one point in Small Street the carriage way was only 9 ft. wide.

"Mr. DANIEL protested against Mr. Pethick saying that Small Street was the back lane to Broad Street, and that the carriage road was only 9 ft. (hear, hear). The narrow part of Small Street

would come down when the improvements to the Post Office took place.

"Mr. PETHICK: I state facts—what the street is to-day.

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"Mr. DANIEL: But is the narrow part you speak of the entrance to Small Street?

"Mr. PETHICK: It is the approach from Bristol Bridge, *viâ* the Exchange, for mail carriages and other traffic, and all must pass through the narrow part, which is only 9 ft. wide. Even if this were taken away, Mr. Pethick continued, they would still have a narrow space to pass through. The whole would not be 14,000 superficial feet; and above all, with so bad an access, they proposed to enlarge the present building.

"Mr. Alderman PROCTOR BAKER: It is not proposed.

"Mr. PETHICK observed that in Baldwin Street they had a good carriage way, and they would have a front and back entrance to a new building. He hoped no little or narrow parochial spirit would be put forward in this matter. The difference of the distance of the two sites was so small as to be insignificant, and he trusted they would endeavour to get a handsome and commodious building erected on the Baldwin Street side of the city.

"Mr. Alderman PROCTOR BAKER said they were indebted to Mr. Robinson for his interesting details, but he did not think they were details for the Council to study, but for the study of the Government. The Post Office was a Government undertaking, and carried on for profit by the Government, and it was on their shoulders, and theirs alone, to provide proper premises. There were two questions involved in the resolution before them, and if it could be so arranged he should like a separate opinion being taken. One question was the actual position of the future Post Office—whether it was to be in Small Street or Baldwin Street. The other question was whether the Council was prepared to sell to the Post Office the land in Baldwin Street and receive in exchange the building in Small Street. As regarded the question of convenience there was very little to be said on either side; but with regard to the other matter he thought they should not agree to exchange the land for the present Post Office building. If they took over the existing building, it could only be pulled or used for public offices. Already they had a population of 200,000 persons, and the area of the city was to be extended; and if they believed in the progress of the city they must expect it by-and-by to be the centre of a quarter of a million of people. It would be impossible, as it would be discreditable, for them to attempt to carry on that great municipality in such buildings as they now had. The chamber in which they were assembled was in a bad condition; the air at that moment was as foul as it could be; and if they took over the present Post Office and applied it for the purposes of the municipality, they would perpetuate the present discomfort, inconvenience, etc., of having divided offices, and postpone for half a century the erection of a large municipal building, in which all their offices would be. As to Baldwin Street and Small Street sites, there was much to be said on both sides; but if it was proposed to take in exchange the Post Office building for their land the Council should vote against it (hear, hear). He sincerely trusted they would not take over a building which would keep up the inconvenience they now suffered from (hear, hear).

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"Mr. LANE said it seemed to him that they were simply asked the question whether the Council were desirous that there should be such a change in the position of the Post Office. Every argument for the change was a thoroughly good one which should weigh with them. Selfish considerations and every consideration should be banished (applause), and they should consider it in the interest of the city and in the interest of the development of the trade of the future. The opinion of the postmaster was a great argument in favour of larger premises.

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"Mr. INSKIP argued that the representatives of the ratepayers were not there to carry out the bidding of the postmaster. It might be wise and proper for him to communicate his views to the department with which he was connected, but it seemed unreasonable to ask members of the Council to vote for what he was in favour of. He ventured to suggest that the arrangement proposed by the report would be unlawful, and to enter into the exchange would be an unlawful proceeding. They acquired land in Baldwin Street under the Public Health Act for carrying out improvements, and he could not see how it could be said that the buildings in Small Street would be required for the purpose of improvements. Before they entered into the exchange they ought to obtain power by Act of Parliament. If they entered into a speculation of that sort they would be transgressing the law of the land. With regard to the matter of convenience, if they took the outlying districts of the city they would see that the people who lived there went to the Post Office after the branch offices were closed, and they would see that Small Street was appreciably more convenient for the outlying population than the Baldwin Street site could possibly be (applause). Then as to the piece of land which would be obtained, the argument of Mr. Pethick was a strong one to retain it. The Guildhall was there, and it had been promised for years that Small Street should be improved, and that improvement would be accomplished if the Government had No. 3, Small Street, which would be set back, and they would have done a great deal to redeem the promise made some years ago (applause).

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"Mr. DIX said he was very much obliged to Mr. Robinson for his figures. They all felt that there had been a great growth in the postal arrangements of the country, and that there would be a great growth in the future; and if it had been shown to him that they could not have a good building in Small Street by having the one there altered by the authorities, and that they could have a proper one in Baldwin Street, he would say let them go to Baldwin Street; but it did not come before them in that light. They were anticipating that the postal authorities could not make a proper building in Small Street; but he could not see how Mr. Robinson and those who

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advocated the Baldwin Street site came to such a conclusion. If they had the buildings in Small Street, that street would be improved, which had been anticipated for years, and they would have the Post Office close to the Guildhall and that great place of commerce—the Commercial Rooms (applause). He argued that the city did not want the property in Small Street—it would be useless to them; and he hoped they would pronounce against it going forth to the Postmaster-General that it was the wish of the Council to alter the site (applause).

"Mr. S. G. JAMES said he did not think that they should be saddled with a building that would not be any good to them. He suggested that it should be represented to the Government that the building would be a good one for a Stamp and Excise Office, and that it would be convenient to have those offices moved from Queen Square to the building in Small Street. He thought that would be a very wise suggestion to make to the Government.

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"Mr. DANIEL said he viewed the proposition to shift the Post Office as one of the most solemn and weighty that had been considered by the Town Council for years (hear, hear). By common consent, and by the development of the city trade, where the Post Office now was the centre of commerce, and they should hesitate very much before they changed it (hear, hear); and the Council, being trustees of the property owned by the city, and looking at the extent of that property in the neighbourhood of the Post Office, and the outlay made on it by the city, he could not understand why they made the suggestion to run away from Small Street (applause). They had under arbitration paid to the bank £9,600 for a piece of land, and that was surely not to keep the street as a narrow lane. If the present Post Office were retained, the authorities would take the houses that would be put in a line with the Post Office, and two-thirds of Small Street would be converted into a wide street—and it was only to shave off the Water Works offices and adjoining building, and then they would have a good wide street (hear, hear). The Corporation during the last twenty years had spent in the neighbourhood not less than £50,000, and if by establishing the Post Office in Baldwin Street they would enhance the value of the adjoining property, so taking it away from the centre of the city would depreciate the property there. It would not be doing justice to the citizens to take it away from Small Street and remove it to a remote spot like Baldwin Street. ('Oh, oh!' and laughter.) It was a remote spot, and he did not know that a street through which were a tram line and continual cab traffic was the best place for a Post Office. He believed a quiet street would be the better place. He farther argued that the proper place for the Post Office was where it was—in the neighbourhood of the Assize Courts, where the County Court was held all the year round, and the assizes and sessions were held, and at the back of the Commercial Rooms, to which there were upwards of 600 subscribers.

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"Mr. Alderman NAISH said that what weighed with him was that the Government had not applied for a better site. He apprehended that Mr. Shaw-Lefevre was perfectly satisfied with the accommodation he could get on the present site. He had seen the draft of the Bill promoted by the Government for taking possession of a building under the compulsory powers at a fair valuation. Someone in Bristol wished them to go somewhere else. All Mr. Shaw-Lefevre said was that if the citizens wanted to go elsewhere they must take the old building. The Postmaster-General did not suggest the removal, but somebody else did (hear, hear). The Postmaster-General knew his business, and he probably considered that the present office could be enlarged so as to provide all the accommodation necessary. They could thus have a good public improvement in the centre of the city, and at the same time provide for the postal requirements. They were simply asked to go to a street in which certain people were interested, which, although a large thoroughfare, had two lines of tramways running through it. He hoped the Council would not agree to the proposal.

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"Mr. MATTHEWS said if the question was put to them simply, did they require more postal accommodation?—they would unhesitatingly say that they did; but the question of site was a totally different matter. They had not gone into the question whether another site would not be a better one than the Baldwin Street one. He moved that the question of a site be remitted to a committee, with instructions to report to the Council, and that the committee consist of the Mayor, Aldermen Spark, Harvey, and Naish, and Messrs. Townsend, C. F. Hare, Barker, and Inskip.

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"Mr. LEVY considered that the city was indebted to those who suggested the Baldwin Street site. There could be no two opinions about the matter (cries of 'Oh,' and laughter). They had seen an amusing correspondence in the papers about it. He would not do anything to injure the *Times and Mirror* for a moment (laughter). In Baldwin Street a Constitutional Club had been established, and the *Times and Mirror* might consider that institution (laughter).

"Mr. WHITWILL thought they should simply confine themselves to an expression of opinion as to the desirability of Baldwin Street site, for he should be strongly opposed to the exchange (hear, hear).

"Mr. H. G. GARDNER said the position in Small Street was preferable to him, but they ought to sink personal convenience. The Chamber of Commerce suggested the matter, and he looked on that body as young Bristol.

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"Mr. ROBINSON said he only meant that the property should be taken over if an equitable arrangement could be come to. He would drop the last part of his resolution, and it would now read as follows:—'That, considering the want of adequate space in Small Street for the postal telegram arrangements, it is desirable that a new Post Office be erected in Baldwin Street on the site recently viewed by the Postmaster-General.'

"The motion was then put with the following result:—*For*: Aldermen Lucas, Edwards, Jose, Spark; Messrs. Moore, Robinson, James, Pethick, Wills, Bartlett, Fear, Bush, Townsend, C. Gardner, Jefferies, H. G. Gardner, Low, Lane, Levy, Garton, Derham, Whitwill, Barker—23. *Against*: The Mayor; Aldermen Morgan, Smith, Naish, Fox, Jones, Hathway, Harvey, Cope-Proctor; Messrs. Terrett, Dix, Gibson, Alsop, Francis, Bastow, A. Baker, C. F. Hare, C. B. Hare, Harvey, C. Nash, Hall, Lockley, Daniel, Matthews, Follwoll, Sibly, Inskip—27. Aldermen Proctor Baker and George and Mr. Dole did not vote.

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"Mr. LEVY asked if the Postmaster-General made an offer it would be entertained.

"The TOWN CLERK said he supposed that any offer from the Postmaster-General or anybody else would be considered."

The Council dropped the matter of removal, and an enlargement of the Post Office was commenced in 1886 on 5,500 square feet of ground on which the Rectory House of St. Mary Werburgh formerly stood. The enlargement was completed in 1889. The structure was designed by the Surveyor of Her Majesty's Office of Works. In making his plan in 1868 no doubt the Surveyor thought he was building for, at least, fifty years; and so he set back his building to form a square structure, instead of following the line of street as laid down by the city authorities in their Act of Parliament. The new part of the building had to conform to the city line, and had, therefore, to be built at an angle with the old office, which detracts from the general appearance. The Post Office building in Small Street stands on a site 17,300 square feet in extent; and now, thirty-one years from the opening of the new office and ten years from its enlargement, further extension is necessary, and the erection of a second or supplementary office larger in dimensions than the present structure is about to be proceeded with.



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As the work in the Post Office goes on through the whole day and night, the air in the working rooms became vitiated and over-heated when lighted with gas. In 1896 the effectual remedy of abandoning the use of gas and adopting electric light was carried out. The Corporation provides the current. The lamps used are 4 arc lamps, of approximately 750 candle-power each, and 450 glow lamps of 8, 16, or 25 candle-power.

THE BRISTOL HEAD POST OFFICE IN 1899. *From a photograph by Mr. Protheroe, Wine Street, Bristol.*

Two million gallons of water a year are used to keep the buildings clean.

As the Post Office, from its size, if not from its architectural beauty, dominates Small Street in some measure it may be well here to introduce particulars from an ancient manuscript in the City Library, which show that Small Street has been a street ever since Anglo-Saxon times. About Small Street and St. Leonard's Lane lived some of Bristol's greatest merchants. For hundreds of years there was not within the walls of Bristol a more fashionable street than Small Street. Many of the mansions there had good gardens. In the reign of Charles II. there were only six houses on the west, or Post Office, side of the street. Amongst the worthies who resided there were the Colstons, the Creswicks, the Kitchens, the Seymours, the Esterfields, the Codringtons, the Haymans, the Kilkes; John Foster, the founder of the almshouse on St. Michael's Hill; Nicholas Thorne, one of the founders of our Grammar School; and Thomas Fenn, attorney, who in 1762 succeeded to the Earldom of Westmoreland. It is not indicated whether he was related in any way to William Fenn, who was postmaster, 1778-88, but it might have been so, for William Fenn must have been a person of some note or the appointment would not at his death have been conferred on his widow. In Small Street, too, more Royal and noble visitors have lodged and received hospitality than in any other street in Bristol. The Earl of Bedford and his son were received there in 1569, and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, one of Queen Elizabeth's favourites, and the Earl of Warwick, in 1587; the latter lodged at Robert Kitchen's. In 1643 King Charles I., with Prince Charles and the Duke of York, lodged there, so did Oliver Cromwell and his wife in 1649; and James II., with George, Prince of Denmark, and the Dukes of Grafton, Beaufort, and Somerset, in 1688. Queen Catherine was entertained at Sir Henry Creswick's house in 1677, where Sir Henry, the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the good and great Duke of Ormonde, lodged for several days in 1665. We learn that Small Street was selected for the reception of these illustrious visitors "by reason of the conveniency of the street for entertaining the nobility."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

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THE LOCAL POST OFFICE IN EARLY DAYS.  
SIR ROWLAND HILL.—RECENT PROGRESS.

It is pleasing to look back to the time, little more than one hundred years ago, when Bristol was the premier provincial post town. It had long ranked next to London in wealth, in population, and in its Post Office. Bristol has, however, in a postal sense, yielded place to other towns, and now ranks after Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool, and Manchester.

Dipping into history, it is found that there was a Post Office at Clifton a hundred years since. At about the time of the Battle of Waterloo it was situated near Saville Place, in a small tenement. The post keeper was a knight of the shears, who sat cross-legged at his work on a shop-board in the window, whilst his better-half sold "goodies." The "Staff" consisted of this pigeon pair, and the work of carrying the bags to and from Bristol, and of delivering the missives, was undertaken by them conjointly.

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The year 1793 was signalled by the extension to Bristol of the penny post for local letters, that is, letters for Bristol city, its suburbs, and neighbouring villages. That post covered a wide area ranging from Thornbury and Wotton-under-Edge in the North, to Temple Cloud, Chewton-Mendip, and Oakhill in the South; eastward in the direction of Box, and westward to Portishead. This institution had until then been established nowhere else but in London and in Dublin; but Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Manchester were granted the privilege at the same time as Bristol. During the year 1794-95 the penny post brought a clear gain to the revenue:—in Bristol of £469, in Manchester of £586, and in Birmingham of £240. Notwithstanding these gains, the Post Office authorities concluded that neither at Liverpool nor at Leeds, nor at any other town in the Kingdom, would a penny post defray its own expenses.

There is little more on record about local Post Office details for some years; but we learn that in April, 1825, an evening delivery of post letters was ordered to Kingsdown, Montpelier, Wellington Place, and Catherine Place, Stoke's Croft, all the year round; and to Lawrence Hill, West Street, Gloucester Lane, in the parish of St. Philip and Jacob, from 1st of March to 1st of November in each year. A receiving house for letters was established at the corner of West Street on May 20th, 1825; and also one in Harford Street, New Cut. In December, 1827, the population of Bristol was estimated at 50,000 persons; and in August, 1831, the number of persons the Post Office had to serve was 59,070.

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Evans's *New Guide; or, Pictures of Bristol*, published in 1828, furnishes the next record. It stated that "the London mail goes out every afternoon at twenty minutes past 5, and arrives every day at 9.0 in the morning. Bath: Out every morning at 7.0 and 10.0, and at twenty minutes past 5 in the evening; arrives at 9.0 morning, and a quarter before 5 and a quarter before 7 in the evening. Sodbury, through Stapleton, Hambrook, Winterbourne, and Iron Acton: Goes out at twenty minutes before 10 in the morning; arrives at half-past 4 in the evening. Thornbury, through Filton, Almondsbury, and Rudgeway: Goes out twenty minutes before 10 in the morning; arrives at half-past 4 in the evening. Bitton, through New Church, Kingswood, Hanham, and Willsbridge: Goes out at 10.0 in the morning; arrives at half-past 4 in the evening. Exeter and Westward: Out every morning between 9.0 and 10.0; arrives every evening between 4.0 and 5.0. Portsmouth, Chichester, Salisbury, etc.: Out at half-past 5 in the afternoon; arrives every day previously to the London mail. Tetbury and Cirencester: Out every morning at half-past 9; arrives every evening at 5.0. Birmingham and Northward: Out every evening at 7.0; arrives every morning between 6.0 and 7.0. Milford and South Wales: Out every day at half-past 9; arrives at half-past 3 in the afternoon. The Irish mail is made up every day, and letters from Ireland may be expected to arrive every day at half-past 3. Jamaica and Leeward Islands, first and third Wednesday in the month; Lisbon, every week; Gibraltar and Mediterranean, every three weeks; Madeira and Brazils, first Tuesday in each month; Surinam, Berbice, and Demorara, second Wednesday in each month; France and Spain, Sundays, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays; Holland and Hamburgh, Mondays and Thursdays; Guernsey and Jersey, Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays. Letters for all parts may be put into the Post Office at any time, but should be delivered half an hour before the mail is made up. Letters delivered later than half an hour previous to the departure of the respective mails to be accompanied with one penny. Payment of postage will not be received unless tendered full half an hour before the time fixed for closing the bags. Letters for Axbridge, Weston-super-Mare, and adjacent places are sent and received by the Western mail. Letter bags are made up daily, after the sorting of the London mail, for Bourton, Wrington, Langford, Churchill, Nailsea, Clevedon, and their respective deliveries. The letters must be put in by 9.0 o'clock. The return to Bristol is at 4.0 in the afternoon. Letters may be put into the receiving offices for all parts of the kingdom, and the full postage, if desired, paid with them. Letter carriers are despatched regularly every day (Sundays not excepted) with letters to and from Durdham Down, Westbury, Stapleton, Frenchay, Downend, Hambrook, and Winterbourne; and also to Brislington, Keynsham, and other places. The delivery of letters at Clifton is each day at 10.0 and 6.0. Letters should be in the offices at Clifton and the Wells for the London and the North mails by 4.0."

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It may be interesting to state, what the rates of postage from this city were in 1830. Thus: Australia, 11d.; Buenos Ayres, 3s. 5d.; Canary Islands, 2s. 6d.; Cape de Verde Islands, 2s. 6d.; Chili, 3s. 5d.; China, 11d.; Colombo, 3s.; Cuba, 3s.; East Indies, 11d.; Havana, 3s.; St. Helena, 11d.; South America, 3s. 5d.; Van Dieman's Land, 11d.; whilst for the Continent the rates were considerably higher, thus: Austria, 2s. 2d.; Belgium, 1s. 11d.; Corsica, 2s. 2d.; Denmark, 2s. 3d.; Flanders, 2s. 2d.; France—Calais, 1s. 5d.; Germany, 2s. 3d.; Gibraltar, 2s. 6d.; Holland, 1s. 11d.; Italy, 2s. 2d.; Malta, 2s. 6d.; Poland, 2s. 3d.; Prussia, 2s. 3d.; Russia, 2s. 3d.; Spain, 2s. 2d.; Turkey, 2s. 2d. At that period the Inland Rates were very high, and the cost was regulated thus: From any Post Office in England or Wales, to any place not exceeding 15 miles from such office,

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4d.; above 15 to 20 miles, 5d.; 20 to 30 miles, 6d.; 30 to 50 miles, 7d.; 50 to 80 miles, 8d.; 80 to 120 miles, 9d.; 120 to 170 miles, 10d.; 170 to 230 miles, 11d.; 230 to 300 miles, 12d. And one penny in addition on each letter for every 100 miles beyond 300. Thus a letter from Bristol to Cirencester cost 7d.; Cheltenham, 8d.; Banbury, 10d.; Leeds, 11d.; Hull, 12d., and so on. Now a letter four ounces in weight can be sent from one end of the land to the other for a penny, and a parcel one pound in weight for threepence.

The Bristol ex-Postal Superintendent, Mr. H. T. Carter, carrying his mind back over his forty years of diligent and zealous service, recalls the time when the mails for the not far-distant village of Shirehampton were conveyed in a cart drawn by a dog, the property of rural postman Ham. The cart was not large, but of sufficient size to carry postman and mail bags. The dog, of Newfoundland breed, got over the ground at a rapid pace. Ham was addicted to drink, but nevertheless, whether he was drunk or sober, asleep or awake, in stormy or fine weather, the dog took him and the mails to their proper destination.

A venerable man now living at Earthcott Green, a hamlet within ten miles of our great city, well recollects the time when he received his letters through Iron Acton, at a special cost to him of 2d. each, with a delivery only every other day. The plan was for an additional penny to be charged on all letters sent out by rural posts for delivery, and in addition to this penny an extra charge was levied on all letters delivered from sub-Post Offices to bye houses or places beyond the several village deliveries. In some cases recognised men or women attended at the Head Office, Bristol, once or twice a week to take out letters for delivery in the remote country regions—of course for a "consideration."

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The Bristol district shared in the representations in 1838 of the hardships borne by poor people in respect of the heavy charges for the conveyance of letters. The postmaster at Congresbury deposed thus:—"The price of a letter is a great tax on poor people. I sent one, charged eightpence, to a poor labouring man about a week ago; it came from his daughter. He first refused it, saying it would take a loaf of bread from his other children; but, after hesitating a little time, he paid the money, and opened the letter. I seldom return letters of this kind to Bristol, because I let the poor people have them, and take the chance of being paid; sometimes I lose the postage, but generally the poor people pay me by degrees." Then the postmaster of Yatton stated as follows:—"I have had a letter waiting lately for a poor woman, from her husband who is at work in Wales; the charge was 9d.,—it lay many days, in consequence of her not being able to pay the postage. I at last trusted her with it." Of the desire of the poor to correspond, a Mr. Emery gave evidence, stating "that the poor near Bristol have signed a petition to Parliament for the reduction of the postage. He never saw greater enthusiasm in any public thing that was ever got up in the shape of a petition; they seemed all to enter into the thing as fully and with as much feeling as it was possible, as a boon or godsend to them, that they should be able to correspond with their distant friends."

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Uniform penny postage came in 1840. The Bristol citizens, of course, found it no cheaper than before to send a single letter to places in their own neighbourhood, but a light enclosure could be put in without extra charge, though the weight had to be brought down from four ounces to half an ounce.

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It may not be out of place to mention in these pages that one of the penny postage stamps of the very earliest issue after the penny postage system came into operation in 1840 was made use of for the prepayment of a letter sent by His Grace the Duke of Wellington to H. Nuttall Tomlins, Esq., of the Hotwells, Bristol. It was sent six days before stamps and stamped covers were first used by the general public, the Duke, as Prime Minister, having no doubt been supplied in advance with stamps, one of which he attached to his letter, to give a surprise to his friend Nuttall Tomlins. The envelope, with the stamp still upon it, is now in the possession of a well-known philatelist in London.

The allusion to the "Penny Post" naturally calls to mind its originator. On the hill slope of the still pleasant rural village of Stapleton, four miles from Bristol Post Office,—once a Roman settlement, and in later days the head-quarters of Oliver Cromwell during the siege of Bristol,—the great postal reformer, Sir Rowland Hill, frequently spent some of his leisure time with his brother, the late Recorder of Bristol, Mr. Matthew Davenport Hill. There is in the Bristol postal service at the present time a mail officer who recalls that, in his very young days, it was his mission to set out from Heath House to fetch the morning letters for Sir Rowland from the Stapleton Post Office. He tells how he had to ride the old pony at a rapid rate, as, even in those days, Sir Rowland's time was valuable, and if his letters were late he had to curtail his "constitutional," which usually consisted of a three-mile sharp walk, with cap in hand instead of on head, over Purdown, past Stoke House, returning through Frenchay.

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In December, 1844, Sir Rowland Hill, in connection with the National Testimonial to him as the author of Penny Postage, recorded the circumstance that he had received a letter from Mr. Estlin, an eminent surgeon of Bristol, giving an account of proceedings in that important city anterior to any movement in London. Sir Rowland believed it was in Bristol, and from Mr. Estlin, that the testimonial had its origin. The sum presented from Bristol to the national collection amounted to about £300.

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The celebration of the Jubilee of Penny Postage in 1890 took the practical turn in one respect of increasing the Rowland Hill Benevolent Fund. Bristol contributed its quota of £72 14s. 6d., made up in great measure of public subscriptions. When the grand celebration took place on July 2nd, at the South Kensington Museum, with the Duke and Duchess of Edinburgh present at the

conversazione, Bristol took its part, and immediately after a signal from South Kensington was received over the telegraph wire at 10 o'clock three hearty cheers for Her Majesty were given, the postmaster leading. The Post Office band then struck up the National Anthem, and cheers for the Queen were at once taken up by a body of about 200 postmen who had assembled in the Post Office yard.

As in 1847 the state of things at the provincial offices generally was not regarded as satisfactory, Sir Rowland Hill, in accordance with the wish of the Postmaster-General, visited Bristol on April 1st in that year. He found that the first delivery of the day, by far the most important of all, was not completed until 12 o'clock; the letter-carriers, as he was informed, often staying after departure from the office to take their breakfast before commencing their rounds. He was able to show how at a small cost (only £125 a year) it might be completed by 9.0. The office itself he found small, badly lighted, and ill ventilated. The day mail bag to London was nearly useless, its contents for London delivery being on the morning of his inquiry only sixty-four letters, thirty-seven of which might have been sent by the previous mail on the mere payment of the extra penny. His impression regarding this mail, both in and out of the office, agreed exactly with his evidence in 1843; viz., that all day mails, to be efficient for their purpose, should start as late as was consistent with their reaching London in time for their letters to be forwarded by the outgoing evening mails. The satisfaction Sir Rowland felt in such improvements as he had been able to make on the spot was much enhanced by his receiving at the termination of his visit the thanks of both clerks and letter-carriers for the new arrangements. It should be said that Sir Rowland Hill did not by his action cast any reflection upon Mr. Todd Walton, junior, as he was at pains to say that, regarded as a specimen of the administration of provincial Post Offices at the time the Bristol specimen was by no means an unfavourable one. At that time there were only about 20,000 letters, etc., delivered in a week.

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The Bristol Chamber of Commerce took no notice of the Post Office for nearly twenty years (1835-1855), but in the latter year it did so, for its records of the annual meeting of 31st January, 1855, with John Salmon, President, in the chair, shew the following, viz.:—

"The Post Office questions of salaries, internal arrangements, and local inquiry, are still in the same position as they were six months ago, except that, after repeated further applications to the Postmaster-General, your Committee extracted, on the 10th December last, a renewed promise from his lordship that 'no time should be lost in making the enquiry at the Bristol Post Office.' As the inefficiency of the public service arises from the unjust treatment of the employés and defective internal arrangements of the local office, your Committee cannot desist, notwithstanding the tedious and disagreeable nature of the task which they have undertaken, from insisting on these repeated promises being redeemed."

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Then, under the same presidency, at the next half-yearly meeting in the same year, it was stated that "Subsequent to the date of the last report, your Committee discovered that the Postmaster-General had caused a private local enquiry to be made with respect to the classification and salaries of the officers of the Bristol Post Office."

There was this further remonstrance:—

".... It would have been more satisfactory to your Committee if the Postmaster-General had fulfilled his promise to the deputation who waited upon him on the 30th of January, 1854, to hold a local enquiry at which they should be present, as there were several other matters connected with the internal arrangements of the Bristol Post Office (particularly the money order department, which is still very defective) with respect to which they were desirous of making some suggestions."

Then followed a copy of the report made to the Postmaster-General by Mr. Tilley, who conducted the enquiry, also a statement of the proposed Establishment.

At the Chamber's next annual meeting on 30th January, 1856, with James Hassell, the president, in the chair, the Post Office is again reproved thus:—

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"No further reply than the official printed acknowledgment and promise of attention has yet reached your Committee respecting the memorial on the subject of the Welsh mail, the West India mails, etc.; but past experience and general repute do not lead them to anticipate prompt redress from the Post Office authorities. It required repeated applications, extending over a period of about eighteen months, to obtain a remedy for the grievances set forth in our former memorial; and even now the Money Order Department is not completed, and probably similar perseverance will again be required, as it is now more than a month ago the memorial relating to the West India mail was presented."

It was thought worthy of note in the *Bristol Mirror* of November 5th, 1831, that "500 letters were brought yesterday from Clifton for the general post." In demonstration of the strides which the Post Office has made, it may be mentioned that in the "fifties," in addition to the Post Office at Clifton, the only offices were the branches at Haberfield Crescent and Phippen Street, with four collections a day, and the receiving houses at Ashley Road, Bedminster, Hotwells, and Redland, with three collections a day. The city only boasted at that time of pillar letter boxes at Arley Chapel, Armoury Square, Bedminster Bridge, Bristol Bridge, Castle Street, Christmas Steps, College Green, Freemantle Square, Kingsdown, Milk Street, Railway Station, St. Philip's Police Station, Kingsland Road, Whiteladies Road, and Woodwell Crescent, with three collections daily. Now there are 167 Post Offices in the district. On the Gloucestershire side there are 99, at 41 of

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which telegraph business is carried on; and on the Somersetshire side 68, 27 of which are telegraph offices. In addition telegraph business is carried on for the Postmaster-General at five railway stations on the Gloucestershire side and five on the Somersetshire side. Licenses to sell postage stamps are held by over a hundred shopkeepers.

There are now 350 pillar and wall letter boxes provided for public convenience.

It may be mentioned in passing that during the strike amongst the deal-runners in Bristol, when men were brought from other towns and housed and fed at "Huntersholm" (a large wooden building erected specially in one of the timber yards), and allowed out under police supervision, a stamp license was applied for and granted, to meet a large demand for postage stamps which these men made in consequence of having to send their wages home weekly to their families.

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In detail, but without complication by mention of the names of all the districts, the local improvements for the seven years from March, 1892, to February, 1899, inclusive, were as follows:—New post offices established, 33; telegraph offices opened, 18; money order and savings bank business extended to 17 offices; postal orders sold at 6 additional offices; new pillar and wall boxes erected, 142; new or additional day mails from 34 districts; and out to 44 districts; new extra deliveries established in 65 districts, and two extra deliveries in 7 districts. Free delivery extended in 35 rural districts, and the ordinary second or third delivery extended in 44 rural districts; morning delivery accelerated in 63, and the day delivery in 8, rural districts. A later posting for North mail in 6, and for the night mail in 58, rural districts. New collections established in 73, and a later collection in 30, rural districts.

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Increased facilities in the postal world are almost invariably followed by augmentation of business. It certainly has been so in the Bristol district, for there has been a marvellous development in the last seven years. The letters delivered have increased by 60 per cent., and those posted have grown at the rate of 55 per cent. Parcels have increased by 25 per cent. There has been a similar marked increase in all branches of business. The three preceding periods of seven years were comparatively "lean" periods, for the increase in the number of letters during the whole twenty-one years was actually less than during the seven last years. The increase is altogether out of proportion to the growth of population, and it is far in excess of the general increase of letter correspondence throughout the country generally, which has been only at the rate of 22 per cent. during the period as against Bristol's 60 per cent. It is hoped that this may be taken as a sure indication of the well-being of the trade of Bristol, and as a sign that there is quickened life in the commerce of the good old city. At all events, it shows that the local Post Office organization is quite abreast of the times, and that the facilities afforded are appreciated and are fully taken advantage of.

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## CHAPTER IX.

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### BRISTOL AS A MAIL STEAMER STATION FOR IRELAND, WEST INDIES, AMERICA, AND CANADA.

From the archives of the Bristol Chamber of Commerce it transpires that from the very first constitution of the Chamber in 1823, it had before it a scheme for the conveyance of mails between this port and the South of Ireland by direct steam packet. It was considered that such a service would be highly advantageous to the city, and correspondence on the subject from time to time took place with the Post Office Department. Allusion is made to it in the Chamber's Annual Report in January, 1824; again in 1828, when the President of the Chamber, Mr. Joseph Cookson, had a conference with the leading officer of the Post Office; and once more in 1829. The case is so fully and ably set forth in the Board's Annual Report of the 26th January, 1829, that its reproduction *in extenso* cannot fail to be of deep interest to the citizens of the present day as their attention is often drawn to the steamship traffic. It ran thus:—

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"The transmission of the mails direct from Bristol was earnestly pressed upon the attention of the Postmaster-General in the year 1823, on which occasion the Chamber minutely investigated the practicability, safety, and general advantages of the measure, the material points of which were embodied in a memorial, accompanied by a list of queries and replies. The Civic Corporation, the Society of Merchant Venturers, and the Bristol Dock Company each presented similar memorials.

"In resuming the enquiry, the Board have resorted to the channels best calculated to convey accurate information. The managing proprietor of the steam packet establishments at this port, Captain Dungey, an individual on whose experience and judgment reliance may be placed, and other persons of practical knowledge, have been consulted on the subject. All concur in establishing the fact that the voyage to and from Dunmore may, with general certainty, be accomplished by efficient steamboats in from 24 to 26 hours during the eight summer months, and in from 26 to 30 hours in the four months of winter; that the instances of exceeding this scale would not be more frequent than at the present station, the navigation of the Bristol Channel being protected by the coast on either side, and consequently less influenced by severe weather than the Irish Sea.

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"The earlier arrival of the London mail and its later departure, as altered some time since, accords materially with the proposition for making Bristol a packet station. By the present

regulations, the London mail arrives in Bristol at five minutes past 9 in the morning; and leaves at half-past 5 in the evening; it is capable of being still further accelerated by taking the two last stages in the direct line through Marshfield, instead of passing through Bath. According to the present arrangements, the Irish mails may with ease and convenience to passengers be despatched from the mouth of the Bristol river, five miles from the Post Office, every day at half-past 10, and those from Ireland, if arriving by 4.0, be forwarded to London the same evening. The time saved by this route as compared with that of Milford would be, at least during the summer months, equal to one whole day for the purposes of business, since the arrival at Dunmore would be in the morning instead of evening, and the departure at noon instead of at an early hour of the morning as at present.

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"The present slips at Lamplighter's Hall and Broad Pill now serve for landing passengers from the packets on special occasions; with very trifling expense they may be made efficient for passengers, and not more objectionable than the present accommodation for crossing the estuary of the Severn—carriages, horses, baggage, and heavy goods might at an earlier hour be put on board at the Bristol Docks, which the boat would leave at the height of tide in order to be in waiting for the mails at the place appointed for receiving them. At Lamplighter's Hall an hotel is established, which, with the contiguity to the city, would ensure to the public a supply of all the accommodation a packet station would require. These are the facilities which can at present be afforded. At no very distant date the accommodation will, in all probability, be yet further increased, first, by the erection of a pier with hotel and establishment at Portishead on the Somersetshire side of the Avon, which the Corporation of the City have for some time had under consideration with a view to promote the convenience of passengers by the steam vessels and thus encourage the intercourse between this city and the South of Ireland. In aid of the present enquiry they have directed a survey and report by Mr. Milne, the engineer, on the practicability and probable cost of the proposed pier. Secondly, and arising also from this scheme, is a plan for erecting a bridge across the Avon, by the application in part of a fund amounting to nearly £8,000, held by the Society of Merchant Venturers in trust under the will of William Vick, deceased, for the especial purpose; with the formation of an improved line of road by Mr. Gordon, Mr. Miles, and other landed proprietors on that side of the river, for the short distance to Portishead. These several improvements the respective parties interested are disposed to effect, and which any impelling motive, such as the establishment of a regular mail packet station, may induce them immediately to undertake. The accomplishment of these works would render Portishead a most eligible station. It is protected from weather, is a safe anchorage, would have ample depth of water at any state of the tide, the landing would be instant on arrival, and it would be supplied with every convenience and accommodation for passengers.

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"The Board believe an important saving of expense to Government would result from establishing Bristol as a mail packet station. The great deficiency on the Milford station in the receipts as compared with the expenditure arises from the very limited number of persons who avail themselves of that line of communication. The land journey of twenty hours at a fare of £3 10s., followed by a twelve hours' voyage by open sea at a further expense of £1 10s., with the inconvenience frequently sustained in crossing the estuary of the Severn, deters people from taking the Milford route by choice. The general introduction of steam packets, the degree of perfection in sailing to which they have been brought, the regularity and safety with which the voyages are performed, the accommodation to passengers, and the moderate scale of fares, have contributed to effect of late years a material change in the general opinion on steamboat conveyance. The long voyage by sea is now generally preferred to a long journey by land and the shorter one by sea. The number and efficiency of the Bristol boats, and the economy in the fares, induce a large proportion of travellers to take the direct course from Bristol. Indeed, to so great an extent has this preference operated that the contractors for conveying the mail throughout the whole line from Bristol to Milford are understood to have given notice of their intention to determine their engagement, on account of the gradual decrease in the number of passengers and the consequent loss they incur. A similar statement appears in the report of the Postmaster-General on the memorial of the innkeepers on the Holyhead route.

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"In favour of Bristol it may be fairly stated that, at a comparatively trifling expense, the port may be made commodious for a packet station; that the present strength of the establishment at Milford would serve, with some addition, for that of Bristol; that the difference in price of coal at Portishead would reduce the expense of sailing the packets from that station; that Bristol affords every prospect of increase of receipt, whilst at Milford it must, for the reasons before stated, necessarily decrease; that the demands of a large commercial city, with its populous adjoining and connected districts, will create a traffic for boats making quick and regular voyages, which Milford, from its position, never can acquire—the conveyance of fish and provisions alone could be made to yield a revenue of consequence. Numerous other sources of receipt would arise from the conveniency of its regularity and expedition. Indeed, so much are the Board impressed with the belief that the traffic would be extensive and productive that they venture to anticipate it may, at no very distant period, relieve the Government from any further charge than a comparatively nominal sum for the transport of the mails. The Board are induced also to put the proposition in a national point of view. They feel that the more closely Ireland can be brought into direct and active communication with this country, the more rapid will be its course of improvement. The introduction of steam navigation has, at this port, given an energy and extension to the Irish trade that far exceeds any previous expectations; each succeeding month brings a vast increase of import and a corresponding export, to the material benefit of each kingdom, and the more complete the intercourse can be established the more important will the trade become.

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"The port of Bristol, from its position, possesses numerous capabilities for a mail packet station. Its contiguity and means of land and water communication with the capital; its being the principal shipping port for the manufacturing districts of the South-west part of the kingdom; its close connection and water communication with Birmingham, Worcester, and other large towns in the centre of the kingdom; the convenience of its floating harbour; the reduced scale of its local tolls—all these circumstances combine to give Bristol a superiority over other places on the coast, whether the subject be viewed as regards the economy of the Post Office Department or the accommodation of the public.

"The Board have placed the subject of the Commissioners' enquiry in the several points of view which appear to them fairly to arise upon the investigation and consideration it has received, and they shall feel sincere gratification if, on this or any future occasion, they should in the least degree prove of assistance to a department of Government, or should otherwise by their exertions conduce to the advancement of the public interests.

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"THOMAS STOCK, President.  
July 7th, 1828."

A strong memorial (under the hand of Thomas Cookson, President) was forwarded to the Postmaster-General.

Francis Freeling, Secretary, in his reply for the Postmaster-General, refused to admit that the port of Bristol did afford the requisite facilities for a station for His Majesty's packets. When the projected works were carried out the matter would be reconsidered by the Government.

Replying further, Mr. Freeling, on the 2nd March, alluded to the impossibility of despatching the mails at a fixed time every day in the year, and said that that presented insurmountable objections to the choice of Bristol as a station for His Majesty's packets. He said that the first requisite for a packet station was that the port should afford the means for embarking and landing the mails at all times of tide and under all circumstances of weather.

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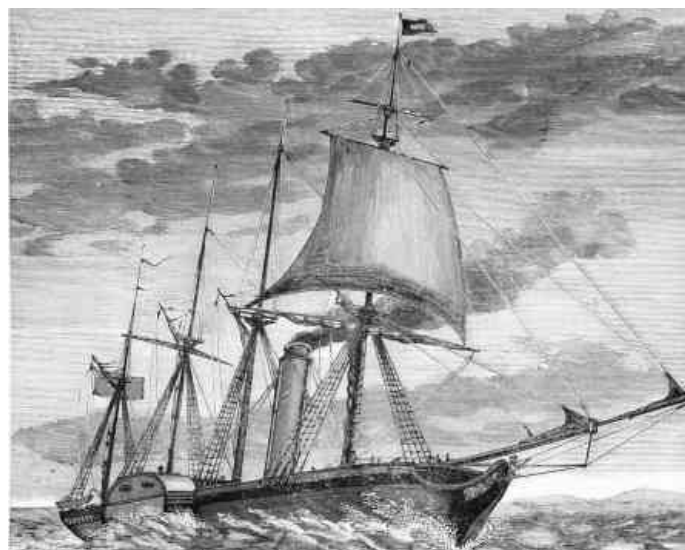
The Bristol Dock Directors and a Standing Committee of the Society of Merchants considered the matter, but did not see their way to press it under the chilling response received from the Postmaster-General.

The Board did not give up the case, for in the Annual Report 28th January, 1833, it was stated that the proposition for establishing at this port a mail packet station by steam vessels to the South of Ireland was being diligently pursued, and that the House of Commons having appointed a Committee to enquire into the communications between England and Ireland, a favourable opportunity was presented of again urging the advantages Bristol port was calculated to afford.

The numerous appeals, representations, and enquiries did not result in the manner desired, and to this day the mails from the South of Ireland for Bristol and its district follow the same route *viâ* Waterford and Milford Haven, the only difference being that from the latter port to Bristol the service is carried on by rail instead of by road.

Bristol became a mail packet station eventually, as steamships carried the American mails between this port and New York for several years, commencing in 1837, the year of Her Most Gracious Majesty's accession to the throne. The *Great Western*, constructed under the direction of Brunel, the famous engineer of the Great Western Railway, was chiefly used in the service.

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THE "GREAT WESTERN."  
THE FIRST STEAMER WHICH CARRIED MAILS FROM BRISTOL TO  
NEW YORK.

On the 31st May, 1838, writing from 19 Trinity Street, Bristol, Mr. Claxton, managing director to the *Great Western*—which was then, nearly due,—asked the Bristol postmaster whether a consignee at New York might charge the foreign postage on letters to parts on the Continent with which no arrangement, similar to that then existing between France and England, had been

made. The idea was that such letters might be put into a separate bag, and the foreign postage from Bristol be handed over to the local Post Office. He wrote that notice had been given by the Chamber of Commerce of Liverpool that masters of ships need not send anything but letters to the Post Office on arrival. Mr. Todd Walton replied on the next day to the effect that the agent should only direct letters to Mr. Claxton's care to forward from such persons as he could refer to in case of errors. Then followed a long communication from Mr. Walton to Colonel Maberly, Secretary to the Post Office, the gist of which was that a difficulty existed in preventing illegal conveyance of ship letters; that the commanders of vessels did not receive money with letters to any great extent; that the public prints stated that 1,600 letters were received on board the *Great Western* besides those sent from the Post Office; that an immense number of letters was collected at the Great Western office; and that as the *Great Western* and *Syrius* were regularly established, and other vessels of the same description were preparing, unless some means were taken to protect the revenue, it could not fail to suffer very considerably.

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The *Great Western* brought to England 5,500 post letters and 1,770 post papers, which, had that conveyance not been offered, would most likely have been sent by private ships. Mr. Walton conceived it would be very advantageous to the revenue to contract with those superior vessels to carry mails, so as to render the latter chargeable with package rates; and he submitted that ship letter mails should be made up at Bristol, the same as at London and Liverpool, for all vessels leaving this port. About 5,500 ship letters were brought to the Bristol Post Office annually, and he had no doubt that vast numbers were carried from Bristol in the same manner; but with the exception of those by the *Great Western*, no mails had ever been made up here for foreign countries. The Secretary, replying for the Postmaster-General, said it did not appear to Lord Lichfield that cognizance need be taken of the suggestion conveyed in Mr. Claxton's letter of the 31st May, for the transmission through this country of letters from the United States addressed to those foreign countries upon which the postage must be paid here before they can be forwarded to their destination. The Post Office could have no objection to such letters being addressed to the care of Mr. Claxton or any other agent in this country who would pay the foreign postage and send them on to their destinations. The letters in question, would, of course, be subject, so far as the Post Office was concerned, to the ship letter rate to Bristol, and when re-posted, to the inland and foreign rates forward.

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The postmaster's proposition for making up mails to be forwarded by the steam vessels charged with packet rates of postage was out of the question; but with regard to making up ship letter bags for foreign countries, so strangely neglected at this great port, the postmaster was to embrace every opportunity in his power of despatching ship letter bags by sailing as well as by steam vessels. There is no official record, however, of any such ship letter mails having been forwarded from Bristol.

In the year 1841 a Royal Commission was appointed to enquire into the question of the most suitable port for the embarkation and debarkation of the West Indian Mails. The committee consisted of Mr. Freshfield, Lord Dalmeny, Lord Viscount Ingestre, Captain Pechell, Captain Duncombe, Mr. Chas. Wood, Sir Thomas Cochrane, Mr. John O'Connell, Mr. Cresswell, Lord Worsley, Mr. Gibson Craig, Mr. De Horsey, Mr. Oswald, Mr. Richard Hodgson, and Mr. Philip Miles, who was prominent as representing Bristol. Much evidence was given in favour of the ports of Bristol, Dartmouth, Devonport, Falmouth, Plymouth, Portsmouth, and Southampton respectively. The case of Bristol was strongly supported by Lieut. J. Hosken, R.N., commander of the *Great Western* screw steamer from Bristol to New York, and Lieut. C. Claxton, R.N., the Bristol Harbour Master.

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The principal reasons put forward in favour of our old port were: that the Bristol Channel was navigable at all states of the tide and in all weathers; that there was good anchorage in the Kingroad; and that although Bristol was not quite so near to Barbadoes, the first island of call, as some of her rival ports, yet it admitted of quicker transmission of mails between London and the northern towns than any other English port. The arguments in favour of the Bristol port were not strong enough to induce the committee to report in its favour.

From the "forties," when the American mail service was withdrawn from Bristol, no foreign or colonial mails left the port until the autumn of 1898, when Mr. Alfred Jones, the enterprising managing director of the firm of Messrs. Elder, Dempster & Co., made arrangements for carrying private ship mails from Avonmouth to Montreal by a weekly service of steamers. The Bristol merchants found it convenient to make use of this ship mail system for the conveyance of their invoices, bills of lading, and advices, as, by travelling in the same ship as the goods which they related to, their delivery in time to be of use in connection with the ship's load was ensured. The first vessel to carry such a ship mail was the s.s. *Montcalm*.

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When it was in anticipation at the Bristol Post Office that the ship mail service might be resumed in 1899 on the breaking up of the ice in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, there came a cablegram from the Canadian Government intimating that a contract had been entered into with Messrs. Elder, Dempster and Co.; and, heigh presto! Avonmouth at once became the port of departure and arrival of the steamers carrying the direct Canadian mails. The suddenness of the event naturally created quite a stir after Bristol had been so long waiting, and the mail services outwards and inwards were watched with close attention by the public. The first steamer to run under the new contract was the s.s. *Monterey*. She left Avonmouth on the 23rd July, but time had not admitted of arrangements being made for her to carry the mails from Avonmouth, which were therefore picked up at Queenstown. The s.s. *Ikkal* took the next trip, leaving Avonmouth on the 30th July. The parcels from the whole of the kingdom, including Ireland, were circulated on Bristol, and

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made up here in direct mails for Montreal, Quebec, Hamilton, Kingston, Toronto, Winnipeg, Prince Edward Island, Hawaii, St. Pierre and Miquelon, Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Kobe, Nagasaki, and Yokohama. The notice to the Bristol Post Office was very short, but the necessary arrangements were smartly made to meet the emergency. Mr. Kislingbury, the divisional superintendent of the Great Western Railway, ever ready to heartily co-operate with the local Post Office, had a special tender placed in readiness for the reception of the mails at Temple Meads and they were despatched by the 9.50 a.m. train to Avonmouth. On the part of the Dock authorities, the general manager, Mr. F. B. Girdlestone, had provided an engine to take the brake-vans containing the parcel mails direct from the Docks junction to the pier head. The system was fully tried, for the mails had to be taken from the train to the steam-tug *Sea Prince* to be conveyed to the steamer, which was moored in Kingroad, having arrived too late to enter the dock. The mails weighed close upon three tons, and were contained in fifty-five large hampers. In the following week the s.s. *Arawa* (a sixteen-knot boat, 440 feet long) carried the mails, which were taken by train alongside the ship in dock; and which consequently, although five tons in weight, were put on board under much more favourable circumstances than in the preceding week, when the steamer had to lie out in the Kingroad. It is noteworthy that the *Arawa* took out 400 emigrants.

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R.M.S. "MONTEREY."  
FIRST LINER IN THE NEW CANADIAN MAIL SERVICE.  
*From a photograph by G. M. Roche, Esq., Dublin.*

Subsequent steamers used for carrying on the mail service were the *Montfort*, *Monteagle*, and *Montrose*.

The arrangements for the new service worked very smoothly from the outset, thanks in no small measure to Mr. Flinn, the local general manager for Messrs. Elder, Dempster & Co., who facilitated in every way the Post Office and Customs operations. The trial so far has proved that the use of Avonmouth as a port for the Canadian mail traffic is attended with advantages on this side of the ocean, but greater facilities for embarking and disembarking the mails at Avonmouth are absolutely necessary.

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## CHAPTER X.

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### POSTAL SERVICE STAFF; ITS COMPOSITION, DUTIES, RESPONSIBILITIES.—VOLUME OF WORK.

In 1855 the Bristol Post Office staff consisted of a postmaster and fifteen clerks, with sixty-four letter carriers. Over 1,500 people of all grades, including sub-postmasters and their assistants, are now employed; and the annual bill for salaries, wages, and allowances of men, women, and boys amounts to little short of £100,000. It will thus be seen that the Post Office ranks as one of the largest employers of labour in the western city.

The head office is centrally situated both for the receipt and despatch of the letter correspondence. It is not very far from a point known as "Tramway Centre," upon which the tram services of the city converge. It plays an important part with regard to the Bristol postal system, as out of a total of 833,000 letters posted weekly in the city delivery area—exclusive of 55,300 Clifton posted letters—221,000 letters are posted at the head office itself, and the total posted within a radius of a mile is 652,290, or more than three-fourths of the whole. In addition to the 888,000 letters posted weekly in Bristol city and Clifton, there are 108,000 letters posted in the suburban and rural districts. The posting every Sunday consists of 35,000 letters.

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The greater extent to which the well-to-do classes in Bristol use the post than their less fortunate brethren may be gathered from the fact that the average yield of letters, newspapers, etc., per day per box in the Clifton district is 128 per cent. higher than in Redland and Cotham, and 179 per cent. higher than in Redcliffe; and in the Redland and Cotham district 22 per cent. higher than in Redcliffe.

The mails are chiefly conveyed between the head office and the principal railway station by horsed carts.

About 7,000,000 "forward" letters—that is, letters neither posted nor delivered locally, but passing through the Bristol Post Office—are dealt with annually.

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The parcel post, started in 1883, has done well in Bristol. Nearly three-quarters of a million of

parcels are posted in the district annually. The greater part of the parcel despatching duties is performed at a separate parcel office on the Temple Meads Railway Station premises. People often avail themselves of the parcel post for obtaining a regular weekly supply of produce. A joint of beef from Scotland, weighing just under eleven pounds, invariably reaches Bristol at the week end, and a package of butter from Dublin is observed every Friday in the Bristol parcel depôt on its way to Weston-super-Mare.

The London mail is, naturally, the most important mail which leaves Bristol. In the course of the day fifty-five mail bags are forwarded, containing about 20,000 letters; the trains used being those leaving at 3.10 a.m., 7.50 a.m., 9.35 a.m., 11.40 a.m., 12.13 p.m., 1.54 p.m., 3.0 p.m., 3.43 p.m., 4.45 p.m., 7.22 p.m., and 12.45 a.m. So numerous are the London and "London forward" letters in the evening, that three clerks are engaged from 5.0 p.m. to midnight in sorting them. In the opposite direction fifty mail bags are received from London daily, containing about 30,000 letters. Birmingham comes next in the importance of exchange, thus: twelve mail bags go out daily, containing 5,500 letters, and ten bags come in, with 4,500 letters. The neighbouring city of Bath figures next, with ten outward mail bags daily, containing 4,200 letters, and ten inward bags, containing 2,700 letters. The same three cities also stand in the forefront in respect of the import and export of parcels, 870 parcels being received from London and 550 parcels sent thereto daily. Birmingham sends 190 parcels and takes a like number; whilst Bath sends 160 and takes in return 250 parcels daily.

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The members of the permanent staff have fallen on better days than their predecessors of old times. They are granted holidays varying in periods according to rank, from the twelve working days allowed to the telegraph messengers to the month enjoyed by the superintending officers. Medical attendance is afforded gratuitously, and full pay is, as a rule, given during sick absence, and under special circumstances sick leave on full pay is allowed for six months, and a further six months on half-pay. After that time, if there appears to be little or no chance of recovery, a pension or gratuity is given. The appointment of medical officer to the Post Office was in 1862 conferred upon Mr. F. Poole Lansdown, who has held the post ever since. For the last four years the average sick absence per year has been ten days for males and seventeen days for females per head; and during the last seven years the average mortality amongst the established officers of the Service has been two per annum.

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Uniform and boots are provided by the Department for the postmen and telegraph messengers, at an annual cost of about £2,000.

Good-conduct stripes are the reward to all full-time postmen, established or unestablished, of unblemished conduct. A stripe is awarded after each five years' meritorious service, and each man is eligible for six stripes, each of which carry one shilling a week extra pay. The value of the stripes is taken into account in calculation of pensions.

Of the 1,500 persons of all grades alluded to there are in the postal department a superintendent, 24 superintending officers, and 154 male and 8 female clerks.

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The selection of candidates for situations in the Bristol Post Office as sorting clerks and telegraphists, both male and female, was for many years vested entirely in the postmaster, and persons were given temporary employment without passing any educational test as to their special fitness for Post Office employment. It so happened that not infrequently a clerk would be employed in a temporary capacity for some years, and finally be rejected by the Civil Service Commissioners on educational or medical grounds. In 1892, however, a special preliminary educational examination was instituted. All candidates of respectable parentage, of good health and character, were allowed to sit at this examination, the successful ones being taken into the office and trained for appointment to the Establishment. The Civil Service Examination had, of course, to be undergone before an appointment could be obtained. In 1896 a new system was introduced, whereby a Civil Service certificate had to be obtained before a person was taken into the office. This obviated the necessity of holding the preliminary educational examination, but the postmaster still exercised the privilege of nominating candidates to the situations. The open competitive system of examination was commenced last year, and the appointments are now open to general competition.

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There is a term of probation in the Post Office, and details of the duties devolving on postal clerks may not be without interest to the Bristol public. The business, with its multitudinous ramifications, takes a long time to learn thoroughly. To become a perfect all-round postal clerk a man must possess intelligence, must be cool, fertile in expedient, have a retentive memory, and withal be quick and active. He must know how to primarily sort, sub-divide, and despatch letters. He must have a good knowledge of Post Office circulation and be able to bear in mind the names of the smallest places—hamlets, etc.—in the kingdom, the varying circulations for different periods of the day, and the rates of postage of all articles sent through the post. He must be able to detect the short-paid letter, and to deal with the ordinary letter, the large letter, the unpaid, the registered, the foreign, the "dead," insufficiently addressed, the official, the fragile, the insured, the postcard (single and reply), the letter card, the newspaper, the book-packet, and the circular (the definition of which is very difficult). He is responsible for the correct sortation of every letter that he deals with, and he has to be expert in tying letters in bundles. He has to cast the unpaid postage and enter the correct account on the letter bill; take charge of registered letter bags and loose registered letters, and advise them on the letter bill; see to the correct labelling, tying, and sealing of the mail bags he makes up; check the despatch of mails on the bag list; dispose of his letters by a given time, the hours of the despatch of mails being fixed. In

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consequence, he often has to work under great pressure in order to finish in time. The postal clerk has to surcharge unpaid and insufficiently prepaid correspondence; to see that all postage stamps are carefully obliterated, that the rules of the different posts are not infringed; to attend to the regulations relating to official correspondence. He has to decipher imperfectly and insufficiently addressed correspondence, search official and other directories to trace proper addressees. In addition to all this he has in turn to serve at the public counter, and there attend to money order, savings bank, postal order, and other items of business of the kind.

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As an illustration of the perspicacity of officers of the Post Office in the Western Division of the Kingdom and of the postmen of Bristol, may be cited the circulation through the post and prompt and safe delivery of a letter from Plymouth bearing as its only address the magic letters "W. G.," with cricket hat, stumps, and ball, so dear to the individual who bears the initials.

Delay in delivery of articles sent by post, however, not infrequently takes place in consequence of misdirection. A parcel was addressed to a reverend gentleman at "Publow Church, near Bristol," and as it could not be presented at the fine old structure itself, the postman took it to the adjoining vicarage, where, in the absence of the vicar, it was taken in by a servant upon the inference that it might be intended for some future visitor. It turned out, however, that the address was inaccurate, and that the parcel was actually intended for a village some miles from Bristol, on the other side, having for its name Pucklechurch.

Occasionally there is very slow transmission in these speedy days. A rather remarkable case occurred here of a postcard having occupied nearly eight years in travelling between Horfield Barracks and the premises of a firm in Stokes Croft,—a distance of less than two miles. The missive was posted and stamped on the 10th July, 1890, and trace of it was lost until it turned up at Bournemouth and received the impression of the stamp of that office in April, 1898, whence it was sent to Bristol and delivered. There were no other marks to indicate its long detention.

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Not infrequently the Post Office has to contend with difficulties arising from want of thought on the part of the trading community. Recently there was a somewhat unusual occurrence at the Bristol Post Office. A sack containing samples of biscuits in small tin boxes was received. Around the tins flimsy paper was tied, on which the addresses were written. The paper had become so frayed in transit that scarcely a single wrapper was complete, and when the tins were turned out of the sack there were showers of small pieces of paper like a snowstorm. In order that the samples might reach their destinations, the addresses were, as far as practicable, re-copied, and the samples sent out. Nearly every one of the 500 packets received was then sent out for delivery without delay, no doubt to the astonishment of those who received the biscuits in envelopes from the Returned Letter Office.

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In the sorting office all through the twenty-four hours there is work going on. As one batch of officials goes off duty another comes on, and these relays never cease—not even on Sundays, Christmas Days, or Bank Holidays. The sorting office is at its busiest from 5.15 to 6.45 in the evening, and from 8.30 p.m. till midnight. Then postmen enter hastily, one after another, with bags from the branch offices and pillar-boxes, which are immediately taken charge of, opened, and the contents shot out. The postmen rapidly arrange the small letters face upwards, pack them in "trays" of 400, pass them over to the stamping department; the stampers obliterate Her Majesty's head, and record the hour, date, and place of departure, with one and the same stroke of the stamp, at the rate of a hundred a minute. The stamped letters are placed on sorting tables, where the first division takes place. Those for Bristol and neighbourhood are assigned to a compartment for further sortation, and the outward correspondence is sorted out into the different "roads" by which it will travel. Letters for small places are sent to the mail trains, where they are sorted to their respective stations as the locomotive is whirling them along at the rate of fifty miles an hour. Many of the larger towns, such as Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Exeter, Plymouth, Reading, Bath and Swindon, have their own bags made up at Bristol. Newspapers, packages, and book packets are sorted separately, and subsequently put into their respective bags. By-and-by the country postbags come pouring in, and no sooner are they opened than the letters they contain are subjected to the same analytical treatment.

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In a week 2,600 separate bags (or sacks containing several bags) are sent away from the Bristol Post Office over the Great Western and Midland Railway systems. The weight is 21 tons, or an average of over 18 lbs. per bag or sack. Of the total number, 500 of the bags, with an average weight of nearly 14 lbs. each, are for places within the Bristol district, and 300 of them are sent to London, with a total weight of 4 tons 33 lbs., or an average of 30 lbs. per bag or sack. The bags and sacks received in Bristol from all quarters are about equal in number and weight to those going outwards. Those from London weigh 6 tons 3 cwt. 44 lbs.—an average of 51 lbs each.

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In order to simplify the disposal of the letters in London, they are not sent up unsorted from Bristol, but are divided into thirty-seven labelled bundles or separate bags, a bundle or bag being made up for each London district, for each great railway out of London, for several foreign divisions, for seventeen large provincial towns, and even in such detail as for Paternoster Row and Wood Street.

It is not often that ships of war appear in Bristol waters. Indeed, the old inhabitant saith that it is fifty years since a warship anchored in the vicinity. The recent visit of a squadron calls therefore for a passing mention. Such an event took place during the British Association Meeting in September, 1898. The ironclads composing the squadron were H.M.S. *Nile*, *Thunderer*, *Trafalgar*, *Sans Pareil*, and the gunboat *Spanker*. The vessels anchored in Walton Bay, midway between Clevedon and Portishead. In these pages the interest attaching to them must necessarily

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be centred in their mail arrangements. Nearly a thousand letters a day were received at Clevedon for delivery to the fleet. The ships' postman from each ship came ashore by launch three times a day to fetch the letters. Launches were specially employed to fetch telegrams on signal being given by flag from the end of Clevedon Pier.

A first aid class in connection with the St. John's Ambulance Society was formed by members of the Bristol Post Office staff in 1894, and there was an average attendance of twenty members, under the skilled direction of Dr. Bertram Rogers, of Clifton. Of the members who presented themselves for examination at the termination of the course of lectures, eight were successful, and were presented with certificates at the Society's Annual Meeting, held at the Merchant Venturers' Technical College; and in the following year they qualified for the Society's much-prized medallion of efficiency. At the conclusion of the course, Dr. Bertram Rogers was presented with an ivory-handled and silver-mounted malacca cane, subscribed for by members of the class. A writing-case was also presented to Mr. Blake for organising the class.

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The want of a gymnasium in or near the Post Office premises is greatly felt, but the staff do not neglect opportunities of improving their health in other ways. Cycle Clubs have been in active operation; the Cricket Clubs come off victorious in many matches; and the Electric Swimming Club has been attended with great success.

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## CHAPTER XI.

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### CHRISTMAS AND ST. VALENTINE SEASONS.

A century ago the Christmas card was unthought of; whether it will be a thing of the past in the year 2000 cannot be foretold. The preparations made to meet the annually recurring pressure involve much forethought and considerable labour, and have to be in progress for a long time prior to Christmas. The time occupied in getting the instructions ready for the staff and making all arrangements incidental to the season is equivalent to more than the entire duty of a clerk for a whole year. Nothing whatever is left to chance; for unless the arrangements are organised in full detail, the work could not go on with the clock-like smoothness which is necessary to ensure a successful issue. At Christmas many people find a difficulty in deciding what to give their friends. The difficulty in the Post Office is how to convey Christmas gifts from friend to friend, from relative to relative, and the solution is found in the extensive preparations alluded to. They consist of many and various ways of affording means of rapid circulation and facilitating the traffic. Thus arrangements are made as regards London for direct bags to be made up at Bristol for each of the eight principal district offices, and separate bags for the inclusion of all the London sub-district letters throughout the day. At normal times such bags are made up only for the night mail and heaviest despatches. All foreign letters are sent in separate bags, so as to keep them apart on arrival in London from the inland Christmas missives. Then, in the reverse direction, London relieves the Bristol office by making a direct bag for the tributary office of Clifton by every mail, instead of by two mails only. To further facilitate matters, the parcels and letters for the environs of Bristol are kept separate from those for town delivery at all the large offices sending parcel baskets and mail bags here, and Bristol reciprocates by adopting the same plan for towns with which it exchanges mails. Even the expedient of putting specially-lettered neck-labels on the bags to indicate their contents is adopted. Where, ordinarily, bundles of letters are made up for particular towns, direct bags take their places, and where, ordinarily, letters are sent in bulk from many towns separate bundles are made up for each town: thus, letters from Bristol for Brighton, which are usually dealt with in London, are forwarded in a direct bag to pass through the metropolis unopened. The individual attendances of the ordinary staff are increased from eight hours to twelve, fourteen, and sixteen hours per day. All holidays are suspended for the time being, which enables some telegraphists to undertake postal duty; clerical labour is stopped, outside help is obtained, and altogether additional labour provided for to the extent of 50 per cent. over the normal staff. Although there is such a large augmentation numerically, the value of it cannot be judged in that way, as it takes a long time to make a really efficient postal officer, and the novices who are engaged, although willing enough, can do little more than undertake manual labour. Many army reserve men and army and navy pensioners are engaged to assist on the occasion. The weather is always a potent factor. The ordinary types of mail vehicles, contracted for by the Bristol Tramways Company, and always well turned out by Mr. G. Matthews, have to be supplemented at the Christmas season by the employment of large pair-horse trolleys, which, are used not only for the conveyance of mails between office and railway station, but are also sent round the town to pick up the heavy parcel collections from the numerous sub-offices.

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The great unpunctuality of the mail trains which invariably sets in early in the Christmas week causes no little inconvenience, particularly as regards the mails from the North of England, and the merchants are therefore not slow to avail themselves of the Post Office new system, under which, for a small fee, they can get their letters brought by delayed trains delivered by special messenger promptly on their arrival at the Head Post Office. The extra posting of letters and parcels for places abroad, intended for delivery about Christmas Day, begins to manifest itself early in November.

A great number of people appear to think that Christmas cards and other printed matter may be sent by book-post in covers which are entirely closed, except for small slits cut at the sides. These packets are liable to charge at letter postage rates unless they are made up in such a manner as will admit of the contents being easily withdrawn for examination. To educate the public in the matter of full prepayment, it has become necessary for the Department to be particularly vigilant in surcharging the Christmas missives which contravene the regulations, and the Bristol clerks have the unpleasant task of raising an impost on letters during the Christmas season which infringe the Postmaster-General's not severe regulations. The custom of sending Christmas cards in open envelopes is increasing.

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With regard to telegrams, the public have recently received at the hands of His Grace the Duke of Norfolk the great benefit of being allowed to have their telegraphic messages delivered up to distances of three miles without payment of any charge whatever for portage. In this neighbourhood, the concession has resulted in an increase in the number of messages for delivery over a mile, especially at Christmas. During the Christmas season there is always a decrease in the number of business telegrams, but that is in some measure made up for by a large number of telegrams being sent by the public who are travelling to keep holiday, and in this connection more use is made of the telegraph than the telephone service. The decrease in the volume of work admits of telegraphists aiding their brother officers on the postal side.

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The inflow of Christmas cards is pretty evenly dispersed over the earlier days of the season, but the great rush comes on the night of the 23rd and the morning of the 24th of the month. Letters up to four ounces in weight are now conveyed at the small cost to the public of a penny. So far as this city is concerned, letters and book-packets over two ounces in weight, which are now blended in one post, are quadrupled in number at the Christmas season. This increase in the letter packets has the effect of retarding the postmen in effecting their deliveries, inasmuch as they have to search in their bags for the packages which they cannot carry tied up in consecutive order. The trouble arising therefrom is somewhat mitigated, however, by the circumstance that the charged letters are less numerous than heretofore, owing to the large increase in the weight which is now carried for a penny. The Christmas season is departmentally regarded as consisting of the days from the 20th of the month to Christmas Day, the 25th, inclusive. From the most reliable calculations that the officials are capable of making, it would appear that during the Christmas period no fewer than 2,000,000 letters are dropped by the residents into the 500 receptacles dotted here and there over Bristol's large postal area. The letters distributed by Bristol's regular postmen, with their 250 followers, are a million and a half, in each case about an extra week's work to be got through in three days.

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Some 20,000 letters and parcels find their way to the Bristol Returned Letter Office as the flotsam and jetsam of the Christmas postings. They consist of letters without addresses, letters addressed in undecipherable caligraphy, letters for people dead, gone away, and not known; parcels of poultry and game without name of sender or addressee. Certainly handwriting does not improve, hence all these failures and embarrassments to the Post Office.

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The articles for transmission by parcel post handed in at the head Post Office, branch, offices, sub-offices in town, suburbs, and villages, reach the total of 40,000, being about four times as numerous as at ordinary periods. The rural districts alone produce 8,000 parcels. The parcels delivered number 35,000, being treble ordinary numbers. Ten thousand of these parcels are delivered in the villages. Nearly a thousand large hampers of parcels are exchanged between London and Bristol, and of these some forty contain foreign parcels alone.

Notwithstanding the vastly increased numbers, it becomes noticeable at Bristol, year by year, that there is a diminution of parcels conveyed by parcel post containing articles of good cheer: the geese, the fowls, and the game having decreased, plum pudding's, however, being as much in evidence as ever. The reduction in the parcel post rates which took place in 1897 has had a very marked effect upon the parcel post traffic, and the increase, particularly in the heavy weights, has been very great. On the other hand, the reduction in the rates of charge for the conveyance of post parcels has had the effect of bringing about a decrease in the number of parcels weighing under 2 lb.

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As showing that the postal deliveries at the Christmas season are arranged as well as the extraordinary circumstances will admit, and that the public on its part can appreciate the difficulties to be contended with, it may be worthy of mention that complaints of delay are rarely made.

The Postmaster-General is not unmindful of his duty in providing sustenance for his legions at the busy season, and refreshments are supplied for the permanent staff without stint. There are no trams running on Christmas Day, so that the postmen with their heavy loads are much worse off than on ordinary days, when, with lighter loads, they can ride to and fro on the tramcars. There are some pleasing social features which are worthy of record. For instance, the ladies of the Clifton Letter Mission have for some years past sent "A Christmas Letter" and Christmas card to each of the 150 telegraph messengers employed in the Bristol district. The ladies who manage the society known as the Postal and Telegraph Christian Association invariably send to every postman in the Bristol district a sympathetic and seasonable letter, accompanied by a pretty Christmas card and the best of all good wishes. The staff of the Bristol Post Office usually pay the compliments of the Christmas season to their postal friends elsewhere in the form of a prettily-designed card.

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Christmas Day of 1898 is rendered memorable in postal annals from the circumstance that on

that day the postage on letters to and from many of our colonies and foreign possessions was reduced from the modest sum of 2½d. per half-ounce to the still more modest sum of 1d. per half-ounce. Bristol has a not inconsiderable colonial and foreign correspondence. British India takes 550 letters, etc., on the average weekly; the Dominion of Canada, 450; Newfoundland, 110; and Gibraltar, 100; the other countries to which the reduced rate of postage has been applied take 500 in the week.

One of the many changes that have taken place in the manners and customs of the people as affecting the Post Office is very noticeable as regards the observance of St. Valentine's Day. Thirty years ago the votaries of the patron saint, in their thousands, vied with each other, year after year, to honour his memory, and make the Post Office the medium of sending to every close friend some kind of love token, ranging from the artistic production at one guinea, down to the humble penny fly-leaf which contained the simple but expressive pleading, at the bottom of a neat woodcut, "O come, true love, be mine." Only too often, however, the day was made the occasion to strike a blow at the fickle lover by means of some gross caricature. On the eve of St. Valentine the energies of the staff, which was limited as compared with now, were formerly greatly taxed to get rid of the enormous piles of packets which flooded the various receptacles in the city. All this is, however, changed; the occasion now passes by almost unnoticed in the sorting office and by the postmen.

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## CHAPTER XII.

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### PUBLIC OFFICE: ITS BUSINESS—THE SAVINGS BANK—PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS.



THE PUBLIC HALL, BRISTOL.

*From a photograph by Mr. Protheroe, Wine Street, Bristol.*

The public office of the Bristol Post Office is very commodious (50 ft. by 44 ft.), and affords ample counter accommodation to the citizens for properly conducting their Post Office business. It is markedly superior as regards size and fitting-up to almost any other provincial office, and indeed its equal in those respects is scarcely to be found in all London. In contrast to the spacious public hall of the Bristol Post Office and the civility of its clerks, the writer's first impressions of the postal service of his country were by no means of a pleasant character. When quite a small child, he was entrusted by his mother with the mission of conveying a small rose-coloured and delicately-perfumed letter to the Post Office in a world-famed Warwickshire town—an errand of which he was "no end" proud. Timidly he knocked at a little wicket in the window of the house to which he was directed. Almost immediately the wicket was thrown open, and a very red visage appeared. "What do you want?" "Will you put a stamp on this letter, sir, please?" "No! What the devil do you mean by bringing letters like this? 'Tisn't big enough. It'll get lost in some hole or corner." Frightened at this "Giant Grim," a hasty retreat was made, and the irascible old postmaster was left to do as he liked with letter and penny.

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The penny combined postage and Inland Revenue stamp was introduced in 1881. A new series of postage stamps was issued in 1884, and the present series in January, 1887.

In the year 1833 the value of the postage stamps obtained from London for distribution in the Bristol district was £33,844; in 1862 it had only grown to £35,720; but in 1898 it had reached the more prodigious proportions of £171,000, of which sum those stamps of the halfpenny denomination were of the value of £30,700, and in number 14,735,000; and the penny stamps in value £85,775 and in number 20,586,000. Stamps of other denominations were issued thus:— 1½d., 207,360; 2d., 205,920; 2½d., 207,000; 3d., 364,320; 4d., 277,680; 4½d., 16,000; 5d., 147,120; 6d., 534,600; 9d., 51,200; 10d., 27,840; 1s., 82,320; 2s. 6d., 2,800; 5s., 2,588; 10s., 688; 20s., 550 and £5, 4. Post-cards, embossed envelopes, newspaper wrappers, telegraph forms and other articles of the kind were of the value of £14,334. At the earlier period the postmaster of the day was allowed 1 per cent. on the value of the stamps sold, in addition to his salary. It is not so

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now!

Under the system inaugurated in 1880 the postal orders issued and paid at the Bristol public office counter number nearly half a million in the year. The money orders paid at the counter preponderate over those issued—the amounts respectively being £237,000 and £34,000. These sums include the amounts received in respect of telegraph money orders—the Department's new departure of 1890. The Government insurance and annuity business commenced by the Post Office in 1865 is making progress in Bristol, and the same may be said of the system started in 1880 of investments in Government stock through Post Office medium.

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The first Post Office Savings Bank in the district was established at the Clifton Branch Post Office on the 16th September, 1861, the year in which savings bank business was commenced throughout the country generally. Several accounts were opened on that day, and the amount deposited was £35 4s. A similar institution was opened in the city in March, 1862, at the Money Order Office, then located in the corner shop in Albion Chambers, Small Street, opposite the present Head Post Office. From such small beginnings a vast savings bank business has grown up. The sum standing to the credit of depositors in the Post Office Savings Bank in the Bristol postal area at the end of 1895, when the last account was published, was nearly £2,000,000, deposited by some 100,000 separate individuals. The deposits made at the head office in Small Street reached close upon £400,000, and the other part of the amount is made up thus: Gloucestershire side—Town Post Offices, £659,085; rural Post Offices, £192,934. Somersetshire side—Town Post Offices, £215,295; rural Post Offices, £91,944. The estimated amount due to depositors in the Post Office Savings Banks throughout the whole country on the 21st December, 1898, was £123,155,000, and the amount due to trustees of Savings Banks on November 20th, 1898,—the latest date on which the figures were made up—was £50,634,655. The Bristol Savings Bank was closed in 1888, and its 12,814 accounts were transferred to the Post Office Savings Bank. The amount of money involved was a little over half a million.

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During Mr. Fawcett's administration at the Post Office, thrift on the part of the nation was encouraged in every possible way. Then was inaugurated the now familiar system for facilitating the placing of small sums in the Post Office Savings Bank by means of postage stamps affixed to a Post Office form as penny after penny is saved until an amount of one shilling is reached, the minimum for a Post Office Savings Bank deposit.

A case occurred at a Bristol Post Office fifteen years since, in which a young servant girl, in her desire to be thrifty under the system alluded to, craftily obtained the key of the letter box from the secret place in which the sub-postmaster kept it, and abstracted a number of circular letters on School Board business, and took off the stamps for attachment to the Savings Bank slips. She was sentenced to a term of imprisonment, which, on account of her youth, was limited to six months.

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Amusing incidents sometimes occur to break the monotony of counter work. For instance, a woman applied for a postal order, and when it was handed to her, the clerk, acting upon the official instructions, recommended the good lady to take the number before sending the order away. A few days afterwards she appeared at the Post Office with the order and complained that payment had been refused because the order had been mutilated. The clerk on examining the order found that the direction to "take the number of the order" had been acted on literally. The number had been carefully cut out, and retained in the possession of the applicant. It was some time before she could be made to realize her mistake. In another instance early one fine autumn morn a young couple presented themselves at the public office of the Bristol Post Office and begged in earnest language that they might be supplied with a marriage license. The request could not, of course, be complied with, but the applicants, much to their satisfaction, were informed where they could obtain the needed document. On another occasion some money was observed on the counter, and on the very small child near it being asked what was required, "Two ounces of tea and a pound of sugar" were at once demanded. This mistake no doubt arose from the fact that the business carried on in the late Post Office building in Exchange Avenue is that of a tea dealer. It is a rule of the Service that letters should not be delivered from the *Poste Restante* except to the actual addressees or to other persons bearing authority to receive the letters on behalf of the addressees. A request was made at the Bristol Head Post Office for the delivery of letters to a person other than the addressee, which person could not produce the necessary authority to act as recipient. The excuse given for non-production of authority was that the addressee was asleep. The enquirer having been advised to get authority when the addressee awoke, rather astonished the counter clerk by saying that such awaking would not take place until Saturday, the day of application being Tuesday. It transpired that the application was made in respect of letters for a person who was undergoing a state of hypnotism at a Bristol music hall. The touching incident occurred at the Bristol Post Office of a poor woman—pressing want having come upon her at last—who had to withdraw a shilling which she had thirty years previously deposited in a trustee savings bank which was taken over by the Post Office. She had to receive one penny by way of interest for the use of her mite for thirty years. Some years since a collector of old issues of crown-pieces presented seventy of such coins, in a good state of preservation, at the Bristol Post Office counter as a Savings Bank deposit. The depositor, after taking the trouble to accumulate these old coins, had come to the conclusion that an annual interest of eight shillings and sixpence would be more useful to him than an occasional inspection of the coins. Few people know so little about Post Office matters as an individual from over the Severn who recently asked for a postage stamp. "Do you want a penny or a halfpenny stamp?" asked the clerk. "I want a South Wales stamp," was the reply of Taffy. Then the surprise of the counter

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officer must have been great when, on counting up his money, he found that on one of the shillings the legend "Baby" boldly appeared impressed where the Queen's head is usually found, the coin having evidently been used as a brooch.

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The Department, in communicating with the public, prescribes that its officers should subscribe themselves as the public's most obedient servants, and on some of the printed forms which have to be returned in answer to queries raised by the Department the same style is adopted for the public to use. One dignified gentleman returned his form, from which he had erased "Your obedient servant" and substituted "Yours respectfully," adding a marginal note to the effect that he was not the servant of the Department, but that the Department was his servant.

The postmaster of Bristol is addressed by the public in various ways, as for instance: "Postmaster General," "General Postmaster," "Bristol Postmaster," "H.M. Chief Postmaster," "To the Postmaster in State, Small Street, Bristol," "Head Post-Master and Surveyor of the Bristol District," "Head Master, Post Office," "Post Office Master," "Postmaster-in-General," "Master General, Post-Office," "Mr. —, Esq., Post M.G.," "Mr. —, Esq., Post Office General," "To the Reverend Sir Postmaster, Bristol, England."

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It is astonishing how many Foreigners and Colonists apply to the Bristol Post Office respecting their relations, or for information as regards trading matters. The former questions are sometimes answered, but the latter are handed over to the courteous secretary of the Chamber of Commerce to deal with.

Very unusual was the circumstance of the receipt at the Bristol Post Office in 1895, anonymously, of a sum of ten shillings in postage stamps as conscience money, and, oddly enough, the next day threepence in stamps was received in the same anonymous manner and for the same purpose. These two instances were the first and the last.

The difference between romance and fact is exemplified by an article which appeared in a monthly magazine as follows, viz.:—

"A PUBLIC SERVANT."

"Her Majesty possesses one more faithful public servant than she is aware of, though its name does not transpire in the list of the Ministry. Every night at the General Post Office, Bristol, a spirited mare attached to the red mail-cart is brought, at a quarter before midnight, to fetch the bags of letters, &c. She stands perfectly still, waiting while the mails are sealed and tossed one by one into the vehicle. At the five minutes before twelve, however, should all not be ready for departure, her driver sings out 'Any more for the down train?' by way of hurrying the officials. No sooner does the mare hear those words than she begins to dance and curvet, showing in every possible way her anxiety to start and her sense of the importance of her duties. But if by any chance the first stroke of midnight should sound before they are ready to proceed to the station, she takes matters into her own hands, and nothing will then hold her in. Those who have to do with this clever and beautiful creature are very proud of her, on account of the example she sets of punctuality and attention to the affairs of the nation."

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The real facts on which this incident is founded were, that the horse (not mare) remained in the Post Office yard quietly from 11.10 p.m. until midnight on one particular night only, and not generally, and when the loading of the van commenced the horse became restive, the final slamming of the van doors causing it to start off for the street. In consequence of a repetition of this restlessness on another night, and "kicking-in" the front of the van, the horse was taken off the Royal Mail Service.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

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### TELEGRAPHS, TELEPHONES, EXPRESS DELIVERY.

The Saxon King, Edmund I., doubtless never conceived, when he held court (A.D. 940-946) at his palace in the village of Pucklechurch, seven miles from Bristol, that in generations to come there would exist, as there does now, a telegraph office within a few yards of the site of his castle, whence a question could be wired to the ends of the earth, and a reply obtained in the short space of a few hours. Probably at that remote period a journey from Pucklechurch to the north of Scotland would have been considered as great an achievement as that in recent days of Dr. Nansen in his endeavour to get to the North Pole.

The first actual working telegraph was erected in 1838 between Paddington and West Drayton on the Great Western Railway, and in the following year Wheatstone and Cook constructed a telegraph line from Paddington to Slough. Mr. Brunel then wished to extend the line to this city, but the shareholders would not support him to that extent. In 1852, however, the Great Western Railway Board had the line constructed through to Bristol. By means of it messages could, at that later date, be forwarded to and from most parts of the kingdom from the office at the Bristol Railway Station. Arrangements were put in progress for extending the wires into the centre of the city, in order that greater facilities might be afforded to those parties who might wish to avail

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themselves of the means of inter-communication, and before the end of the year the wires were laid from the railway station to the Commercial Rooms, and subsequently three telegraph offices were opened in the city, viz.: the Electric and International, on the Exchange; the Magnetic, in Exchange Avenue; and the United Kingdom, in Corn Street. A telegraph line was laid to Shirehampton, and the committee of the Commercial Rooms subscribed £30 a year towards its maintenance.

It is recorded that in 1859 the firm of Messrs. W. D. and H. O. Wills, tobacconists and snuff manufacturers of this city, laid down an electric telegraph wire between their warehouse in Maryport Street and their manufactory in Redcliff Street, whereby the partners and employés, although engaged in different parts of the city, were enabled to converse with each other as readily as if occupying the same counting-house. The wire was used solely for their own business. [Pg 200]

In 1862 a turnpike road telegraph was spoken of as being in course of construction between Bristol and Birmingham.

Mr. James Robertson, the senior assistant superintendent of the Bristol Telegraph Office, during his forty-two years' service, thirteen of which were passed in the employment of the Electric and International Telegraph Company, has had many experiences. He has culled from his "ancient history" the fact that the amount of telegraph business transacted by the E. and I. T. Co. at Falmouth, Plymouth, Bristol, and London (Lothbury, head office) on March 10th, 1858, at the respective times of day stated, was:—Falmouth, 8 messages, handed in by 10.20 a.m.; Plymouth at 10.36 had managed to transmit 7; Bristol, at noon, 39; and Lothbury had received 116 by 12.17 p.m. Plymouth transmitted for Falmouth, and Bristol for Plymouth. Bain's chemical recorder was the system used on the Falmouth wire, the double needle on the Plymouth and Bristol, and "Bains" and needles on Bristol-London circuits. The average delay on messages at Plymouth was eighty-three minutes and at Bristol fourteen minutes. The charge at the time from Falmouth to London was four shillings for twenty words, addresses free. The present proprietor of *Lloyd's Newspaper*, Mr. Thomas Catling, records an incident in which Mr. Robertson was concerned. Mr. Catling was the only London newspaper reporter who visited Windsor on the eventful night when the deeply lamented Prince Consort breathed his last on 14th December, 1861. On reaching Windsor by the last train from London he learned that His Royal Highness had passed away about twenty minutes previously. Having obtained at the Castle particulars of the sad event, Mr. Catling hunted out the residence of the clerk of the Electric and International Telegraph Company. On ringing him up, the clerk pleaded that before going to bed he had been taking gruel and hot water to get rid of a bad cold. He, however, got up and proceeded with Mr. Catling to the telegraph office in High Street, whence intelligence was wired to London. Mr. Catling preserved the receipt of that message as a souvenir of the occasion. Mr. Robertson was the telegraph clerk who arose from his bed to perform the service in the dead of night. [Pg 201]

On the transfer of the telegraph business from the companies to the State early in 1870, the Post Office, Bristol, engaged sixteen clerks from the Electric and International Telegraph Company, five from the United Kingdom Company, and six from the Magnetic Company. Additional clerks were employed by the Post Office as soon as the volume of work could be gauged, but in the meantime the transferred clerks had to do practically double duty. The officials taken over from the companies were located in the Small Street Post Office, but it was not until January, 1872, that room could be found there for the entire staff, which had then grown to be ninety clerks and fifty messengers. The telegraphic system soon after the Government took to it was extended in this district to twenty of the principal villages. In the first year of Post Office working there were 450,000 messages dealt with here, and now the yearly number is 3,500,000. The sixpenny telegram was introduced in 1885. The local telegraph service now has a staff consisting of a superintendent, 23 superintending officers, 140 male and 44 female telegraphists, eight telephonists, and 155 telegraph messengers. Telegrams are delivered from the head office, two branch offices, fifteen town sub-offices, forty rural sub-offices, and four railway stations. The head office has 600,000 messages delivered from it annually, the branch and town sub-offices 220,000, and the rural districts 74,000. Of the latter (74,000), about 8,000 are delivered at distances of from one to three miles, and 350 at distances over three miles. After 8.0 p.m. all the messages in the town area are delivered from the head office. The Duke of Norfolk's 1897 concession of free delivery of telegrams for all distances under three miles has been appreciated by all those concerned. [Pg 203]

The telegraph gallery has direct telegraphic connection with the undermentioned towns: Bath, Birmingham, Bridgwater, Cardiff, Cheltenham, Chippenham, Clevedon, Cork, Exeter, Glasgow, Gloucester, Guernsey, Jersey, Leeds, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Newport (Mon.), Oxford, Plymouth, Reading, Southampton, Swansea, Swindon, Taunton, and Weston-super-Mare, and thirty-two smaller towns. [Pg 204]

Bristol plays a not unimportant part in the Post Office telephone trunk line system, commenced in 1896. It has direct trunk lines to Bath, Birmingham, Cardiff, Exeter, Gloucester, London, Newport, Sharpness, Taunton, and Weston-super-Mare. The conversations held by the public through the medium of these lines number 4,000 weekly.



THE TELEGRAPH INSTRUMENT ROOM, BRISTOL POST OFFICE.  
*From a photograph by Mr. Protheroe, Wine Street, Bristol.*

The well-ventilated and well-lighted telegraph instrument room is on the upper floor, and extends from end to end of the building. In it there are 102 telegraph instruments of various kinds in use, viz.: 5 A.B.C.'s, 19 double-plate sounders, 30 sounders, 28 duplexes, 5 quadruplexes, 5 Wheatstone sets, 7 repeaters or relays, 2 concentrators and 1 hexode. Divested of technicalities, it may be said that telegraphing on the A.B.C. instruments is effected by alphabetic manipulative keys, which are depressed by the fingers of the left hand of the sender at the same time that a handle is turned with the right hand, and a corresponding effect is produced on the dial plate of the receiver. The double-plate sounder is read by sound from two small metal hands striking right and left against two pieces of metal. In sending, the working is by means of keys manipulated by the hand. The sending upon the sounder instrument, which is that chiefly used, is done by a small key with handle being depressed and released according to the dots and dashes of the Morse alphabet. The signals by which messages are received and read by the ear are produced by a bar of soft iron striking upon a steel point placed between two coils of wire. With the A.B.C., double-plate sounder, and sounder, only one message can be sent or received on the wire at one time; but the duplex sounder instruments are so constructed that two messages can be sent on the wire—one in each direction—at the same time. Double-current duplex instruments are in use for telegraphing to busy towns such as Plymouth, Exeter, Cardiff, Swansea, &c., &c. The quadruplex consists of two duplex sets upon one wire. Upon these circuits two distinct messages may be sent simultaneously from each end. The hexode has six instruments at each end of a single wire, enabling twelve clerks to operate at the same time—six at each end,—and thus admits of a single wire doing so much work as six wires worked with the ordinary sounder instrument.

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At times of pressure when race meetings are going on, or during the cricket and football seasons, the ordinary methods of working are supplemented by extraordinary means, thus: the duplex working between Bristol and Manchester is augmented by Manchester connecting there a Bristol wire with a Newcastle wire: Newcastle in like manner further connecting the line with Glasgow, Glasgow with Edinburgh, Edinburgh with Dundee, and Dundee with Aberdeen. Then at the Bristol end, instead of working by means of the ordinary keys, Wheatstone working is resorted to, viz.: the messages instead of being "keyed" are "punched," the punching process being performed by means of iron punching sticks upon an apparatus called the "perforator." The sticks are rapidly worked by skilful operators upon three steel keys, which, when struck, mechanically draw a strip of white paper tape, at the same time perforating holes which indicate signs in accordance with the Morse alphabet system. These slips thus "punched"—which, by-the-by, very much resemble the perforated slips used in connection with the organette instrument—are passed through a Wheatstone "transmitter," and buzzed through so rapidly that 400 or 500 words can be sent in a minute. The signals are simultaneously reproduced upon blue slips in the form of dots and dashes at Manchester, at Newcastle, at Glasgow, at Edinburgh, at Dundee, and at Aberdeen. The message recorded on the slips is broken off at about every hundred words to form a "press" page at the receiving offices for writing up by the telegraphists, a large number of whom can be employed on the work at the same time. When this process is resorted to the battery power for the wire has to be greatly increased. The repeater instruments are worked in like manner, except that the system is permanent instead of occasional. The concentrator is a recent invention, and is used for the purpose of economising force and apparatus, and of minimising delay and table space. By its means the wires for eighteen to twenty offices, which use the same form of telegraphic instrument, are led into a special switch-board, and each wire as it is required is "switched" through to a telegraph instrument, at which a clerk is ready to send or receive the message. Thus the telegraphist is "fed" by the operator at the concentrator, and has to send a message to any one of the thirty towns instead of, under ordinary working, to only three or four towns.

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In place of over 700 batteries with 3,500 cells of the Bichromate, Daniel and Leclanche type in use at the Bristol telegraph office for many years, a system of accumulators or storage batteries has been brought into operation. The power for charging the accumulators is generated on the spot by a Crossley's gas engine driving a dynamo. The accumulators number 250, and each has seven divisions. The hexode instrument between Bristol and London requires a voltage of 400 dry cells. There are two complete sets of accumulators, each with separate connecting wires to the



instrument room. One set is in use at a time. The system of accumulators has been introduced for the purposes of economy and saving of space.

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It may be interesting to the uninitiated to learn that in telegraphy the earth plays the part of a return wire; thus the circuit between Bristol and Birmingham is rendered complete by earth. The wires connected with the two towns indicated are brought into the test boxes at the respective places, and there connected to a single wire at each town which finds earth by means of a zinc plate buried some twelve feet in the soil near or under the Post Office buildings.

Occasionally when people have been out for a drive or a cycle ride, and their eyes have been delighted with the grand scenery to be found around Bristol, they look, as they journey homewards, to the Government poles and to the many wires therefrom suspended, and wonder which are telegraph wires, which are telephone wires, where they all lead to, and between what points messages are sent and conversations held. Such travellers returning to Bristol by way of Almondsbury would see the wires on the one side (telegraphs), which run from Bristol to Falfield, Newport, Cardiff, Swansea, Gloucester, Liverpool; London to Swansea, Newport, and Cardiff; Birmingham to Exeter; Plymouth to Liverpool; and (telephones) Bristol to Birmingham, Gloucester, Cardiff; and on the other side of the road (telephones) Horfield, Fylton, Almondsbury, Newport, Cardiff, Gloucester and Birmingham. In some instances there are two or three wires for the same place. The telegraph, and telephone wires cross and recross each other at frequent intervals along the road, and the whole sets of wires cross from side to side of the road between Fylton and Almondsbury.

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Alternative routes for the wires are adopted where practicable, so that in case of a break-down on one line communication may be kept up on the other.

By way of illustration of such alternate routes, it may be mentioned that the two wires from the Head Post Office in Small Street for Swansea run underground to Stapleton Road, at which point they are brought above ground and diverge, one running to Wee Lane, thence to Ashley Hill, Horfield, Almondsbury, Alveston Ship, Falfield and Berkeley, up to the Severn Bridge; and the other branching off at the end of Stapleton Road, and carried along the Fishponds and Chipping Sodbury roads nearly to Yate, and down the Tortworth road to just beyond Falfield, where it joins the other Swansea and South Wales wires, and passes over the Severn Bridge into Wales.

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The telegraph and telephone wires in this district are chiefly erected and maintained by soldiers of the Royal Engineers. Sixteen military telegraphists, members of the Royal Engineers, are attached to the Bristol Post Office, and kept in training for telegraph service with the army. Twelve of them are now—November, 1899—in South Africa on active service, in connection with the troubles in the Transvaal.

In the great hurricane which occurred in January, 1899, the telephone and telegraph wires radiating from Bristol were blown down in all directions. In consequence Bristol was entirely cut off from direct telephonic communication with Birmingham for 21 hours, and had only one wire instead of two for 9¼ hours; from Bath for 18 hours, and had only one wire instead of two for 5½ hours; from Cardiff for 18 hours, and had only two wires instead of three for 10½ hours; from Weston-super-Mare entirely for 24½ hours; from Taunton for 28½ hours; from Exeter for 27 hours; from Sharpness for 26 hours. There was only one wire instead of two to Gloucester for 26¼ hours, to London for 6 hours, and to Newport for 20¾ hours.

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The trunk telephone lines were more or less interrupted for a week, caused by the working parties engaged on repairs.

The telegraph wires for the counties of Gloucester, Somerset, Monmouth, Warwick, Shropshire, Worcester, Wilts, Devon, Cornwall and Lancashire were those chiefly deranged.

It is believed that there is only one telegraph cable in the Bristol district, and that cable does not belong to the Postmaster-General. It crosses the river Avon at a point adjacent to Pill and Shirehampton, and was used by the Commercial Rooms in connection with reports of the arrival of vessels. Up to the time of its introduction, as already stated, "warners" were employed. The last of the old running "warners" were Gerrish and Case. These men lived at Pill, and on hearing news from pilots-men of the arrival of a ship in the Bristol Channel they started off on foot to Bristol and *warned* the merchants and wives of sailors of the vessel's arrival in the Channel, getting, of course, fees for their trouble,—a guinea from the merchants, and so on, down to the shillings of the sailors' wives,—and fifty years ago these fees were willingly paid, and the heavy postages too. The runners were men of some little mark.

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The Post Office at Avonmouth, a Bristol sub-office, is much used for telegraph purposes by persons on board vessels passing up and down the Kingroad in the Bristol Channel. The Bristol Corporation placed outside the port a large white notice board with "TELEGRAPH OFFICE" painted upon it in black letters, to attract the attention of mariners. The messages are chiefly received from vessels with cargoes consigned to Sharpness, which in neap tides have often to lie in the roads for days.

Telegrams for vessels lying in Kingroad are often taken out by boat at midnight or in the early hours of the morning. This is often in consequence of the tide not serving, or being too strong for the boatman to go out at seasonable hours.

Lundy Island, in the Bristol Channel, is connected with the mainland by a submarine cable, which is considered to be one of the most perfect of its kind. Letters for Lundy, from Bristol and

elsewhere, are carried across by boat from Instow once a week. The nearer small islands of Flat Holm and Steep Holm have cable telephonic communication with Weston-super-Mare. The telephone, which is carried into the Weston Post Office, is rented by the War Office Authorities, who allow the islanders the use of it. Letters from Bristol for the Flat Holm are conveyed by way of Cardiff. The island is rented from the Cardiff Corporation by a farmer who resides upon it. His son, who lives in Cardiff, daily visits the island in a yacht, and conveys the letters for the Trinity House officials and residents. For the Steep Holm, Bristol letters are sent from Weston-super-Mare; the services to the island being tri-weekly—Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday,—and are performed by a contractor, who goes across on behalf of the War Office. The Steep Holm is inhabited by military men only. In a manuscript of 30th March, 1825, it is described as "Stipe Holme." One of the first serious efforts in connection with the plan of telegraphing through space without connecting wires was conducted between the diminutive island of Flat Holm and the shore, a distance of about five miles; and between Penarth and Brean Down, a distance of nine miles. An interesting illustration of the system of wireless telegraphy was given, under the direction of Mr. W. H. Preece, C.B., F.R.S. (now Sir W. H. Preece, K.C.B., F.R.S.), at the Clifton College conversazione, held in honour of the learned British Associates during the meeting of the Association at Bristol in 1898. [Pg 214]

The telegraph staff have seldom had their skill and smartness more thoroughly tested than on the memorable Monday evening in February, 1893, when press messages of great length relating to the introduction of the Home Rule Bill were sent over the wires. Twenty minutes after Mr. Gladstone rose to speak in the House of Commons the first instalment of the special summary of his speech reached this city. The conclusion of the summary was received at two minutes to 7. The verbatim report commenced to arrive at 4.49, and the last instalment reached the Bristol Office at 8 o'clock. The total number of words in the messages sent to Bristol was nearly 40,000. [Pg 215]

During the early potato season telegraphing is very brisk with Jersey. Bristol is the only large office besides London which has direct communication with the island. Some idea may be gathered of the extra labour entailed on the telegraph service from the fact that in the month of June, 1899, no fewer than 20,904 telegrams passed between Bristol and Jersey, the normal number being only 5,800 monthly. Five or six telegraph operators are usually sent during the season to Jersey from Bristol. [Pg 216]

In Bristol about 700 firms use abbreviated telegraphic addresses.

The telegraph money order system, started in 1889, is exhibiting marvellous developments in the local service.

The express letter delivery service, which came into operation in 1891, is very useful to the public. By means of this agency the Post Office distributes by express messenger 300,000 letters and parcels annually. Of that number Bristol contributes 7,000 services. Bicycles and tricycles are now delivered for the public from any telegraph office in Bristol and district by special messenger at a fee of 3d. per mile, without any charge for weight. The messengers are not permitted to ride upon the cycles, except by the permission of the senders, but will wheel them up to a distance of three miles. [Pg 217]

An express delivery messenger has been used, ere now, for the convoy of a traveller from point to point in a town unknown to him or her. The Post Office is often required to assist even more closely in the domestic relations of life. Recently a gentleman from America wrote to the Clifton Post Office to enquire whether a certain near relative of his could be found, as he was very anxious to see her before return to America. He enclosed a shilling stamp for a reply by telegraph, and begged for urgency. The relative was found and her address given. The applicant's ardour to see his relative cooled, or his stay in the country was abridged, for instead of paying the proposed visit, he begged the Post Office officials to expend five shillings, which he sent, in the purchase of cut roses for his relative. Of course, this was outside the round of Post Office duties, but the clerks obligingly attended to it, with the aid of a telegraph messenger who was off duty at the moment.

Occasional mistakes are not to be wondered at when people write illegibly. Through the improper formation of the capital letter, D, in the proper name Dyster, has in telegraphing been turned into O, and the name made Oyster, with the result of misdelivery of the telegram to a firm of fishmongers having "Oyster" as an abbreviated address. It must have been extremely painful to an anxious parent to receive a telegram summoning him to a nursing home far distant, in terms that his "sow was worse," and begging him to come at once; the telegraphist having made the slight mistake of transcribing "w" for "n." The gentleman who sent a telegram to his town house in the West End of London asking that his covert coat might be forwarded to him was no doubt considerably astonished when his butler returned the telegram to him by post asking for an explanation, and he found that the text of it was "Pigs,  $\frac{9}{3}$ ,  $\frac{8}{9}$ , and 8/-." The error was occasioned in connection with the use of multiple addresses for a bacon-trading firm's telegrams. In another instance a curious complication resulted through imperfect spacing on the part of the signalling telegraphist, thus:—A telegram written by the sender as "To ----, Fore St., Northam, Bideford. Be in attendance Public Offices," was transcribed thus:—"To — forest, Northam, Bideford. Be in at ten dance Public Offices," and, owing to the number of words counting the same as the number signalled, the inaccuracy was not discovered until a repetition had been obtained from the office of origin on application of the addressee. It was printed in a Midland newspaper that at the presentation of a sword of honour to the Sirdar the Common Councilmen attended in their "margarine gowns," and, of course, the error of using "margarine" for "mazarine" was put down [Pg 218] [Pg 219]

to the carelessness of the telegraph clerk. A telegram was sent indicating arrival at 8 Mostyn Crescent, in a favourite North Wales town. At one stage in transmission "Mostyn" became converted into "mostly," and at the next office of transmission "Crescent" became "pleasant," and the telegram when delivered read "Arrived 8 mostly pleasant." The Prime Minister who had informed his audience that "there was no prospect of an immediate general election, that they had a working majority, and the Government was of good cheer," would not have been pleased had he seen that the last word in the telegram posted up in the Bristol Commercial Rooms had been transcribed as "of good cheek."

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A telegram, "Have arranged for Sunday. Dening," with the first two words struck out, and "arrangement complete" substituted underneath, was handed in at a telegraph office by a well-known and much respected Bristol clergyman. At the forwarding office the message was unfortunately read "For Sunday Dinning arrangement complete," the erasure and addition not having been properly understood and the proper name misspelt. At the delivering office the message again suffered alteration, and became "For Sunday dining arrangements complete." It may readily be supposed that the addressee was somewhat astonished at the peculiar text of the message.

The following is from the Bristol *Times and Mirror* of February, 1893, and has reference to a little inaccuracy on the part of a telegraph assistant employed at a Bristol sub-post office. The incident itself is correctly reported:—"Garraways, 12 o'clock. Dear Mrs. B.—Chops and tomato sauce. Yours Pickwick," settled the hash of a well-known character; and a wire, "Going to Bath to meet girl. Not back to dinner," had, very nearly, a similar effect on the domestic relations of one of the smartest solicitors in our city. The telegraph has had, in its time, much to answer for, "but never aught like this." When Puck said: "I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes," he little thought what mischief he might do. It was only the other day we read how a stray dropped line destroyed a horse, killed a cow, and cut off the head of a nigger; but these accidents were a trifle compared with what might have happened if the message first quoted could not have been explained. The learned gentleman it appears has a brother, by name Gilbert, familiarly known in the circle as "Gil." The latter, having business in Bath, wrote asking his relative to dine with him at the "Christopher." The learned advocate at once accepted; but, being a thoroughly domesticated man, telegraphed to his better-half: "Going to Bath to meet Gil; not back to dinner." Then came in the "cussedness" of the wire which substituted "girl" for "Gil," and hence the temporary ructions when the happy husband, having succeeded with his latchkey, sought repose.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

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### TELEGRAPH MESSENGERS.

The telegraph messengers in uniform employed in the Bristol district number about 160. They have a literary institute, a drum and fife band, hold swimming classes, etc. That there is need of night classes may be inferred from the following specimens of telegraph messengers' orthography and syntax:—

(1) "Supt, Sir, I will try to be more careful in the pass. Yours obed, H. P—."

(2) "Supt, Sir, I having asked where the message was ment for and they told me to go up the road where I should see a chemist shop where I should find it about there and I having could not find it I asked, a gentleman which he said it was farther up the road and I left it with cotton the undertaker which he said it was quite right.—G. H—."

(3) "Supt, sir, I will try to be more extint in the future as this is the truth.—M. T—."

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(4) "Supt, Sir, I much regret not returning my report But I left it home in my other Pocket in my overcoat which is home drying which was wet through on Saturday last. Yours obed H. E—."

The institute was inaugurated at a public meeting at the Colston Hall on the 1st December, 1892, which was attended by a large and influential gathering of citizens. Upon the platform were the Mayor of Bristol (Mr. W. R. Barker), who presided, the Very Rev. the Dean of Bristol (Dr. Pigou), Mr. Charles Townsend, M.P., Rev. R. Cornall, Mr. R. C. Tombs (the postmaster), Mrs. R. C. Tombs, Dr. Lansdown, jun., Miss Syngé, Miss Pollock, Messrs. John Harvey, Arthur Baker, E. G. Clarke, H. Lewis, C. H. Tucker, R. L. Leighton, W. H. Lindrea, J. R. Bennett, E. Sampson; also Messrs. A. J. Flewell (superintendent of the telegraph department), W. H. Gange, J. Robertson, J. S. Gover, J. J. Mackay, H. T. Carter (superintendent of the postal department).

It was explained that the telegraph messengers were engaged at from thirteen to fourteen years of age, and the lessons they had learned at school had chiefly been supplemented by a knowledge acquired in the streets. The object was to counteract street influences by providing elementary instruction, recreation, and interesting literature. There was no desire to educate the boys to such a pitch that Jack would think himself better than his master, but to take care that they should not degenerate. It was announced that the hours of labour had just been reduced from sixty-two to fifty per week, which would be a great boon to the boys. It was further stated that a private appeal had been made, not in vain, to a few of Bristol's most generous citizens, and that

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through their kindly aid, with subscriptions from the members of the staff and the grant which it was hoped to earn from the Education Department, the institute would be carried on without pecuniary embarrassment. The description of the institute's work was as follows:—

1. The institute would be open to the telegraph messengers and to junior officers of the postal and telegraph service, the charge to each member to be one penny per week.
2. The institute would be carried on in a room at the General Post Office. [Pg 225]
3. In connection with the institute an evening school would be held, the educational session to last from October to May. An annual examination of the members of the classes would be held.
4. In addition to the three elementary subjects,—reading, writing, and arithmetic,—classes would be arranged for the study of Scripture, geography, drawing, composition, and shorthand.
5. For the purpose of recreation certain games would be provided.
6. In connection with the institute there would be a library, which had been formed by means of books generously given by the citizens of Bristol.
7. The library would be open to any established or unestablished officer of the postal and telegraph service at a slight subscription per month.
8. A penny savings bank would also be started.

The Chairman said he gladly consented, to preside that evening, because the object of the meeting was one in which he took deep interest, and one which he felt sure would commend itself to a very large number of his fellow-citizens. He thought he might say that everything connected with the postal service was peculiarly interesting to them all, and anything they could do to ameliorate the lot of those who daily rendered them such important service they would be very glad to do. He thought it would not be well to make the movement too "goody" in its character, or too educational, so he was glad to see that there was a lighter side to the scheme. [Pg 226]

Mr. Charles Townsend, M.P., Mr. Arthur Baker, Mr. Harold Lewis, Miss Synge, and members of the postal and telegraph, staff, also spoke.

Then, the Dean of Bristol addressed the telegraph messengers, and said he really should have been disappointed if he had not been invited to attend the meeting. It was a pleasant part of his privilege in ministering in Bristol to be asked to take a share in such an interesting gathering as they were holding that evening. One of the best features of this institute was that it would assist them to put their leisure to the most profitable use.

The educational work has been progressing steadily ever since its inauguration, and much good has resulted from it to the messengers.

Ever ready to give their countenance to entertainments for the benefit of the community, their Graces the late lamented Duke, and the Dowager Duchess, of Beaufort, as their first public act after coming to reside at Stoke Park, near our city, attended a concert at the Redland Park Hall, which was held for the purpose of benefiting the funds of the Telegraph Messengers' Institute. Later on, May 21st, 1898, they were kind enough to attend an annual meeting and a prize distribution at the Colston Hall. The late Duke, who presided on the occasion, said it was a great pleasure to him to be present. He had witnessed a good deal of the care and discipline with which the Post Office messengers were looked after. Like everybody who had a great deal of correspondence, he had the privilege of having the services of the best regulated Post Office in the world. They also had in this country the privilege of being able to use the best regulated telegraph service. They might be perfectly sure that if a man wanted to send a telegram, when once he put it into the hands of the postal officials, however ill-written or badly addressed it might be, it was very probable that the telegram would reach its destination. Those who had a good deal of correspondence were deeply indebted for the splendid organisation of the Bristol Department. They were also very much indebted to the telegraph clerks, who deciphered the scrawls handed them, and who transmitted the messages. They were deeply indebted also to the boys for the way in which they refrained from stopping to play marbles, and did their duties with great zeal, and delivered their messages at the proper places and to the proper persons. They would understand that they were Government officers, and that they had to discharge important duties. He could personally say that those duties were thoroughly well carried out in the city of Bristol and its neighbourhood. [Pg 227]

The Duchess of Beaufort then distributed the prizes, after which a telegraph messenger presented Her Grace with a basket of choice flowers. [Pg 228]

The Bishop of Bristol addressed the lads, and urged them to do their duty thoroughly when on duty, and to enter heartily into healthy play when off duty. In doing their duty they should remember one or two things. They might be charged with the delivery of a message which was a matter of life or death; it might be one regarding which thousands of pounds depended; or it might be one of little importance. But, whatever it was, it was not for them to enquire, but to deliver the message with punctuality and promptness. Having spoken of the discipline and training telegraph boys received, he observed that of all telegraph boys, for punctuality, steadiness, courtesy, and politeness, the Bristol boys were about the best. He urged them also to live pure lives and observe complete honesty, that they might become worthy citizens of whom the country might be proud. He was glad to hear the name of the lady (Miss Pollock) who [Pg 229]

conducted the scriptural class so cordially received, which showed that the lady and her work had taken hold of the hearts of the boys. The excellence of their work as boys, and as men, and the enjoyment of their lives, in the best sense, depended upon their becoming God-fearing. He should be pleased to give a prize in connection with the Scripture class.

The letters of the Bishop, written with reference to the occasion, should not be left unchronicled. They ran as follows, viz.: —

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"Church House,  
Dean's Yard, S.W.,  
May 10th, 1898.

"MY DEAR POSTMASTER,—I am speaking at Bath on the afternoon of the 20th, and am engaged to stay the night. But I think your proposal so important that I am writing to my host, Mr. S., to ask if he has engaged friends to meet me. If he can excuse me, I will, if all be well, come to you and say something.

"Yours very truly,  
G. F. BRISTOL."

"The Athenæum,  
May 12th, 1898.

"MY DEAR POSTMASTER,—I have arranged to return to Bristol on the evening of May 20, and if all be well can be with you. Send me a card of place and hour.

"Yours very truly,  
G. F. BRISTOL."

The following extract from a letter in which His Grace wrote concerning the meeting, is indicative of the interest which he took in matters affecting the postal and telegraph services of Bristol, viz.:—

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"Stoke Park,  
Stapleton, near Bristol,  
21st May, 1898.

"DEAR MR. TOMBS,—I must write you a few lines of thanks for the very pleasant evening you gave us last night. Both the Duchess and I enjoyed it very much. I was remarkably struck with the appearance of your boys: such nice, clean, smart-looking youths. What a difference drill makes to lads! They have already a smart—soldierlike, I should call it—appearance, and I am sure it tends to sharpen their minds as well as to straighten their bodies.

"Believe me to remain,  
Yours truly,  
BEAUFORT."

The messengers little thought as they listened to the Duke's encouraging words, addressed to them on the occasion of the meeting, that they would before a year had passed away be sending a modest, humble, but loving tribute, in the form of a wreath, which was thought worthy to be suspended over the pulpit in Badminton Church at the Duke's obsequies, in juxtaposition with a wreath of mammoth proportions sent by the officers of the 7th Dragoons (the Duke's old Regiment).

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The Bristol telegraph messengers have cause to remember that bright Saturday afternoon in 1895 when, preceded by their drum and fife band, they marched out to Burfield, Westbury-on-Trym, the country residence of Sir (then Mr.) R. H. Symes, the Mayor of Bristol. They were there enabled to have a few hours of recreation and pleasure, and to forget the busy hum of the city with its turmoil and heat. Following the excellent example, Mr. Arthur Baker, of Henbury, and other country gentlemen have invited the boys out on Saturday afternoons, to encourage them to keep banded together for good purposes, and to maintain that *esprit de corps* which is so necessary in a body of youths drawn together after the manner of the Telegraph Messengers' Class.

A most memorable occasion was that in 1897, when the messengers were inspected by Lieutenant-Colonel MacGregor, of the 24th Middlesex R.V.C., London. They mustered at the Post Office, and, under the direction of Inspectors Mawditt, Appleby (late 29th Regiment and sergeant-major Scinde Volunteers), and Cook (late Royal Marines), and headed by their drum and fife band, marched to the Artillery Drill Ground in Whiteladies Road where, in presence of many visitors, military and civilian, they were put through manual exercises, physical drill to music, and then reviewed on the parade ground. In the speeches which followed the boys were complimented on their efficiency and smart appearance. It was on this occasion that it was announced the Postmaster-General had obtained the sanction of the Treasury for a grant of money in order to encourage telegraph messengers' institutes and drill in the large towns. Under this scheme, prizes for proficiency in drill and general good conduct are awarded—a system which has since been found to work admirably.

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## LETTER DELIVERY SYSTEM.

## POSTMEN: THEIR DUTIES AND RECREATIONS.

The extent of the Bristol postal establishment in 1775 may be gleaned from the reply given by the Postmasters-General to a memorial complaining that there was only one letter carrier for the delivery of all the letters received in Liverpool. The answer was that only one letter carrier was maintained in any provincial town, including the premier city of Bristol, and that they did not think themselves justified in incurring for Liverpool the expense of another. An additional Bristol postman was, however, appointed between then and January, 1778. In 1792 there were four letter carriers at Bristol, but only two appear to have been allowed by the Department, the other two being employed as extras, and provided for, probably, by an extra charge on the letters delivered. The Bristol letter carriers were not supplied with uniform clothing until 1858. Then, a hat and coat once yearly, and a waterproof cape once in two years, were given to them. The uniform clothing was not supplied to the auxiliary letter carriers. Bags or pouches for the men to carry for the protection of the letters were at that time provided.

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In 1859 the postmen wore scarlet uniform and issued out from the Post Office three times daily to traverse the length and breadth of the city in the distribution of letters. In 1899 the "men in blue" sally forth six times every day.

In the postmen's department there are now seven inspectors and three hundred and seventy postmen. The delivery of letters in the town district is made from the head office. There is a branch delivering office at Clifton, but those at North Street and Phippen Street were long since abandoned. In the Bristol postal district, sixty years ago, there were fewer than 20,000 letters delivered in a week, or about 1,000,000 in a year—a number now nearly reached in a week. The letters delivered annually from the Central Post Office number 31,000,000; from the Clifton Post Office, 6,250,000; from the suburban offices and rural offices, 7,300,000. It is a noteworthy fact that the letters posted in Bristol for delivery within its own limit form 27 per cent. of the total number, which percentage is only surpassed at two or three of the large cities of the Kingdom. Six deliveries of letters and five deliveries of parcels are made in the city, with ten collections. The average number of persons to whom letters are delivered by each postman in Bristol (city) is 1,800. There are 666,536 parcels delivered annually. To each of two firms are delivered more than one quarter of a million letters annually, equal to one hundredth part of the total number of letters delivered.

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The distances from the head office to the extreme outward terminal City and Clifton delivery points are as follows:—Westbury Park, 2½ miles; Horfield Barracks, 3 miles; Ridgeway, 2½ miles; Barton Hill, 1¾ miles; Arno's Vale, 1¾ miles; Totterdown, 2 miles; Bedminster Down, 2 miles; Ashton Gate, 2 miles; and Clifton Suspension Bridge, 1½ miles. The trams are used by the postmen, and the Department pays the Tramways Company a lump sum in respect thereof. The convenience in this respect will be enhanced when the electric traction system is fully introduced.

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In the sorting office the letters are sorted to the various rounds by postmen dividers, and the general body of postmen then have to arrange them at their desks seated on little revolving stools. The process adopted by the postmen in setting in their letters for delivery may be explained by the following example relating to what is technically known as the "Cotham Brow Walk." The letters are first primarily divided (upright) into streets, roads, squares, courts, etc., taken thus—viz.: (a) Sydenham Road, 1 to 18 (one side only); (b) Sydenham Hill, 45 to 11, odd numbers (one side only); (c) Tamworth Place 13 to 1 (one side only); (d) Arley Hill, 2 to 34 and 5 to 27 (cross); (e) Arley Park (cross); (f) Arley Hill, 36 and 38 and 29 to 41 (cross); (g) Cotham Brow, 124 to 88 and 125 to 27 (cross); (h) Southfield Road, 2 to 28 and 1 to 27 (cross); (i) Upper Sydenham Road, 38 to 19 (one side only); (j) Springfield Road, 47 to 85, odd numbers (one side only). Then the letters for one of the above-named ten divisions or streets are taken one by one and placed in order of actual delivery flat on the table; then all are gathered together and stood upright, the letters for each division being treated in like manner. When the letters for any one street or road, etc., have been set in order, fresh batches of letters of, say, thirty or so, are fully sub-divided by the same process before being set in with the accumulated and finished letters. This course is necessary in order to obviate the postman having to go through a set of fifty or a hundred letters time after time as he gets a fresh batch of letters. Two hours are allowed for the morning delivery and one and a half hours for other deliveries. As those who have the longest rounds have the lightest burdens, they all contrive to finish at about the same time.

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The Clifton Suspension Bridge, which was erected in 1864 at a cost of £100,000, plays a very unimportant part in postal affairs, as it serves for the passage over the Avon of three postmen only, who cross with letters for the Leigh Woods and Failand districts. Long Ashton, which has a carriage road approached by the bridge from the Clifton side, receives its letters by a postman who crosses by a ferry lower down the river and reaches his destination more expeditiously than by crossing over the bridge.

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A Bristol postman, who was well acquainted with the locality which he had to serve, met with an ugly accident through colliding with a lamp-post, recently erected and not supplied with gas for

lighting up. It had been put up during the man's interval of duty, so that he came upon it for the first time when it was shrouded in darkness. The postmen, having in the discharge of their duties to be early birds and to be first out and about in the morning, often pick up articles lost or deposited overnight. Thus it was that a postman found on one winter's morn in a Bristol suburb a parcel containing the dead body of a child, and had to constitute himself a corpse-carrier for the nonce. It was in this city of Bristol that the following somewhat amusing and certainly interesting incident took place. Two rats were found in combat over a letter, which, delivered in due course by the postman, had fallen upon the floor at the entrance to a warehouse, and had been dragged thence to the spot where the rodents were engaged in their fierce encounter, the gum on the flap probably being the attraction. The letter contained a cheque for £300, and its loss for some days caused no small amount of consternation and anxiety to the gentleman who should have received it, and who, it need scarcely be said, at once gave orders for a letter-box to be attached to his warehouse door.

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It was well for the Magistrates' Clerk for the Gloucestershire Division of Bristol that he was well known to the postman, or assuredly he would never have received the letter addressed thus: "Mr. Latchem Laforegat pleace stashun," the proper address being: "Mr. Latcham, Lawford's Gate Police Station, Stapleton Road, Bristol."

Recently many valuable dogs were poisoned in different parts of the city, and a suggestion appeared in the newspapers that the postmen might be urged to constitute themselves amateur detectives for the discovery of the miscreants, on the ground that they enter every garden and knock at every door throughout the length and breadth of Bristol, and that at early morn and late at night as well as by day. The postmen are public spirited, but it is hardly likely that they would go considerably out of their way for the purpose, considering the risks which they run from dogs and the annoyances to which they are subjected to by them. The postmen have to face the snappish terrier and the ferocious-looking bulldog. Not infrequently they get bitten, and more frequently get soundly abused if, for their own protection, they belabour a dog occasionally, or give it a taste of their belt for want of a better weapon of defence or offence. Reciprocity would demand that if the postmen look out for dog poisoners, the owners of dogs on their part should take the utmost care to keep their dogs properly secured when known to be dangerous or to have a special dislike to the public servants in blue. The bold announcement given on the pillar of a gateway of a residence in a fashionable suburb of Bristol, "Beware of the bulldog," is not calculated to give confidence to the postmen who have to deliver the letters. One poor dog, well known in the city, fell dead in Small Street; and as the dog had just been seen to visit the Post Office, and even to drink from a Bristol Dogs' Home trough standing in the portico, it was assumed by the many spectators of the poodle's sad death that he had come to an untimely end through drinking poisoned water from the Post Office trough. The vessel was therefore confiscated by an over-zealous supporter of the Dogs' Home, and the water was subjected to analysis, but investigation proved that it was innocuous, although from an examination it transpired that the dog really had died from poison, which had, however, been taken in meat.

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A London firm made indignant enquiry as to why a letter had been returned to them through the Returned Letter Office, seeing that it was addressed to a well-known and distinguished baronet living near Bristol. It turned out that the right hon. gentleman was himself the cause of the return of the letter, as he read the contracted words "Rt. Honb.," in a line preceding his own name, as the name of "Robt. Hunt," a person who lived near his mansion, and he gave the letter back to the postman with the foregoing result. In 1847 a letter indicative of the times, with the following superscription, as noticed in the post:—"To the Post Office, Bristol, Somersetshire, England, 115 miles west of London, this letter is to be delivered to the Ladey that transported Jobe Smith and 2 others with him near Bristol." Members of the public complain from time to time in indignant terms respecting the loss of letters in the post, but in very many instances they afterwards write in meeker strain to say they have discovered the missing letters—in most unlikely places in their homes.

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At a dinner given by officials of the Bristol Post Office, the Dean of Bristol bestowed praise on the postmen for success in conveying ill-addressed letters to their destination. Dr. Pigou cited their performances in his own case. He had been addressed as Pigue, Picken, Pigon, Pigour, Pickles, Peggue, Puegon, Ragou, and Pagan. That "Ragou"—not being a name beginning with "P"—should have reached him, he thought could only be explained as the result either of a flash of inspiration or of the recollection of previous "hashes" of his name; but "Pickles" evidently got home on the mere strength of its initial letter, and though, as he complained, it is hard lines to be addressed as "Dr. Pagan" after having been thirty or forty years in orders, the written word would much more nearly resemble his real name than several of the other addresses which did find him. "The Head Gamekeeper, the Deanery, Bristol," was, of course, mysterious. The letter contained a circular advertising wire netting for pheasants, rabbits, and hares; and when the Dean replied, pointing out that the only space available on his premises—an area of 30 ft. by 40 ft.—was too small to rear pheasants in, he received, a further circular recommending a trial of "our dog biscuits." Occasionally, also, the local postmen meet with letters so peculiarly addressed as that for "Mr. —, Oction her and Countent, Corn Street, Bristol," and another for "Chowl, near Temple," intended for "Cholwell, near Temple Cloud." The postmen collect, too, letters peculiarly addressed to other places.

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There are still a few postmen veterans in the Bristol Post Office who are toiling on long after having exceeded their "three score years." Doubtless these aged men excite sympathy as they are seen on their daily rounds, and the thought presents itself to the public mind that the Post Office

is harsh to make them labour when so far advanced in years. Such is not the case, however, as the men, unfortunately not being entitled to pensions, have been allowed to continue to perform their duties long after pensionable established men would have been retired, either willingly or compulsorily, under the regulations which now call for a Civil servant's retirement to be considered his reaching the age of sixty years. These old worthies are not Post Office short-service men; but, as their good conduct stripes testify, they have for long years served their Queen and country.

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J. S., one of these life-long toilers, who worked as an uncovenanted postman for many years, commenced his career in the navy. When fifteen years of age (1844) he joined the gunnery ship *Excellent* at Portsmouth, Captain (afterwards Admiral) Chade being then in command. After serving two years, he was transferred to the old *Conway*, then engaged in putting down the slave trade in East African waters; and after three years on board that vessel he went to the brig *Helena*, and was with her in the West Indies for several years. In about 1854 he was passed to the *Britannia* for Mediterranean service. While sailing from Gibraltar to Malta, S. met with a serious accident. Being considered a smart young man, he was ordered by the captain to assist another "A.B." to rig the topgallant yard-arm. While thus at work he fell from the maintopmast cross-trees into the main rigging, again to the main chains, and then overboard—a drop in all of 120 feet. A boat was lowered promptly, and he was soon picked up, but he was in an insensible condition. It was found on examination by the ship's surgeon that his skull was fractured. He went into hospital on arrival at Malta, and there he remained six months. Shortly after the accident, the *Britannia*, which was the Admiral's flagship, was ordered to the Crimea (1855), and not only did the seaman who took over S.'s gun meet with his death by the shells from the fortifications at Sebastopol, but the whole of the gallant tars fighting on the starboard side of the ship were killed. S. was taken to London on board the *Growler* (Sir Charles Wood), the first steamer he had ever seen, and was incapacitated for two or three years, but fortunately he obtained a pension on having to leave the navy. He was engaged in private life till 1878, when, at the age of 49 years, he was given Post Office work, on which he was employed for twenty years, and, indeed, until he again came to grief through an accident when on duty at Christmas, 1898. On this occasion he was knocked over by a cart in Victoria Street, which ran into the parcel handcart S. was wheeling, and which sent him flying into the mud and his parcels all about in the road. This put an end to his Post Office career, and the old man, with disabled body from his first accident and somewhat impaired faculty from the latter, has now sunk back into seclusion, and it is hoped that he may end his days in peace. Except for three weeks' illness caused by influenza, he was never away on sick leave out of his twenty years of Post Office service. Not once was S. late at work. He was, he says, always out of bed at 3 a.m., and so punctual was he known to be that the remark was often made when he entered the office, that "We know what time it is without looking at the clock." On leaving the Post Office service this year (1899) a small gratuity was awarded him.

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S. T., although in his 71st year, managed up till quite recently to perform Post Office work for a few hours daily. From early boyhood up to his 22nd year, T. was engaged at shoemaking in this city; then he enlisted and served as gunner and driver in the Royal Horse Artillery for three years. Having obtained his discharge from the army, he acted as policeman on the Great Western Railway for a few months. At the time of the Crimean War, T. again enlisted, this time as a seaman and gunner in Her Majesty's Navy. He was disabled in action and discharged with a life pension. For the next twenty-seven years he followed his former occupation of shoemaking and rounding, working for about twenty years for one firm in this city. When 53 years of age, he first obtained employment in the Post Office, working for a few hours daily, and receiving 10s. per-week. He is a member of the Crimean and Indian Veterans' Association.

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A Bristol Post Office benefit society was established in March, 1861. It became the Bristol Letter Carriers' Sick Benefit Society in 1862, and was carried on under that title up to 1890 when it ceased.

Early in the year of 1896, the remains of the late Thomas Rutley, one of the oldest of Bristol postmen, were interred at Greenbank Cemetery. About one hundred postmen, headed by the Post Office band, were in attendance to mark their sympathy, and respect to his memory. The Rev. Moffat Logan conducted the service. Such a mark of respect is not always accorded to deceased Post Office servants. The writer recollects on a bright summer day having attended the funeral at Highgate Cemetery of one of the oldest and most respected superintendents in the Post Office, London. The good man was so much liked by those who served under him that he had gained for himself the name of "Honest John," yet there was only one other official besides the writer to stand by his graveside.

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The postmen have a military band, composed of thirty members of their own staff. The primary object is to advance the art of music in the Post Office, and, secondarily, to provide concerts in the open spaces in Bristol for the benefit of the public. A grand concert is given by the band every year, which is usually attended by some 3,000 of the inhabitants, attracted chiefly by the popularity of the Post Office and by the fame of artistes so eminent as Madame Ella Russell, Madame Fanny Moody, Mr. Plunkett Greene, and others, who have from time to time been engaged.

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The "D" Company of the 1st Volunteer Battalion Gloucester Regiment is composed almost exclusively of members of the Bristol Post Office. For three years in succession, (1894-5-6), this company won the first prize in the drill competition and also first prize and challenge vase in the volley firing competition. The company challenge bowl and first prize, and the brigadier's cup and



third prize in the Western District of England, were also won by the company during the same period. For many years the Bristol Post Office has had two out of the nine representatives of the battalion competing for the Queen's Prize. The company has also been well represented in all the battalion and county shooting matches. Of the eight battalion signallers, five are Post Office men, who have on several occasions held first place in the Volunteer service annual examinations.

The postmen of Bristol maintain for the winter months two of the old veterans who are under the auspices of the Crimean and Indian Mutiny Veterans' Association.

Mr. Goodenough Taylor, one of the proprietors of the *Times and Mirror* newspaper, has kindly given a Ten Guinea Challenge Cup, to be raced for by Bristol postmen who use bicycles in connection with their Post Office business of delivering and collecting letters. The cup has to be won three years, not necessarily in succession, before it becomes the postman's sole property. The terms under which the competition for the cup is held are as follows, viz.:—"Competitors to be postmen of any age or rank; appointed, unestablished, auxiliary, or sub-postmaster's assistant, of not less than two years' service, who have never won a prize in public competition. Competitors to be certified as having in the course of the preceding twelve months, under official sanction or direction, ridden 150 miles in the execution of their official duties, or to and from the office when attending duty. The race to be a handicap race of two miles, to take place on the Gloucestershire County Ground or other enclosure during each year. The post-master, assisted by experts in the Post Office service, to be the handicapper. The handicap to be framed on points of age, physical ability, and regard to be had to the weight or kind of bicycle to be used in competition." Postman Newman, of Coalpit Heath, was the winner this year (1899).

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The postmen have a library, consisting now of some 700 volumes. It was started in 1892. The writer made an appeal through the local press for gifts of books to form the nucleus of a library for the postmen and telegraph messengers attached to the Bristol Post Office. This appeal was liberally and promptly responded to by the residents of Bristol and Clifton. Warmest thanks are due to the newspaper proprietors for their kindness in inserting paragraphs relating to the subject, as, but for their powerful co-operation in the matter, the movement could not have been brought to a successful issue. A well-known literary gentleman at Clifton gave eighty volumes, Mr. Harold Lewis, B.A., showed his interest in the movement by the donation of 200 copies; and Mr. J. W. Arrowsmith has frequently given fifty volumes at a time. The postmen themselves manage the library, and contribute small sums weekly towards its maintenance and further development.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

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### POST LETTER BOXES: POSITION, VIOLATION, PECULIAR USES.

The three hundred and fifty pillar and wall letter boxes are placed at convenient points, regard being had to the wants of the immediate neighbourhood that each has to serve—to approach by paved crossings, to contiguity to a public lamp, to being out of the way of pedestrians and as far removed from mud-splashing as possible. At the same time, the inspectors endeavour to place the boxes so that they may be an attraction, rather than an eyesore, to the spot where erected.

The sign of "The Pillar Box" has been given to a public-house before which a Post Office box stands. Occasionally the Post Office letter boxes are greatly misused. Some little time since a woman in Bristol was savage enough to drop oil of vitriol, nitric acid, and other dangerous fluids into the boxes. She even poured paraffin into the letter box at a post office, and dropped an ignited match in after it. A conflagration was only averted by the fortunate circumstance of the postman clearing the box just in time to extinguish the commencing fire. The woman's determination is evidenced from the fact that her hands were severely burned by the strong acid she used; but, notwithstanding this, she continued night after night to carry on her dastardly work. She was found out after much anxious watching, and having, on trial, been found guilty, she was sentenced by a lenient judge to six months' imprisonment. She would assign no reason for her incomprehensible behaviour even when asked by the judge in court. Not infrequently, mischievous children place lighted matches, rubbish, etc., in the Post Office letter boxes, and in the letter boxes of private houses and warehouses. The Post Office officials are always on the alert to discover the delinquents. It is desirable also that the public, in their own interests, should call the attention of postmen and the police at once to any case in which they may observe letter boxes being tampered with. It may not be generally known that offences of this kind are punishable by imprisonment under the Post Office Protection Act.

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A remarkable case was that of a servant who was a somnambulist, and who for some time wrote letters in her sleep, night after night, and took them to adjacent letter boxes to post. Sometimes she was fully attired, and at other times only partially so. As a rule, the letters were properly addressed, but the girl did not always place postage stamps upon them.

Occasionally the postmen have to encounter the difficulties arising from a frost-bound letter box. Such a case occurred with a box situated on the summit of the Mendip Hills. The letter box and the wall in which the box is built were found by the postman to be covered with ice, caused by

rain and snow having frozen on them. The door resisted all his efforts to open it, and he had to leave it for the night. On making another effort when morning came, it taxed his ingenuity and that of other interested and willing helpers to get the box open. Hot water was tried, paraffin was poured into the lock, and it was only after a hammer had been used and a fire in a movable grate had been applied for a time that the lid could be opened.

A letter box erected in a brick pillar in a secluded spot on the East Harptree road, about a mile distant from any habitation, was, late one night, damaged to the extent of having its iron door completely smashed off, apparently either by means of a large stone which lay at its base when the violation was discovered, or by means of a hammer and jemmy. Although the adjacent ground, ditches, and hedges were searched, no trace of the iron door could be found. As three roysterers were known to have passed the box on the night in question, it was assumed that the damage was done by them out of pure mischief and not from any desire to rob Her Majesty's mails. Whether such were the case or not, they had the unpleasant experience of being locked up over the Sunday on suspicion.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

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### RURAL DISTRICT SUB-POSTMASTERS. RURAL POSTMEN. INCIDENTS.

The Bristol postal area is an extensive one, the distance from point to point being thirty miles, with width ranging from five to twelve miles. It is bounded on one side by the river Severn, from a point about five miles below Sharpness to a point close to Portishead; thence the boundary stretches across country to the Mendip Hills, up to Cheddar Cliffs; then from a point four miles north-east of Wells to Newton-St.-Loe, near Bath; across the river Avon, under Lansdown, thence in a line by Pucklechurch, Iron Acton, and Thornbury across to the starting-point on the Severn. The large rural area is for the greater part agricultural in character, but there are collieries and stone quarries in some few districts.

At the Bristol town and rural sub-Post Offices there are 554 assistants of all kinds employed. Many rural sub-postmasters act as postmen; in the main it is a healthy occupation, and proves a very good antidote to sedentary employment, although there are hardships to be borne, as the toil has to be undergone in all weathers—the scorching sun of summer, the pitiless cold of winter—in rain, hail, and snow. In connection With the Early Closing Movement, at some of the outer Post Offices business is suspended at 5.0 on one day in the week—usually Wednesday.

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In the suburban and rural districts there are 105 sub-Post Offices, and 78 of them are letter delivery offices, served by an aggregate number of 226 postmen. Of the 78 districts, 42 have two daily deliveries 28 three, and 6 four, with about a corresponding number of collections.

The sorting clerks and telegraphists at head-quarters gain some sort of acquaintance with sub-postmasters through daily communication by mail bag and wire; also in the passage of reports and counter-reports; but occasionally people performing postal work throughout the extensive Bristol district are brought into closer harmony and touch with each other by means of social functions, such as "outings" and Bristol Channel steamer trips, when town and country officials take their pastime in company, and the sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses of the Somersetshire portion of the district get acquainted with those of the Gloucestershire side, and all with the head office officials. By these means of friendly intercourse and interchange of kindly feeling, the service is much benefited. As an indication of this exchange of courtesy, the felicitations exchanged by telegram when the first annual trip by steamer to Ilfracombe was taken ran thus:—

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"From Postmaster, Bristol.—Pleasant journey to you. Long may Sub-Postmasterly friendship continue."

"From Sub-Postmasters at Ilfracombe.—Telegram received. Thanks for good wishes. Have just drank your good health. Pleasant trip. Regret your absence extremely.—Sub-Postmasters."

The Bristol Post Office has only recently had electric light introduced, but the squire of East Harptree had long before set the good example of progress by having the Post Office in his village illuminated by electricity. In the Bristol area very many villages have their little counterpart of the huge combination shops in London, where the villager is enabled to procure everything that his modest income will allow him to purchase. It is at these village "Whiteleys" that the Post Office is generally to be found, and a surveying officer may soon become well versed in the qualities of bacon, cheese, bread, flour, candles, and get a knowledge of rakes, prongs, and besoms, without much difficulty. In other instances no business except that of Post Office work is carried on.

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The picture of the sub-Post Office at Cribbs Causeway, five miles from Bristol, may give our readers who are "in cities pent" an idea of a delightful place for the sale of postage stamps and postal orders and the distribution of letters. This unique Post Office has few houses anywhere near it, but it serves a large, albeit very sparsely populated, area. Some of its interest rests in the

fact that it was formerly the half-way inn on the once important highway from Bristol to New Passage, for the ferry over the Severn into South Wales. Some of our elderly readers may probably recollect it as the stopping stage of the coaches which ran prior to the introduction of the railway system. The sub-Post Office, which stands on high ground, is held by two sisters, who went to it as a health resort from a farm in the low-lying Severn marsh. They act as postwomen, and brisk exercise and the early morning dew has brought such roses to their cheeks as would be envied by their Post Office sisters whose fate it is to reside in smoke-begrimed regions.

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CRIBBS CAUSEWAY POST OFFICE.

Although some of the Bristol district villages are situated at a long distance from town and remote from main roads, yet only one of the Post Offices presents the primitive condition of having a thatched roof. None of the rural postmen now avail themselves on their journeys of the services of that faithful creature, the donkey; but the last animal so used was on the road until 1890, when its master, poor Sims, the Congresbury to Shipham postman, shuffled off this mortal coil. Times change, and our manners change with them; so also do our tests for gold coins. At the Wrington Post Office there are brass testing weights, for sovereigns and half-sovereigns, inscribed "Royal Mint, 1843," such as have not been observed by the writer at any other Post Office, either in the Bristol district or in London. A certain sub-postmistress in the district has for many years been in the habit of keeping her sheets of reserve postage stamps in a large Family Bible. Not that she is irreverent—indeed, she is a pious woman,—but, being a lone widow, she has kept them in that manner for safety, as she imagines that no burglar would look for them in such a depository.

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A notable man in his day was Edward Biddle, on the Thornbury side of Bristol. Mr. Biddle was sub-postmaster of Rudgeway for over forty years, and occupied the post until his death in 1889, at the ripe age of 91 years, when he was succeeded by his daughter, and she, in turn, was succeeded by his son, William Biddle, who still holds the appointment. Prior to becoming sub-postmaster, Mr. Edward Biddle was "Pike" keeper at Stone, and used to pay £752 per annum for his post. There he had to open his gate to no fewer than twenty mail coaches daily, on their way between Bristol and Gloucester. At Rudgeway he carried on the joint occupation of sub-postmaster and innkeeper, at a tavern where the Post Office business had been conducted for many years before he succeeded to it; but the innkeeping business had in course of time to be given up, under Post Office regulations. Mr. Elstone, of Alveston House, wrote expressing his satisfaction that the Post Office was to be carried on at a private house, and not as previously at a "roadside pothouse," which all the district considered a very improper place. At that time John Blann and other stage carriers drove their unwieldy waggons, drawn by four strong cart-horses at a walking pace, along the Gloucester turnpike road. The waggons were indeed the goods trains of olden times. The present sub-postmaster, the son of Edward Biddle, who has had for many years to use "Shanks's" pony in the delivery of letters, was engaged in olden times in going on horseback down to the Passage to take, in saddlebags, the mails for South Wales and receive them therefrom. As late as 1850, letters from Rudgeway for Bristol were impressed with a stamp thus:—

BRISTOL  
4 JA 50.  
BY POST.



MR. EDWARD BIDDLE.  
(Sub-Postmaster of  
Rudgeway.)

*Photographed by Mr.  
Protheroe, Narrow  
Wine Street, Bristol,  
from an oil painting.*

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Mr. James Tiley, the village blacksmith of Clutton, now an octogenarian, calls to mind that sixty years ago the letters for Clutton, Temple Cloud, Stowey, Bishop Sutton and adjacent districts were delivered from Old Down, a hamlet on the main coach road from Bath to Wells, distant from Tyburn Turnpike, London, 121 miles. Mr. Tiley has had the luxury of paying 10d. for a letter brought from London by the above means; and as it was dear to him at the time, it is dear to him

now in another sense as a reminiscence of the past. Mr. Tiley recalls the sending of letters of the district by waggoners to Bristol or Bath to save the postage, and slyly remarks: "So stupid were the waggoners that as often as not they brought the letters back again, having forgotten to—what Post Office people now term—'properly dispose of them.'" Also that Joseph Tippett, a postman of the olden time, was brutally assaulted on Stowey Hill, and nearly lost his life and his letters. His assailants were discovered and were transported for life. The Old Down postman was timed to reach Temple Cloud Bridge at 12.0, and always blew horn or whistle to let the village schoolmaster know the time of day. During the Bristol riots the arrival of the mail every morning was eagerly awaited by persons far and near, anxious to hear the latest news.

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So recently as the year 1867, a postman had to trudge right away from Bristol to the distant village of Chew Stoke, having to breast the steep hill of Dundry and pass through Chew Magna on his way. All the letters and newspapers then delivered at Bishopsworth, Dundry, Chew Magna and Chew Stoke were carried by this man. Now, with the introduction of the parcel post and a cheaper letter post, and consequently increased weight, the morning mail is carried in a mail cart, and that service is supplemented by two or three other despatches to Chew Magna and Chew Stoke by train *viâ* Pensford. The hamlets of Breach Hill, Moreton and Herons Green were at that time unserved by the postman officially, and if delivered privately by him he charged for them at the rate of an extra penny each. The residents in those outlying districts who did not get their letters delivered in that way, and who did not call for them at the Chew Stoke Post Office, usually obtained them—two, three, or four days old—from the postman on Sundays, who stationed himself at the church door to oblige such worshippers. Some of the older country postmen say that in by-gone days the poor people, unable to read themselves, considered it part of a postman's duty to read their letters for them, and they looked for sympathy from the postmen in case of receipt of bad news. The Chew Stoke postman had a walk, in and out, of over twenty miles, and had to carry whatever load there was for the route. The pay attached to the post was small. This was in the good (?) days of not so long ago, but the postman who then had to take the journey is by no means anxious for a return to them, for now he receives double the amount of pay then allowed. He was out from five o'clock in the morning till seven or eight o'clock at night; but now he performs his eight hours' duty straight off, and has, therefore, more time at home for his private purposes.

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When, about eight years since, there was a deep fall of snow in this district, the West Town postman, who is likewise sub-postmaster, very considerably added to his labours by carrying tea, sugar, medicine, and even bread to the people on the Mendips, who were snowed up and deserted by baker, butcher, grocer, and indeed by everyone except the faithful Queen's messenger. The floods of November, 1894, which proved very disastrous in the West of England, interfered in no small degree with Post Office arrangements in the rural districts around Bristol. In some villages the roads were submerged from three to four feet, and it was impossible for the public to get to the letter boxes, the postmen and postwomen being, perhaps, the greatest sufferers. In order to avoid flooded roads, it was necessary to change routes and make long detours. Many postmen were compelled to wade through the water waist deep, whilst others had to be driven through in horse and cart. The inhabitants and farmers in many places kindly lent their horses and carts for the purpose, and but for these kindnesses the letters would have been delayed for many hours. In spite of all difficulties, the letters were generally delivered without much delay, and only in a few cases had the letters to be held over for any length of time until the waters had subsided.

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LETTER BOX AT WINTERBOURNE.

A tit made her nest in the bottom of a Post Office letter box at Winterbourne, near Bristol, laid her eggs, and notwithstanding that letters were posted in the box and that the box was cleared by the postman everyday, the bird tenaciously held to her nest and brought up five young tits, two of which perished in their attempts to get out of the box by means of the small posting aperture through which their mother had squeezed so frequently, carrying with her all the materials for the nest. The three survivors flew off one day when the door of the box was purposely left open for a time by the obliging postman portrayed in the picture.

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That all is not gold that glitters has been recently brought home to three or four of the sub-postmasters in the Bristol district, a "sharper" having presented coins gilded to represent sovereigns and half-sovereigns, and obtained Postal Orders in exchange for them. Through the vigilance of the Bristol police the offender was eventually taken into custody, and, having been sentenced at the Assizes to six months' imprisonment, he had plenty of time to reflect on his offences. A bright, shining new farthing was received at the Bristol head office, sent inadvertently in a remittance from a sub-office as a half-sovereign, and mixed up with coins of that value, only to be detected, however, by the vigilant check clerk. The sub-postmaster who accepted it in error for a coin of more precious metal, and did not discover the mistake even in preparing the remittance, had to bear the loss.

One sub-postmaster, who has now departed this life, was wont to furnish his explanations and reports in rhyme, a course which was tolerated on account of its singularity and of the writer's zeal and known devotion to his duty. The following is an example:—

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To the POSTMASTER OF BRISTOL:

"I willingly answer the question  
Respecting the length of the track  
From Shirehampton P.O. to Kingsweston  
House front door, or lodge at the back;  
But respecting the relative merits  
Of back door, or door at the front,  
As delivery door, I aver it's  
A question I cannot but shunt.  
To return to the question of distance:  
Suppose that the birds of the air,  
Sworn in as Post Office assistants,  
To Kingsweston would messages bear:  
As straight through their skiey dominions  
They flew from front door to front door,  
The length of the track of their pinions  
In yards would be 1224.  
When a featherless biped is bearer,  
And through the lone woods his path picks,  
The feet of this weary wayfarer  
Cover yards quite 1466.  
Should the wight have a key, there's a second  
Way thro' the sunk fence's locked gate,  
And then his poor feet must be reckoned  
To make yards 1388.  
As regards the back door, I pass by it;  
The back lodge itself is much less  
Than a mile, howsomdever you try it,  
By Shirehampton Post Office Express.  
I do not pretend to correctness,  
To one yard or even a dozen;  
No need for extreme circumspectness,  
The margin's too ample to cozen.  
I'm obliged by your flattering reference,  
And when you've another dispute on,  
I shall still be, with all proper deference,  
Your obedient Servant,—G. NEWTON."

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The turnpike gates in the neighbourhood of Bristol were abolished in October, 1867, and the consequence was that the proprietors of the various omnibuses by which day mail bags were conveyed to and from several of the districts around Bristol applied for, and obtained, a money payment in lieu of the tolls, the exemption, from which had formed the sole remuneration for the services performed.

The Bristol mail carts running to the rural districts, by permission of the Post Office, carry for the newspaper proprietors bundles of papers, weighing on an average on ordinary days 40 lbs., and on Saturdays 80 lbs. The enterprise of the Bristol newspaper proprietors in circulating by private means the many thousands of the newspapers which they daily print is evidenced, from the circumstance that they find it necessary to commit to the agency of the Post Office only about 160 copies for distribution, and that chiefly in remote rural districts.

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Sub-postmasters in the rural districts of Bristol attain to great ages. The sub-postmaster of Mangotsfield, who had long since passed three-score years and ten, had his cross to bear, having at 60 entirely lost his eyesight. Although blind, and unable to work in consequence, he quaintly appeared in his apron to the end, and said that having worn it for so many years he did not feel happy without it. A daughter acted as his deputy, and mitigated, as far as possible, his hard lot. At his funeral some hundreds of people, representing various religious and other bodies, attended to pay their last tribute of respect to him.

At Bitton, a village midway between Bristol and Bath, there died Sub-postmaster James Brewer, in the 87th year of his age, and in the fifty-seventh year of his Post Office service. It was more

pleasant to enter this Post Office and find the old man calmly smoking his churchwarden pipe before the fire, cheery and chatty, than to have such a welcome as that afforded at another office by the exhibition on the Post Office counter of a miniature coffin and artificial wreaths for graves. Another worthy of local Post Office fame has lately passed away in the person of Join Warburton, aged 84, who for thirty years was the sub-postmaster of Henbury, and who for five years was his daughter's adviser after her succession to the appointment. The sub-postmaster of the village of High Littleton lost an arm some fifty years ago, but notwithstanding that affliction he manages with adroitness to sell postage stamps and issue postal orders to the public. This will not be considered a very great feat, considering that he has been for years a crack one-handed shot, and even now, at the age of 70, can bowl over a pheasant or a rabbit quite as readily as many of our sportsmen who have the use of both arms.

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Sub-postmistresses of great longevity are also to be found. One dame (Martha Pike), now in her 93rd year, represented the Department until quite recently in the charming little village of Wraxall. When nearly 90 years old she had a three hour letter round every morning up hill and down dale, and she even trudged a mile and a half to fetch a letter and parcel mail from the railway station. The sub-postmistress of Stoke Bishop died at the age of 84; she and her father had held the Post Office in the village for over fifty years. An equally remarkable case was that of Hannah Vowles, the sub-postmistress of Frenchay, who, after performing the active duties of that position in the village of Frenchay for forty-seven years, resigned when within five years of 100 years old. In her youth she lived for some time in the West Indies; but she gave up her employment there in order to return home to support her mother, who was 90 years of age when she died. Mrs. Hannah was succeeded in the office of sub-postmistress by Miss Kate Vowdes, a relation, who had already been postwoman in the same district forty-two years!

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HANNAH BREWER.  
(*Postwoman.*)

Hannah Brewer is one of the Bristol Post Office worthies. Her father was the sub-postmaster of the village of Bitton alluded to herein. Hannah commenced to deliver letters in the hamlets and at the farmhouses near Bitton when a mere child, and continued to do so during all the years our gracious Sovereign has sat on the throne. Recently, however, she had to give up the work, as, having attained the advanced age of 72 years and walked her quarter of a million of miles, she felt that she ought to take life more easily than hitherto. In distance her round was eleven miles daily, and the route was a very trying one on account of the steep hills she had to traverse, and of great exposure to the sun in summer, and to the wind, frost, and snow in winter. It may be interesting to record that Hannah Brewer, although she had to serve a district sparsely populated, was never robbed, stopped, nor molested in any way. She was the recipient of the first official waterproof clothing issued to postwomen in England, and in her picture she is represented as wearing it. She only occasionally made visits even to places so near as Bath or Bristol, and was, as a rule, a stay at home.

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She was not a great reader of the newspapers, but persons on her round looked to her as an oracle, and derived information from her as to passing events. Hannah naively says that, as regards Christmas boxes, she fared very well in olden times, but they were not so plentiful in her later years. Hannah, through her devotion to her father when he was alive, and through her assiduous attention to her duties as a humble servant of the Crown, had gained the respect of all those who knew her, both in her native village and on the long round she daily had to traverse. As she served the Post Office throughout her long life (her memory carrying her back to the days when the letters reached Bitton by mail coach and a "single" letter from London cost 10d.), it is gratifying that in her old age, when unable to continue to do her daily round, the Lords of the Treasury, under her exceptional circumstances, granted her half-pay pension, a sum which, with her savings, will serve to maintain her until the end of her days. The writer has had few more pleasurable duties than that which he undertook of presenting Hannah, in her neat and trim cottage, with her first pension warrant.

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At the celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in the village, the opportunity was taken, in the midst of the festivities, to make a presentation of an elegant marble clock and purse to Miss Brewer. The inscription ran: "Presented during Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee, together with a purse of money, by the inhabitants of the postal district of Bitton, Gloucestershire, to Miss Hannah Brewer, postwoman, upon her retirement, having served this office from the commencement of Queen Victoria's reign."

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Even Post Office surveyors are sometimes the subject of little jokes on the part of their subordinates. An assistant surveyor, when testing a rural postman's walk, said that if he had arranged the round originally, he should have taken a shortcut across the fields to a certain little hamlet so as to serve it before instead of after a more distant place, when the postman drily said that he should not have done anything of the kind, as there was a rhine about 18 ft. wide and very deep, which could not well be got over or through, and, turning to the surveyor, he remarked: "Evidently you never were a postman." The humour of this incident lies in the fact that the surveyors have always been drawn from the élite of the Service. A certain imperious surveyor visited a sub-office for the purpose of reprimanding the sub-postmaster for some delinquency, and after soundly rating the individual he addressed, and refusing to hear a single word in explanation, he, when his harangue was over, was coolly informed that he had made a slight mistake, as the circumstance referred to another sub-office altogether.

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On a certain occasion recently, on entering a Post Office the writer heard proceeding from a back

room a voice, recognisable as that of the sub-postmaster, shouting out a greeting in his (the writer's) Christian name: "Come in, Robert." Well, the sub-postmaster thought he saw through the partly-curtained glass in the door a friend of that name, and meant no disrespect to his surveyor-postmaster.

On calling at another little Post Office on a Saturday, the aged sub-postmistress was washing her stone floor—down on her knees in business-like attitude. Without looking up, her greeting to the writer was: "Halloa! I thought you had been to Jericho. You have not been to see me for such a long time!" That salutation was rather embarrassing; but on getting to the perpendicular the old lady was the confused party, as she had thought her visitor was a local resident who occasionally looked in to have a cheery word with her.

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It would seem that postal improvements in the Bristol district have been carried almost as far as is needful; indeed, in one district, not seven miles from the city, contemplated improvements whereby letters would be delivered an hour earlier in the morning and might be posted two hours later at night, and a day mail in and out be afforded, were declined by the parish authorities in council and by memorial from the villagers generally. In this rural hollow the people are very clannish, and rather than let their postwoman suffer a loss of two shillings a week, which the change involved, they were content to forego improved postal facilities, and were not greatly stirred by the "lasinesse of posts" as, according to history, was King James of old.

While Bristol is ever expanding and while splendid buildings are being erected, there are not wanting places within a short distance of the ancient city where there are signs of decadence, as indicated by houses unoccupied and cottages in ruins, and by shrinkage in the number of letters. At Stanton Drew, where some thirty large stones alone remain to mark a site where there probably stood a splendid Druidical Temple, the postal arrangements a few years since were not in a satisfactory condition. Not unlike the story which has recently been going the round of the newspapers, that a sub-postmaster of an Oxfordshire village fixed this notice up: "Have gone fishing. Will be back in time to sell stamps," the sub-postmistress of this Somersetshire hamlet went away for days without putting up any notice whatever, and left her son to supply the inhabitants with postage stamps when he got home in the evening from his work as an agricultural labourer. Still, people did not complain, so that they may be regarded as accessories to the sub-postmistress's delinquencies. There was, however, a postal super-session in that village!

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There is still in the rural service a postman who labours under the disabilities of having only one arm and of being unable to read or write. He has not a very extensive delivery, and so his pockets are made to do duty in the place of the faculty of reading. The left breast pocket indicates that letters placed in it are for Cliff Farm, those in the right breast pocket for Rush Hill Farm, several other pockets serving in like manner.

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From very old official books sent into store on the change of holders of sub-offices, it is noticeable that the writing of fifty years ago was much superior to that of the present day, indicating that sub-postmasters of olden time either took more interest in caligraphy than their successors, or possibly had more leisure in which to make the necessary entries than is afforded in the present period of high pressure.

'Tis strange that it was so, as at the time the steel pen had not ousted the quill. Even so short a time as forty years since a new intrant to the Post Office, hailing from the Emerald Isle, had, like all other new-comers, to enter his name and address in the Order Book on his first introduction to St. Martin's-le-Grand. A steel pen was handed to him, with which he dallied for a time, and when asked why he did not proceed, said: "Sure, I was waiting for a feather."

The institution for the care of consumption started in this country, and known as Nordrach-upon-Mendip, is in the Bristol postal district at one of its most distant points on the range of the Mendip Hills, at an altitude of 850 feet above sea level. It has already played an important part as regards the Bristol Post Office, inasmuch as a consumptive telegraph clerk has benefited considerably from the new treatment, and has indeed left the institution as cured. It is not generally known that until recently there existed a small Convalescent Home on the Mendips, but "Cosy Corner," founded and maintained by Sir Edward Hill, K.C.B., stood there as such, and it served a good part as regards a postal servant. A postman employed at the Bristol railway station as mail porter, who had suffered from a serious attack of typhoid fever, and who had been verily at death's door, passed several weeks at this rural retreat, and derived such benefit from the kind treatment he received and from the bracing air of the district that he quite recovered from his ailment and is now in robust health. "Cosy Corner" has now been affiliated to Nordrach-upon-Mendip.

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The rule of the Service is that coins, postage stamps, and other articles of value picked up in a sorting office are regarded as treasure trove and have to be handed over to the authorities for disposal; but a letter carrier's round can hardly be regarded in the light of a Post Office, and so a postman of the Thornbury district who at Aust Cliff, picked up a well-preserved bronze coin with the image and superscription of Claudius Cæsar (A.D. 41-54) did not consider himself called upon to give it up to the sub-postmaster, but disposed of it for the sum of 15s. 6d. The purchaser presented it to the Leicester Museum.

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Tradition hath it that Miss Hannah More, the celebrated authoress and philanthropist, when residing (1770) at Wrington, near Bristol, in the churchyard of which place her remains now repose, made an arrangement with the postman of the period whereby on passing along the road

near her residence he was to signal to her when any event of importance had occurred. Her sitting and bedroom windows commanded a view of the walk near which the postman had to pass, so that she could see him coming, and she always hurried down to the wicket-gate in readiness to meet him when he put up his flag. A son of the postman, now alive, remembers well that his father told him that he had given the signal on the death of Queen, Caroline. It was outside the postman's function, to wave the red flag with which Mistress Hannah, had provided him, but Post Office matters were not carried on so strictly in those days as under the present regime. The Wrington postman obtained the news about important passing events from the mailman who rode through the village on his way from Bristol to Axbridge. George Vowles, who died twenty-six years ago, at the ripe age of 88 years, was the mail-man who conveyed to the villages on his way the news of the battle of Waterloo, brought down from London by the mail coach, which had been decorated with laurels and flowers in honour of the great event.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

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### GENERAL FREE DELIVERY OF LETTERS.

No stone has been left unturned in the endeavour to afford a free delivery of letters at the door of every house in the district; and at last all houses and cottages, even in the remotest localities, have been reached, and the woodman, the gamekeeper, and the lone cottager now receive a daily visit from the postman. In visiting out of the way places of the kind with a view to arranging a delivery, the surveyor has to look out for dogs. A certain warren house in this district affords a typical case. It is far from the ordinary haunts of man, and was without an official delivery on account of its extreme inaccessibility. The approach is through a deep gorge, known as Goblin Combe, and the path to the house is precipitous. The gamekeeper residing there had to send to a farmhouse a mile and a quarter distant for his letters, which the obliging farmer had consented to take in for him. The attempts of the staff to arrange a method of delivery by postmen had long been baffled. At the time when the writer went to view the place there was a rumour in the neighbourhood that, owing to serious depredations by poachers, fierce dogs roamed the enclosed warren; and on passing out on to the warren from the wood corner, there was observed standing on a wall near the house what in the distance and misty morn, appeared to be a large bloodhound, and so the advance had to be made warily. The attendant rural postman was armed with a riding whip, on which his grip tightened, for he had already been four times bitten by dogs, as the scars on his hand testified, and he desired to guard himself against another attack. At last, as the place was neared, the object of distrust was found to be—a large goat! Another out-of-the-way place in the same neighbourhood, also unserved by the postman, was a woodman's house in a dense wood, which, with its bowling-green, is said once to have been used by "Bristol bloods" of old time as a safe retreat where they could indulge in a little business connected with the prize ring and cock fighting. That the Duke of Norfolk's liberal policy in Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee year has proved a boon and a blessing to many residents in isolated spots is indicated, for instance, by what a poor woman living in a wild district stated. She had recently to trudge the whole way from her house to Bristol, a distance of eight miles out and eight miles back, while a letter which would have obviated her journey had been lying undelivered for days at a Post Office only two miles off.

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Blaize Castle, which is within four miles of the Head Post Office, was singularly enough almost the last habitation in the Bristol district which was granted a free delivery of letters daily, for until 1898 the postman in his official capacity had never penetrated to that rock-elevated and remote part of the Blaize Woods where the castle stands. That reproach to the Bristol district has now been removed, and the custodians of the castle have obtained their rights as citizens of the great kingdom in having their letters delivered at the door daily by the Postmaster-General's representative. It was a difficult matter to find out all the houses at which the postman did not call, and this particular castle, which is now only occupied by caretakers, was not notified by the rural postman, as the occupiers had signified to him that they did not care for a delivery and were quite satisfied if the letters were left in the village till called for. The circumstance may be of interest to Bristolians, from the fact that Blaize Castle is spoken of by many but is seen by very few. Its flagstaff is visible from some little distance, but the castle itself can scarcely be discerned through its wooded surroundings, even from the far-famed Arbutus Walk, which is separated from it by a deep gorge. The castle is situated on a lofty plateau in the midst of the large woods. Close to it is a sheer perpendicular rock, three hundred feet high, known as "The Giant's leap." The castle is said to have derived its name from St. Blaisius, the Spanish patron of wool-combers, to whom a chapel was dedicated on a hill in the grounds where the castle now stands, and where there was once a Roman encampment. The interest attaching to this castle is enhanced from a postal point of view by the circumstance that the son of the lady who owns the property married a daughter of the late Postmaster-General, the Right Hon. H. C. Raikes.

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Mr. Raikes was one of the hardest working of Postmasters-General. So diligent indeed was he, that almost nightly, when the House of Commons was sitting, the right hon. gentleman, after all other Members had gone home, retired to his official room and went through the papers which had been sent up from the Post Office for his consideration. So absorbed would he become in the documents, which he read carefully through from end to end, so that he might judge from his



own standpoint and not from that of his official advisers, that he would sit well into the small hours of the morning, whilst that patient and most obliging of officials, the postmaster of the House, Mr. Pike, kept weary vigil, waiting to take the despatch-bag to the Post Office in the City before he went home to his well-earned rest. Mr. Raikes's invariably clear and even writing betokened that, long past the hour for bed as the time might be, he never had any idea of doing his work in a hurry. He was probably known to many of the citizens of Bristol, through his frequent visits to a mansion on the Westbury side of the Downs.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

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### LOCAL RETURNED LETTER OFFICE.

The Bristol Post Office has its returned letter branch, with which almost all the towns in the West of England, and South Wales are affiliated for "dead letter" work. Through its agency over a million letters and postal packets are returned to senders annually. Book packets and circulars form 50 per cent. of the total number, and of these only 75 per cent. can be restored to the persons who posted them. Over 10,000 letters containing property are recorded in the ledgers, and they represent a total value in cash, bank-notes, bills, cheques, postage stamps, etc., of about £36,000 per annum, nearly the whole of which reaches the hands of the senders. About 400 letters containing money orders, and 1,700 letters containing value, compulsorily registered, are returned in the course of the year. Amongst the curiosities of returned letter office experience may be mentioned the following. A letter was received thus peculiarly addressed:—"Miss ----, 4, Pleasant View, in that beautiful city which charms even eyes familiar with the masterpieces of Bramante and Palladio, and which the genius of Anstey and of Smollett, of Frances Burney and of Jane Austen has made classic ground." The pundits in the returned letter office who deal with derelict letters properly divined that the place so glowingly described was Bath, and issuing the letter accordingly, it was duly delivered in the fair city.

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A packet was received simply addressed "Post Office, Bristol, to be called for." The contents were an army reserve man's discharge papers and pension application forms. The application bore evidence that it referred to Lichfield, and the packet was accordingly sent to that military depôt. Two or three days afterwards an old soldier called at the Bristol office for his letter, and could not possibly understand why it had been opened in the returned letter branch, and the contents sent to Lichfield. His fury was unbounded, and he consigned all and sundry to Hades. His papers were soon obtained for him from Lichfield, and his gratitude at getting them, was as effusively manifested as his disappointment had been in not finding the papers awaiting him on first application. His thanks were conveyed in the following terse communication:—

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"Dear Boss,—A thousand pardons, everything comes right to those who wait. Patience is a virtue.

"Obt servt,  
W. H. —."

"Sir," wrote a Bristol citizen on a postcard, "I have lost a ingine off 3 gine oneing to the delay of a post care wich Mr. — send of wine ts plaa to ingury and abould youre turly I —, 10, — lane rielence Bristol." It was not at first apparent what the writer of the card actually required, but by degrees it was made out that what he meant was:—"I have lost an engagement of 3 guineas owing to the delay of a postcard which Mr. — sent, of Wine Street. Please to enquire and oblige, yours truly, I. —, 10, — Lane, Residence, Bristol."

Danger lurks in unexpected places, even for Post Office cleaners. Packages which have remained in the returned letter office for the prescribed period have to be destroyed from time to time. Sometimes they contain chemicals. It chanced that at Bristol one of the charwomen, when pouring out hot water into a large waste bucket, was startled by the emission from the bucket of a fierce, bright, flame which badly burned her hand and caused her no small fright. The flame lasted for a minute. The fumes were overpowering, and unpleasantly pervaded the whole telegraph gallery above. Upon investigation, it appeared that another charwoman who had been instructed to "dispose" of a bottle of sodium amalgam, had carelessly emptied it into the waste bucket with the startling result narrated.

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The Post Office is ever progressing, and in course of time there will be further particulars for a future writer to relate concerning the "Bristol Royal Mail."

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Transcriber's Note: Discovered publisher's punctuation errors have been corrected. In addition, the following errors have been corrected:

p. 22: 6th instant intead[instead] of on the first of the month. The

p. 136: in the chair, the Post Office is again roproved[reproved]

p. 163: about 30,000 letters. Birminghan[Birmingham] comes next in

- p. 229: spoken of the discipline[discipline] and training telegraph
- p. 283: Office, hailing[hailing] from the Emerald Isle, had, like all
- p. 164: pension or gratuity is given. The appointment[appointment]
- p. 112: Post Office now was was[delete second 'was'] the centre of commerce,
- p. 153: not [been] offered, would most likely have been sent

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